



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council approves bill requiring candidates to satisfy ethics violations before running for office

WINDOW ROCK – During a Navajo Nation Council Special Session on Tuesday, members unanimously approved Legislation No. 0063-15, which will amend Title II provisions in the Ethics in Navajo Government Law and the Navajo Nation Election Code, if signed into law.

According to the legislation, it states that candidates who run for “public elective offices should not have any outstanding ethics judgments, including orders for restitution to the Navajo Nation pursuant to the Navajo Ethics in Government Law,” and ensure that candidates running for office do not have any outstanding ethics violations before serving in an elected office.

If elected officials are in violation of the Ethics in Government Law, the penalties will include disqualification from an election, while current tribal officials would face the possibility of removal. Other penalties may include administrative fines, civil damages, orders of restitution, criminal punishment, and ineligibility to run for a public office for a period of five years.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) said there is approximately \$673,000 owed to the Navajo Nation by employees and elected officials who misappropriated Navajo funds, dating back to 1997.

“Enacting this law will close the loopholes. At this point, over half a million dollars is still outstanding, and [the amount] will continue to grow if we do not put these measures in place,” said Delegate Shepherd. “Ethics charges should be closed out or cleared before an individual runs for office.”

Delegate Shepherd added that if candidates or elected officials owe restitution to the Navajo Nation, it must be paid in full before they are eligible to run for a public office.

In support of the legislation, Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) said current delegates inherited negative characterization of past delegates due to damaging behavior, and hopes that the measures in the bill would challenge all employees and officials to be accountable to themselves and their communities.

“I think one of the most honorable things we can do as elected officials in becoming a leader is to self-govern, and put demands on ourselves that are higher than the average citizen. I think these

are just safeguards that are long overdue,” said Delegate Chee. “It is a measurement to preserve the integrity of our tribal programs, government, and ultimately the leadership we aspire to be.”

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) proposed amending legislation language to ensure that employees, elected officials, and those appointed to an elected position—such as a vacant seat on Council—are included.

“It should say ‘employees or officials.’ I think some of the worse offenders are officials,” said Delegate Tsosie. “Anybody who has an outstanding sanction should simply not be allowed to run [for office], and this can be one way to weed them out.”

Council members voted 17-1 in support of the amendment.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Council voted 17-0 to pass Legislation No. 0063-15. President Russell Begaye will have 10 calendar days to consider the resolution once it is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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