



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 29, 2016

MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
nmb.communications@gmail.com

Navajo Nation Council unanimously approves Nation's largest spending package for water and sanitation system projects

WINDOW ROCK – In September 2014, the Navajo Nation and the federal government signed off on a historic agreement that ended the Navajo Nation's lawsuit against the United States over the mismanagement of trust fund assets, which awarded the Navajo Nation \$554 million.

During the final day of the 2016 Winter Council Session, the 23rd Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved a legislation to use a portion of the settlement award to fund a plan that would use approximately \$101 million for over 60 water projects and an additional \$79 million for nearly 50 sanitation system projects in communities across the Navajo Nation. Thursday's action marks the largest spending package ever approved by the Navajo Nation Council.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), explained that the funds would be used over a five-year period and in accordance with the legislation, the Nation would be required to seek maximum leverage of the funds through funding from federal, state, or private entities through match funding, joint funding, contribution funding, cost-share funding, bond financing, or other agreements to subsidize the cost of the water and sanitation system projects.

The proposed plan was developed by the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee, which was established in April 2015 and tasked with recommending an expenditure plan for the settlement funds.

Delegate Tsosie chairs the subcommittee, whose membership also includes Council Delegates Seth Damon, Nathaniel Brown, Walter Phelps, Jonathan Perry, Otto Tso, Nelson S. BeGaye, Kee Allen Begay, Jr., Mel R. Begay, Lee Jack, Sr., Tom T. Chee, and Davis Filfred.

On Thursday, Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii) explained that the funds would strengthen the Nation's position when lobbying and advocating for federal funding to subsidize the cost of the projects when Council members meet with Congressional members in the coming months.

Delegate Phelps said the funds would give the Nation a greater chance of obtaining additional federal funding by showing Congressional members that the Nation is prepared to share the cost of funding the projects.

On Monday, the Council received a report from Indian Health Service officials who shared a priority listing of sanitation facilities projects, in priority order, that are necessary to correct sanitation deficiencies in Navajo communities.

During the IHS report, Council Delegate Leonard H. Pete (Chinle) approached the IHS officials and displayed a large bottle of dark murky brown water that he had collected from a faucet in his community.

“This is the type of water that our people and our communities are being exposed to and consuming,” said Delegate Pete, emphasizing the need for water and sanitation projects.

Prior to voting on the legislation, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé a’náoz’t’í’í) expressed her support of the bill and said the projects would help many communities.

“This will improve the quality of life for our Navajo people,” stated Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Tsosie said the projects will lay a foundation for community development and eventually economic opportunities, referencing the need for a health clinic in the community of Dilkon, the need for water projects to address water contamination in the northern agency, and water projects that will contribute to the water rights efforts.

In 2014, the Council adopted the Navajo Nation Breach of Trust Settlement Act that created the Síhasin Fund and mandated that the funds from the settlement agreement be used for 1) the planning and development of regional infrastructure supporting economic and community development and 2) educational opportunities for members of the Navajo Nation.

Delegate Tsosie said the plan addresses the need for infrastructure development, which a large majority of the Navajo public recommended during seven public hearings held in 2014.

He added that the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee will produce additional expenditure plans to address economic and community development and education opportunities as mandated by the Navajo Nation Breach of Trust Settlement Act of 2014.

At the conclusion of Thursday’s discussion, Council members voted 18-0 to approve Legislation No. 0015-16. President Russell Begaye will have ten calendar days to consider the bill once it is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

###

For news on the latest legislative branch activities, please visit www.navajonationcouncil.org or find us on Facebook and Twitter, keywords: Navajo Nation Council