



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Budget and Finance Committee approves the Healthy Diné Nation Community Wellness Development Projects Fund**

**WINDOW ROCK**—The Budget and Finance Committee on Monday approved Legislation No. 0114-15, the Healthy Diné Nation Community Wellness Development Projects Fund to create an account to manage the tax revenue from the sale of unhealthy foods and beverages, in accordance with the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2014 — approved and signed into law in November 2014.

The law initiated a two-percent sales tax, in addition to the current five-percent sales tax, on sweetened beverages and food items deemed to have minimal-to-no nutritional value. The two-percent sales tax took effect across the Navajo Nation on April 1.

The fund management plan outlines community-based wellness projects that may be funded with the tax revenue including fitness classes, health coaching, walking/running/biking trails, exercise equipment, healthy food preparation workshops, skate parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, recreational/health/youth clubs, basketball/volleyball courts, and softball fields.

“The funds will serve to empower communities to initiate and development creative ways to promote healthy living among community members of all ages,” Delegate Nez stated.

Delegate Nez was joined by former delegate Danny Simpson, who sponsored the bill in 2014 that created the Healthy Diné Nation Act with the partnership of the community-based organization known as the Diné Community Advocacy Alliance.

Delegate Simpson and DCAA member Denisa Livingston, introduced members of a student organization known as the Naat’áanii Youth Leadership Council from Navajo Preparatory School, who offered their support and recommendations regarding the development of health and wellness projects in their respective communities.

Livingston stated that the new sales tax is projected to generate approximately \$2.7 million in revenue for chapters to development projects each year.

“This is a very creative way for communities to be involved and to take ownership of community-based and community-oriented wellness projects,” added Livingston.

The Navajo Nation Division of Community Development will be responsible for the allocation and annual disbursement of the funds to the Nation’s 110 chapters based on the 50/50 formula outlined in 12 N.N.C. §820, which mandates that half of the overall revenue be distributed equally

among all chapters and the other half distributed based on the number of registered voters in each chapter.

BFC member and former teacher Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) expressed support for the health and wellness projects and encouraged the members of the Naat'áanii Youth Leadership Council to continue promoting initiatives to help Navajo youth in their communities.

“You can have all the money in the world. You could have all the wealth and education in the world, but having your health is the most critical and important thing,” stated Delegate Chee.

The fund management plan also restricts the use of the funds for administrative expenses such as meetings, conference fees, stipends, and travel expenses. Additionally, the plan requires the funds to be audited on an annual basis by independent auditors.

The two-percent sales tax on unhealthy foods and beverages will expire in 2020, unless extended by the Navajo Nation Council.

The legislation was first considered by the Resources and Development Committee on April 7, which referred it to the Budget and Finance Committee with a “do pass” recommendation with no amendments. The BFC serves as the final authority for the legislation.

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