



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee debates bill to restore Navajo Code Talker Day as a paid holiday

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee considered Legislation No. 0197-18, seeking the Navajo Nation Council’s approval to restore “Navajo Nation Code Talker Day” as a paid holiday by rescinding Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CAP-30-17. In April 2017, the Council approved CAP-30-17 and declared the day as an observed holiday rather than a paid holiday.

In 1982, President Ronald Reagan issued a presidential proclamation to honor Navajo Code Talkers by declaring Aug. 14 as “National Navajo Code Talker Day,” and in 2006, the Navajo Nation designated the day as a paid holiday.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahat’a Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins), said he understood the reasoning for changing the status of Code Talker Day to an observed holiday, however he stressed that Navajo people want to dedicate an entire day to honor Navajo Code Talkers to allow families to celebrate and honor them.

“Many of us are descendants of Navajo Code Talkers and many are still living today. President Reagan recognized the importance of putting that day aside because our language was used during the pacific warfare. The secret weapon was our Navajo language that the Navajo Code Talkers used to win the war for America in World War II,” said Delegate Smith.

He said the day is designated to honor the valor and invaluable contribution of Navajo Code Talkers, and Navajo people want the opportunity to participate in celebrations, events, memorials, and family gatherings with their families. The Fort Defiance Agency Veterans Organization passed a supporting resolution for the legislation, and other veterans’ organizations are expected to pass their own resolutions supporting the paid holiday, added Delegate Smith.

In addition, the bill is supported through resolutions passed by the Tsé Si áni Veterans Organization, Nahat’a Dziil Veterans Organization, and the Nahat’a Dziil Commission Governance.

In opposition of the legislation, HEHSC member Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) said that many Navajo Nation employees do not participate in Code Talker

events and another paid day-off disrupts direct services to Navajo citizens such as senior citizen centers, meal programs, and other vital programs.

“With the current paid holidays that the Navajo Nation has, we are using a lot of our funds and taking services away from our Navajo people. I support this as a recognized holiday because we still honor Navajo Code Talkers, but we will be here in our offices to continue serving our people. There are a lot of other holidays out there where we honor our veterans — they are not forgotten,” said Delegate Brown.

He also requested information on the estimated costs for providing holiday paid leave to over 7,000 Navajo Nation employees, information on how direct services may be impacted, and an estimate on the number of employees that attend the Code Talker Day events and celebrations.

EHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ahnáož’t’l’i), stressed the need for a compromise that allows for the Navajo Nation to honor the Code Talkers while also continuing to provide direct services to Navajo citizens.

“Perhaps we can look at administrative leave for employees. We can consider having the Navajo Nation work force create an education component for communities to honor the Navajo Code Talkers. For instance, the [150th Anniversary of the Treaty of 1868], people didn’t get time off, but they were using their work hours to help at events,” said Delegate Crotty. “Everyone is proud of the Code Talkers that come from their home regions, and as we lose them we know families come together and lean on each other for support. I want to know that our communities know the legacy of our Code Talkers.”

With a vote of 2-1, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee issued a “do pass” recommendation for Legislation No. 0197-18, along with one amendment to include the Fort Defiance Agency Veterans Organization’s supporting resolution as an exhibit. The legislation moves forward for consideration by the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the bill.

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