



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Voice of the people denied by President Begaye's veto of referendum

WINDOW ROCK – On Friday, President Russell Begaye vetoed Council resolution CAU-45-16, which would have allowed Navajo voters to decide whether or not to change the structure of their local government through a referendum in November. Had the referendum been approved by the president, Navajo voters would have decided whether or not the Navajo Nation should regionalize the 110 chapters into 24 regional governments.

In May 2015, the Resources and Development Committee established the Title 26 Task Force for the purpose of reviewing accountability measures at the chapter level, exploring ways to empower chapters, and to streamline the Five Management Plan System and transparency. The task force met regularly and held numerous public hearings across the Navajo Nation since its establishment.

“Whether you agree with the regionalization concept or not, the underlying intent of the resolution and referendum was to give the Navajo people a voice to decide how their government should be structured through the casting of their ballots,” said Speaker LoRenzo Bates.

On Aug. 13, the Office of the President and Vice President announced one public hearing to be held Aug. 14 in the community of Tuba City to gain public input regarding the referendum. On Aug. 14, five additional public hearings were announced with dates ranging from Aug. 14 – 18.

If voters passed the referendum, the transition to the regional governments would have been implemented within a four-year period, in accordance with the resolution passed by Council.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie, who sponsored the legislation, previously stated that the four-year time period would have allowed adequate time for input as to how the regional governments would be structured.

Delegate Tsosie on Friday said President Begaye's reasoning for the veto is “illogical” and diminishes the role of democracy on the Navajo Nation.

“I was very disappointed with the veto, which wipes out the democratic process with the flick of a pen. Every Navajo voter would have been invited to participate and be represented by voting yea or nay on the referendum,” stated Delegate Tsosie, who also refuted President Begaye's statement that indicated that the process should not be based solely on the decisions of Council.

“No members of Council were part of the Title 26 Task Force,” stated Delegate Tsosie. “There were many possibilities had he signed the regionalization resolution. His veto will only keep the current system in place where less than five-percent of the Navajo population participate and hardly any development.”

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