



# 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Law and Order Committee approves legislations concerning uranium and transportation needs**

**WINDOW ROCK**— Members of the Law and Order Committee approved two separate legislations on Wednesday, including Legislation No. 0015-15 which seeks the creation of the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission.

If approved by the Navajo Nation Council, bill sponsor LOC member Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahi, Whiterock) said the commission's purpose would be to study and reach conclusions about the impacts of uranium mining and uranium processing on the Navajo Nation and to issue recommendations for policies, laws, and regulations.

The Navajo Nation is in great need of uranium clean-up solutions, which is lacking at the national and international levels as well, said Delegate Perry.

According to the proposed plan of operation, the Navajo Nation 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.

Uranium development for military use dating back to the 1940's, has left over 500 abandoned uranium mines, mills, and processing plants—many near homes and livestock grazing areas which has led to an unspecified number of health issues, added Delegate Perry.

LOC member Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) said he has witnessed firsthand the impacts of abandoned uranium mines on his livestock.

"I live within three-miles of a uranium site and when it rains I've seen sheep fall into abandoned uranium shafts," stated Delegate Tso.

At the conclusion of the discussion, LOC members approved the legislation with a vote of 4-0. The bill now moves forward to the Resources and Development Committee for further consideration.

LOC members also approved Legislation No. 0043-15, sponsored by Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) which seeks the establishment of the "Navajo Transit System Fund," to provide a portion of Fuel Excise Tax net revenue to be used for the needs and expansion of the Navajo Transit System.

Delegate Hale said that 10% of the net revenue would be allocated for public transportation operations, and the remaining 90% would continue to be deposited into the Nation's Road Fund.

The Navajo Nation's Fuel Excise Tax revenue is generated from a tax imposed on distributors and retailers who import gasoline for sale on the Navajo Nation. Currently, the taxation rate is 18 cents per-gallon of gasoline and 25 cents per-gallon for diesel fuel.

Division of General Services director Virgil Brown, Jr. said that the Navajo Nation's public bus service has seen an increase of over 400% in the number of passengers since 2008. He also noted that the division received a federal grant to purchase an electric bus that requires additional funding to begin fully operating, which will eventually cut fuel costs.

In a memo dated September 17, 2014, Brown also stated that establishing the "Navajo Transit System Fund" would allow the division to pursue additional outside funding sources, which often require matching funds.

LOC member Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) asked Brown to consider expanding bus services in areas such as the communities of Houck, Nahata Dziil, and Wide Ruins.

"These communities have many students who attend classes in Gallup and a route from those communities to Gallup would assist many Navajo students," said Delegate Smith.

Delegate Hale added that the funds would allow the division to expand its transit routes which are often unable to accommodate individuals due to the growing demand.

LOC members voted 4-0 to approve the legislation. The Navajo Nation Council is the final authority for the bill.

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