



Navajo Nation Council establishes third week of June as Diné Pride Week recognizing LGBTQ+ community

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Navajo Nation Diné Pride Week was established by the 24th Navajo Nation Council during the 2020 Summer Session. Legislation 0140-20, titled “Proclaiming Third Week in June as Diné Pride Week on a Recurring Annual Basis,” was sponsored by Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) and co-sponsored by Speaker Seth Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) and Council Delegate Carl Roessel Slater (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaille/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’izhi).

The legislation was presented to the 24th Navajo Nation Council in conjunction with Speaker Damon’s earlier proclamation declaring 2020 Diné Pride Week from Jun. 22-28. The proclamation stated: “[T]he Navajo Nation recognizes that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-sprit (LGBTQ+) are important to our livelihood and diversity since time immemorial.”

Legislation No. 0140-20 was first considered by the Health, Education and Human Services Committee (HEHSC) on Jul. 8, where it passed with a vote of 3 in favor and 0 opposed. The Naabik’iyáti’ Committee then considered the legislation on Jul. 16 and discussed the proposed Diné Pride Week at length.

Delegate Nathaniel Brown presented the legislation and explained that it began with inspiration from other LGBTQ+ pride events hosted across the Navajo Nation and the United States. He stated that LGBTQ+ pride events are about recognizing the LGBTQ+ community and basic human rights.

“We see a lot of inequality on the Navajo Nation for our LGBTQ[+] brothers and sisters,” Delegate Brown said, referencing issues such as workplace discrimination, bullying, high suicide rates among LGBTQ+ relatives and the inability for some same-sex couples to get insurance.

“Pride week entails educating the world,” Delegate Brown continued. “Navajo Nation is really behind. We have no such laws that protect our LGBTQ[+] community.”

Questions about the proclamation and the accompanying legislation were presented by Council Delegate Rickie Nez (T’iistoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tse’ Daa’ Kaan, Newcomb, San Juan). He expressed concern and questioned if the legislation was necessary since Speaker Damon had already issued a proclamation establishing a Diné Pride Week for the 2020 year.

The proclamation is a one-time action, whereas an annually recurring Diné Pride Week would require an action of the Navajo Nation Council, such as Legislation No. 0140-20.

Delegate Nez continued, “All lives matter. We’re all equal.” The discussion touched on other groups, such as veterans and elders, that the Navajo Nation does not honor with a particular week of recognition. “I really don’t think we need a whole week recognizing a certain group of people,” Delegate Nez said.

Responding to Nez’s comments, Delegate Slater stated, “I call on my colleague to really deeply perform some deep introspection and listen to those viewpoints that are different from theirs.”

Delegate Slater said, “Everyone here is united by the fact that they have ancestors who have always lived in these lands and they have a right to continue to live on these lands, free from prejudice and free from discrimination.” He called the legislation a good first step and urged the Navajo Nation to go further in supporting the LGBTQ+ community.

Council delegates referred to traditional Navajo teachings to support the discussion. Council Delegate Elmer P. Begay (Dilkon, Indian Wells, Teesto, Whitecone, Greasewood Springs) stated that the male-female distinction in traditional Navajo constellations and other teachings explain why he was not in support of the legislation. Delegate Brown explained that LGBTQ+ people are considered as nadleehi people, which are important figures of Navajo culture.

Council Delegate Charlene Tso (Mexican Water, To'likan, Teenospos, Aneth, Red Mesa) said, "This 24th Navajo Nation Council works well together. There are some of us that are younger, some of us that are older." Expressing her support for the legislation, she explained that this was an important moment to work together across generations towards equality for the Navajo Nation's LGBTQ+ community.

Delegate Charlene Tso added that the issue would need to be addressed by the Navajo Nation government eventually. "I urge my colleagues to understand that the LGBTQ+ community, they are our children, they are our brothers and our sisters," she said.

Adding her support, Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock), explained that, while she supported the proposed Diné Pride Week, she agreed with Delegate Nez's statements regarding the lack of recognition for Navajo veterans. She suggested a whole month should be established honoring Navajo veterans.

Council Delegate Eugene Tso (Chinle) said that the LGBTQ+ community has already been recognized in the Navajo way of life, ultimately adding his support for the legislation.

Legislation No. 0140-20 was considered by the Naabik'iyáti' Committee on Jul. 16 and passed the legislation with a vote of 12 in favor and 9 opposed.

The 24th Navajo Nation Council then considered the legislation on Jul. 22 and voted to approve it with a vote of 14 in favor and 8 opposed.

The Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker and partners will hold a resolution signing ceremony at the Navajo Nation Council Chamber in Window Rock, Arizona. Details to be announced.

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