



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 22, 2016

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Council supports youth employment through approval of funding for the Office of Diné Youth

WINDOW ROCK – On the last day of the Summer Council Session, members unanimously passed Legislation No. 0175-16, which would allocate supplemental funding to the Navajo Nation Office of Diné Youth in the amount of \$207,756 from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance. If signed into law by President Russell Begaye, the funds would be used for personnel expenses to hire Navajo high school and college youth throughout the year at Navajo chapters.

According to the legislation, it states that the Office Diné Youth is a program under the Department of Diné Education, which offers opportunities and essential skills and strategies to productively transition youth into adulthood. The office instructs youth on workforce and post high school education, with an objective to enhance character traits, such as integrity, self-discipline, and respect.

Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) expressed his support for youth employment and emphasized the need to teach Navajo youth important work skills that can influence the field of work that they would like to study in the future.

“A lot of times some areas at the chapters only have them doing jobs like desk work, cleaning, and mopping. They need to be taught skills that will influence them to want to begin looking into careers that they are interested in, and perhaps they can come back to the Navajo Nation and serve their people,” said Delegate Begay.

Delegate Begay recommended a directive to have the Office of Diné Youth provide the Council with recommendations on specific programs they can implement to hire students, such as youth jobs in the courts, police department, or any other area that can allow students to observe and take part in hands-on job duties.

Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) referenced the “Devil Pups” youth program, created by the U.S. Marine Corps, and explained how it has encouraged Navajo youth to become interested in military careers. He

suggested that resources from the Office of Diné Youth also go toward young people who would like to take part in the youth military program.

“We always say that we support our Navajo Code Talkers, and it was because of them that we have freedom here. Having said that, I know Crownpoint sends at least 20-25 young men to San Diego. We have young Navajo people interested in the military and we should also be supporting that initiative through our youth employment programs,” said Delegate Yazzie.

In 1953, Marine Corps Colonel A. Duncan Shaw, Sr. developed the “Devil Pups” program at Camp Pendleton in California to deter youth delinquency and promote individual qualities in teenage girls and boys to become healthier and successful citizens, and providing them the option to consider military careers.

Stressing the importance of valuable work skills, Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi Tó’ii) suggested that the youth program collaborate with the Navajo Nation Department of Workforce Development, although they do currently work together, but to utilize additional resources to increase youth employment on the Navajo Nation.

“I know they already work together, but there has to be a way that the programs can accelerate the process to ensure Navajo youth are placed in jobs where they can learn meaningful skills and experience within our Nation. I would imagine that the increased collaboration of both departments would be beneficial to this cause,” said Delegate Phelps.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) pointed out to Council members that the legislation is not limited to summer employment, rather the legislation allows for year-round jobs for youth at all 110 Navajo chapters.

Council members voted 19-0 to unanimously approve Legislation No. 0175-16 with one directive. President Russell Begaye will have 10 calendar days to consider the legislation once the resolution is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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