



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council unanimously opposes language within NAHASDA bill that would withhold over \$81 million in housing funds from Navajo people

WINDOW ROCK— The Navajo Nation Council on Tuesday unanimously approved Legislation No. 0049-15, opposing language within U.S. House of Representatives Bill H.R. 360, which would withhold federal housing funds from the Navajo Nation if passed and signed into law.

On Jan. 14, U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce of New Mexico introduced H.R. 360, seeking to reauthorize the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act established in 1996 to provide housing funds for Native Americans through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Mel Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a') said that although the Council supports the reauthorization of NAHASDA, it strongly opposes a provision found in Section 302 of the congressional bill that limits a Tribally Designated Housing Entity's carry-over to three times its yearly funding allocation.

The provision would cause the Navajo Housing Authority, the Navajo Nation's Tribally Designated Housing Entity, to lose \$81 million in housing funds this year alone which would then be redistributed to other tribes, according to NHA CEO Aneva Yazzie.

Speaking before Council, Yazzie stated that in August 2014 tribal representatives and HUD officials met with the IHBG Negotiated Rulemaking Committee and agreed to a compromise that would give NHA until Oct. 1, 2017 to bring down the balance of undisbursed funds in accordance with a five-year expenditure plan.

The expenditure plan, beginning in 2013, shows that in two years NHA has used \$288 million in NAHASDA funds to build 580 new homes, modernize 964 older homes, and to fund the development of 16 group homes and three housing units for disabled individuals.

Council also approved an amendment proposed by Council Delegate Davis Filfred (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) to insert language asserting that the Navajo Nation is not a member of the Native American Indian Housing Council and the National Congress of American Indians, both of which have publicly expressed their support for the NAHASDA bill.

The amendment also affirms that the statements of the two national organizations do not reflect the position of the Navajo Nation and that the organizations stand to benefit by taking NAHASDA funds away from the Navajo Nation. The amendment was approved with a vote of 23-0.

“The Navajo Nation is not a part of the NCAI organization, but Congress often goes to them for a view on Native American matters,” stated Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake). “In this case, they have a conflict of interest because they stand to gain from their opposition to the Navajo Nation.”

Council approved an additional amendment requesting President Obama to reverse his position in support of similar punitive language, which Delegate Tsosie said was provided in Executive Order 13175, without consultation with the Navajo Nation.

During the discussion, Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) issued a directive to NHA to elevate concerns over inequities with regard to housing eligibility criteria issued by the federal HUD program.

Yazzie said the federal HUD program has separate criteria for Native Americans and non-Native Americans that create many barriers for Navajo families when applying for housing through NHA.

According to Yazzie, some requirements for Navajo families are for more stringent than those of non-Native American applicants.

“There’s a formula that we have to go through for every applicant within income ranges that’s not required for non-Indian Country so there are a lot of disparities with respect to how they are requiring above and beyond, in terms of justification,” added Yazzie.

Council members also approved a third amendment proposed by Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) to insert language stating that it was not until May 9, 2009 that President Obama signed into law P.L. 93-531 that lifted 40-year ban on development in the Former Bennett Freeze Area.

The amendment also states that the estimated need for housing and infrastructure for families in the area exceeds \$340 million of the funds provided through NAHASDA.

Council also issued a directive proposed by Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) to NHA to have its executive director provide a report to the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee to inform the delegates of the housing activities and issues in their chapter areas served by the NHA housing offices.

At the conclusion of the two-hour debate, Council members voted 23-0 in support of Legislation No. 0049-15.

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