



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Board of Election Supervisors approves fluency referendum ballot language

WINDOW ROCK— The Navajo Nation Board of Election Supervisors on Thursday voted 8-0 to approve ballot language for a referendum measure to allow Navajo voters to decide whether or not to amend a portion of the Navajo Election Code pertaining to fluency requirements for the positions of Navajo Nation president and vice president.

Voters will decide if language within the Navajo Election Code concerning the qualifications for president and vice president should be amended to read, “Must be able to speak and understand the Navajo and English language; and this ability shall be determined by the Navajo voter when he/she casts a ballot.”

If approved, the new law would allow voters to determine if candidates meet fluency requirements through the casting of their ballots in future presidential elections.

The current law requires candidates to fluently speak and understand the Navajo language and to read and write English. Furthermore, the Navajo Election Administration is currently authorized to determine whether candidates meet the language qualifications based on candidate applications.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) said he is pleased with the board’s approval of the ballot language, adding that the referendum measure will empower Diné Citizens to determine their future leadership.

“I thank the board members for their support and also to my Council colleagues who responded to the voices of the Navajo people and pushed this referendum forward,” said Speaker Bates.

The referendum was approved by the Council on March 13, along with approximately \$317,000 to fund the referendum election.

Speaker Bates also emphasized that the referendum measure does not ask voters to consider eliminating Navajo language requirements, but asks voters to determine if the public should decide whether or not candidates meet the language requirements.

During Thursday’s discussion, the NBOES also approved provisions that would prevent the proposed measure from being applied retroactively if it is approved by voters and becomes law.

The NBOES are authorized through 11 N.N.C. §407 to approve the appropriate language and ballot layout for the measure referred by the Council.

During a NBOES meeting held on May 21, NEA executive director Edison Wauneka said it was important for the referendum measure to remain on course for the July 21 election to remain in compliance with the timeline established by law. Wauneka also stated that the NEA is tasked with educating the public in regards to the referendum to ensure that voters are able to make an informed decision.

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