



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council tables referendum measures citing the need for additional input and comprehensive planning

WINDOW ROCK— A special session was held on Tuesday, in which the Navajo Nation Council considered and tabled four separate legislations seeking to refer referendum measures to the Navajo public to vote on in an upcoming referendum election.

Legislation No. 0157-15 sponsored by Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill), seeks a referendum to allow Navajo voters to decide whether or not the Navajo Nation should use a portion of the principle balance of the Permanent Trust Fund to support a Transportation Stimulus Plan.

The plan includes funding for the Navajo Nation Tribal Transportation Improvement Program, maintenance and safety road activities, airports, road maintenance yards, equipment, and non-paved road maintenance. When the bill was considered by the Naabik'iyáti' Committee last Thursday, members removed the amount from the bill pending further considerations.

During Tuesday's special session, Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) said he felt the Council should allow additional time to consider the inclusion of additional transportation projects, and also to allow the Council to consult with the Nation's new executive administration.

Council voted 17-3 to table the legislation pending further input, requiring that the measure be reconsidered by the Council no later than the summer session in July. If approved and signed into law, the referendum question would be placed on the ballot in an upcoming referendum election and would require two-thirds approval of registered Navajo voters who cast a ballot.

Legislation No. 0155-15 was also tabled by Council on Tuesday. The bill sponsored by Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood), would allow the public to vote on whether or not to use approximately \$206 million from the Permanent Trust Fund to complete judicial and public safety facilities in the communities of Chinle, Dilkon, Shiprock, Pinon, and Fort Defiance.

The majority of Tuesday's discussion centered on an amendment introduced by Council Delegate Leonard Tsoie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), which ultimately proposed to add police sub-stations, fire stations, preventive treatment centers along with police housing to the list of projects.

Delegate Tsosie said police sub-stations would increase police presence and cut down on police response time for rural communities. However, Delegate Yazzie who serves as chair of the Law and Order Committee, said that while he supports the idea of more police sub-stations, he feels the need to increase the number of police officers is much greater.

Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) recommended that the Council develop a more comprehensive plan to present to the public and cautioned that drawing down funds from the principle balance of the Permanent Trust Fund would also reduce the Nation's annual revenue from the interest earned from the principle.

A representative from the Office of the Controller informed Council members that the current balance of the Nation's Permanent Trust Fund stands at \$1.893 billion.

Also tabled was Legislation No. 0154-15, a proposed referendum that would allow voters to determine if Navajo Nation District Court Judges and Supreme Court Justices should be elected by the public.

A separate bill, Legislation No. 0156-15, seeks the approval for a referendum to determine if the Navajo Nation Supreme Court should increase the number of Associate Justices from two to five justices selected from each of the Nation's five agencies.

The Navajo Nation Council plans to hold meetings to address the issues raised during Tuesday's session and will reconsider the referendum measures at a later date.

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