



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council supports the redesignation of the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council to a Board of Commissioners

WINDOW ROCK – On the third day of the 2018 Fall Council Session, members of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council considered Legislation No. 0467-17, which seeks to redesignate the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council to a Navajo Nation Veterans Board of Commissioners, that would increase decision-making authority to veteran members.

The legislation states that the current advisory council is pursuing the change because it is limited in its authority to properly execute the needs of Navajo veterans, and seeks a stronger role in presiding over formal recommendations to the Office of the President and Vice President on issues relating to funding, housing, Navajo Nation Veterans Administration, policies, regulations, and any other matters concerning Navajo veterans.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) said the proposed commission would ensure that direct services are carried out effectively to Navajo veterans rather than just serving in an advisory role with limited participation on veterans issues.

“Why did the veterans have to march to Council to get an answer from President Russell Begay? If you look at the veterans administration’s plan of operation, it talks about how the Navajo Veterans Advisory Council provides advice to the President, but they have not reached out to them and there continues to be a lot of issues that lies within the veterans administration,” said Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr.

Delegate Begay said that Navajo veterans who are appointed to the commission would have a decision-making role rather than having to wait for leadership to act on issues, especially in regards to administrative matters. He added that the bill would also allow veterans to advocate on behalf of their issues at the tribal, state, and federal levels.

According to the legislation, the proposed Board of Commissioners would be comprised of 10 agency commanders, one female and one male from each of the Navajo Nation’s five area agencies and would be the designated voting members. The director of the Navajo Nation

Veterans Administration and a Blue or Gold Star Mother, or a disabled veteran, would be non-voting members of the commission.

In support of the legislation, Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) said the commission is needed to address the needs of veterans, and provided recommendations to ensure safeguards for the commission in terms of policies, procedures, and staffing.

“If you put people in there who are veterans or based on other criteria, you will need an attorney and someone who can handle money. You need people with expertise knowledge and backgrounds pertaining to your goals, like appointing people with construction background or anything that has to do with your commission. Your members need the proper education to run the commission efficiently,” said Delegate Brown.

He said the proposed commission should also create a system of “checks and balances” to provide monetary and operational insurance for the members and staff.

Fort Defiance Veterans Agency Organization Commander Olin Kieyoomia, an agent to the legislation for Delegate Begay, thanked Council on behalf of the veterans organizations for continuing to support Navajo veterans and creating policy changes to ensure direct services and funding are provided.

“Give us a bigger voice when it comes to our issues, that’s all we are requesting. We thank the Council for standing beside us. You have done a lot in your four years as Council and we appreciate your hard work and advocacy on our behalf,” said Commander Kieyoomia.

Council voted 19-0 to approve Legislation No. 0467-17, with one amendment and serves as the final authority on the bill. The President will have 10 calendar days to consider the resolution once it is delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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