



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee push for accountability at colleges on the Navajo Nation

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received an annual report from Diné College regarding last year’s accomplishments and proposed future initiatives and programs. The college is slated to celebrate its 50-year anniversary since it’s opening in 1968.

Diné College president Charles Monty Roessel and the board of regents’ president Greg Bigman presented the report to HEHSC, which highlighted areas such as strategic goals, enrollment, academic program offerings, and student highlights. Roessel said that the college is focused on creating programs that impact, and are of interest, to students and the Navajo Nation.

According to the report, Diné College will combine eight previous divisions into four new schools opening in July 2018, which include the following: The School of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), The School of Arts, Humanities, and English, The School of Business and Social Sciences, and The School of Diné Studies and Education. Last summer, the Diné Bizaad Immersion Institute also opened.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) encouraged the college to strengthen its advocacy at the state and federal levels, and suggested that they utilize the Navajo Nation Council’s State Task Force to aid in their efforts.

“I’ve been asking this since last year—even to the Department of Diné Education—where is your position on all these issues you’ve been talking about? It’s not until the last hour that people start speaking up. It makes us look bad as legislators to the people and other entities. It looks like we aren’t doing our work when the schools don’t inform us of their needs,” said Delegate Hale.

Delegate Hale reiterated the importance of conveying to state and federal leaders the Navajo Nation’s intentions and goals regarding education, and to approach Navajo leaders with their needs and positions to ensure the college is utilizing all avenues to receive as much resources as possible.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'í'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ahnáož't'í'í) requested a more comprehensive and extensive report to highlight critical issues rather than focusing only on the positive aspects of the college, which she commended.

“We need a comprehensive report where we can address critical systemic issues. I am not in support to have this annual report today and only giving it 15-minutes so that this is your checkmark that this was completed before the committee. We need to know what areas need improvement and what issues need to be addressed,” said Delegate Crotty. “However, I do commend the college and the students’ achievements as they make positive steps forward. They are important to the future of Diné College.”

Delegate Crotty added that Navajo Technical University has begun opening sub-campus near Diné College campuses and said it is becoming costly to fund and sanction two Navajo colleges that could begin “cannibalizing” one another and offer duplicate services.

“We have two Navajo colleges sanctioned under the Navajo Nation and they have their own administrations and boards. We are still coming back to the critical need to provide direct services to the students, and when I hear that we are spending money supporting two administrative bodies and the high overhead cost, I am concerned with how it affects those services meant for students,” said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty recommended tabling the annual report so that both colleges can provide their annual reports at the same time with the committee to understand the critical needs in their programs, and to aid in developing possible solutions.

She also requested a comprehensive report regarding the proposed law enforcement training programs, Diné Policy Institute, and proposed research regarding incidences of violence against women and children. Delegate Crotty also requested that the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute be included in the upcoming discussion, which will be scheduled at a later date.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to table the report.

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