



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Chinle Nursing Home voted down, citing need for comprehensive planning**

**WINDOW ROCK** – The 23<sup>rd</sup> Navajo Nation Council debated Legislation No. 0324-16 on the third day of the Fall Council Session, which sought to approve matching funds in the amount of \$8 million from the Síhasin Fund to aid in completing the proposed Chinle Nursing Home.

According to the legislation, in Dec. 2015 the Navajo Housing Authority awarded the Navajoland Nursing Home, Inc. approximately \$21.5 million to plan, design, and construct a new nursing home, which funds nearly 75-percent of the entire project's planning and construction costs. The proposed allocation of \$8 million from the Síhasin Fund would fund the remaining 25-percent to complete the care center.

It states that the existing nursing home was constructed in 1968 and holds 79 beds, but does not meet the Center for Medicare/Medicaid Services federal requirements and is fined annually for the lack of compliance. The proposed new nursing center would hold up to 120 beds and would be a three-story building with updated technological capabilities.

Council Delegate Leonard Pete (Chinle), legislation co-sponsor, said the nursing home facility would allow Navajo elders and families throughout the Navajo Nation to be cared for near their home areas on Navajo land.

“The intention is to build a better facility so we can get our elders to come back to the Navajo Nation. If this were being built in Tuba City, I would support it. If it were being built in Shiprock, I would support it. I support the Chinle facility. Why? Because the land is there, the design is in place, the \$21 million is in place, and all it needs is the \$8 million,” said Delegate Pete.

Delegate Pete added that the nursing home would not just serve Navajo elderly, but it also would provide care services for individuals with severe physical disabilities who need 24-hour assistance.

In opposition of the legislation, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) said the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee, who oversees funding proposals that seek to utilize the fund, did not vet the proposal for the nursing home.

“We are setting a dangerous precedent of ignoring the subcommittee, whose direction we gave to set up a process. So we have a couple of delegates telling us, ‘the heck with the process, we’ll just push this through because nobody is going to vote no, because this is for our elders.’ I intend

to vote against this. You might label me as being anti-elder, well then so be it, but I would put my record up of helping elders against any of you,” said Delegate Tsosie.

In addition to the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee not vetting the proposal, Delegate Tsosie stated that the allocation by NHA was not NAHASDA funds, rather it came from the rent and house payments made to NHA by its Navajo customers, and stressed that those payments are not meant for projects like the proposed nursing home.

Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) expressed concern regarding the Central Navajo Agency being the only area that would receive a nursing home, and suggested to Council members to include funding to develop plans to construct nursing homes in each Navajo agency.

“My thoughts, since we are going into the Síhasin Fund, is that it’s for everyone’s use – for the Nation’s use. We can open the centers in each agency,” said Delegate Yazzie.

In support of the legislation, Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the proposed Chinle nursing home does not only benefit the area, but it is open to all Navajo citizens throughout the Navajo Nation that prefer their family members are provided treatment and care on Navajo land.

“If you want this opportunity in your agency, then it is the community’s responsibility to plan for development, land withdrawals, clearances, etc.,” said Delegate Hale. “The current facility is dilapidated and has asbestos, and they need to get the building in order and up to code,” said Delegate Hale.

He added that the facility would contribute to community and economic development in providing increased employment opportunities, and would encourage Navajo medical student graduates to come home and work at the nursing home facility.

A directive was recommended by Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh), who suggested that the Division of Economic Development work with the Navajo Area Agency on Aging to develop nursing home proposals in each agency to be proposed to the Síhasin Fund Subcommittee.

Council members voted 15-4 to pass the directive.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Council members voted 14-6 on Legislation No. 0324-16, which failed to pass because the bill required two-thirds or 16 votes.

Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’ izhí) explained that the Chinle Nursing Home would still be constructed with 90 beds. Had the \$8 million been approved, the facility would have accommodated 120 beds.

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