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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., vetoes Diné Marriage Act

Says law is unnecessary, let people decide through initiative if they choose

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Calling it unnecessary legislation about issues that don't exist, Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., today vetoed the Diné Marriage Act of 2005 that was passed by the Navajo Nation Council on April 22.

The proposed law – Council Resolution CAP-29-05 – would have added language to the Navajo Code that defined marriage as between a man and a woman, would have outlawed such things as marriage between grandparents and grandchildren, and stated that the purpose of marriage on the Navajo Nation is to promote strong families and to preserve and strengthen family values. The bill would have also prohibited marriage between Navajo persons of the same sex, which became its focus.

If the Navajo people want to define marriage or take a position about same-sex unions, President Shirley said, he would support their decision to do so through an initiative rather than have 67 members of the Navajo Nation Council decide it for them. To do otherwise is to allow the Navajo government to unnecessarily intrude and interfere into private, personal lives.

“Same-sex marriage is a non-issue on Navajoland,” he said. “So why waste time and resources on it? We have more important issues to address.”

President Shirley says he strongly supports and encourages family stability, and the need for Navajo husbands and wives to love, care and support each other and their children as a first priority in their busy lives. That, he says, is the basis of personal sovereignty and harmony meant by the Navajo teaching of *hózhójik'ehgo nanitin*.

However, the Diné Marriage Act said nothing about rampant domestic problems across the Navajo Nation, the President said, such as family violence, child abuse, sexual assault, gangs and the breakdown of the Navajo family.

Instead, the proposed law focused on an issue that doesn't exist on the Navajo Nation and would generate feelings of disharmony and disunity among the Navajo people, the President said.

The legislation veiled a discriminatory aspect in the guise of family values, which goes against the Navajo teaching of non-discrimination and doing no psychological or physical harm, he said.

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