



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council approves funding for projects and establishes uranium remediation commission on the final day of the Spring Council Session

WINDOW ROCK— The Navajo Nation Council adjourned late Wednesday evening after completing the Spring Council Session agenda, which included the passage of several legislations including funding appropriations for numerous projects and services across the Navajo Nation.

Council members spent a majority of Wednesday discussing Legislation No. 0089-15, sponsored by Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), which initially sought the approval of close to \$2.1 million from the Nation's Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance for six power line extensions in several communities within Delegate Shepherd's legislative district.

Following hours of discussion and the addition of 11 amendments, Council approved funding from the UUFB for various projects and services including:

- \$778,646 for construction of power line services to 24 homes in Mariano Lake
- \$2,922,425 to construct a new chapter house for the community of Teesto which was lost due to a fire in September 2014
- \$36,510 to assist with utility needs of a veteran living in the community of Round Rock
- \$1,282,030 for power line extension projects in the communities of Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, and Tsayatoh
- \$3 million for capital improvement projects for the Nation's 110 chapters, \$1.5 million for summer youth employment, \$1.5 million for the public employment program, and \$1 million for veterans assistance
- \$3.1 million for Navajo Transitional Energy Company, LLC for costs associated with the oversight expenses and due diligence expenses and procurement costs of securing a contract miner for Navajo Mine
- \$300,000 for power line projects in the community of Whitehorse Lake and approximately \$401,000 for the Navajo Nation Zoo to construct an eagle aviary and education center
- \$181,695 for power line projects in the community of Many Farms
- \$374,276 for power line projects in the community of Tselani/Cottonwood
- \$150,000 for water line extensions in the community of Newcomb for nine families

Delegate Shepherd also sponsored a separate bill to authorize the issuance of bonds to be sold in order to refinance loans in the amount of \$60 million through KeyBank, which was previously

secured by the Navajo Nation to provide funding for several judicial and public safety complexes in the communities of Kayenta, Tuba City, Crownpoint, Ramah, and others.

Delegate Shepherd said refinancing the loan will allow the Nation to seek a lower interest rate on the open market, saving millions of dollars over the course of several years. For the Nation, refinancing the loan would also avoid having to pay a lump sum payment in the amount of \$53.5 million due by July 1, 2015.

The bill required two-thirds approval from Council's full membership, or 16 supporting votes, to pass due to a limited waiver of sovereign immunity included in the legislation to allow arbitration of disputes to be handled in non-Navajo courts in the event of a dispute. Council members approved the bill with a vote of 18-3.

Council members unanimously approved Legislation No. 0015-15, sponsored by Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahi, Whiterock), which will establish the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission.

The commission will be tasked with studying and drawing conclusions about the impacts of uranium mining and uranium processing on the Navajo Nation and to use the studies to issue recommendations for policies, laws, and regulations to the President and the Council.

The proposed plan of operation states that the President would appoint an executive director to be confirmed by the Council. The commission's membership would consist of three "technical experts," seven community members, and one youth member.

Six of the community members would represent six different regions affected by past uranium mining and the seventh member would be selected as an at-large community representative.

Lastly, the Council approved Legislation No. 0116-15, sponsored by Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland), approving a limited waiver of sovereign immunity for the Navajo Transitional Energy Company, LLC to security performance and reclamation bonds on the open market.

Council previously approved a waiver of limited waiver of sovereign immunity for the same purpose; however, Speaker Bates explained that the bill will allow NTEC to secure the bonds at a lower rate which will save the Navajo Nation approximately \$1.7 million annually. Council members approved the legislation with a vote of 18-2.

President Shelly will have ten calendar days to consider the resolutions once they are sent to the Office of the President and Vice President. Council adjourned from the spring session on Wednesday.

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