



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council votes to replace current NHA board members

WINDOW ROCK – On Thursday, the Navajo Nation Council voted 16-4 in support of Legislation No. 0145-17, which would effectively remove the current Navajo Housing Authority board of commission members, if the resolution is approved by President Russell Begaye. The emergency legislation was added to the Spring Session agenda on Thursday by a vote of 17-1.

In January, the Council approved resolution CJA-13-17 to lower the number of NHA board members from eight to five members and to increase and improve the qualification criteria for board members. CJA-13-17 stated that the changes would take effect 120 days after the President signed it on Feb. 10.

The legislation passed on Thursday would change the effective date to state that the changes would take effect “immediately” after the President signs it into law. If signed into law, the resolution would immediately remove the current board members.

In his opening remarks to Council, legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahi, Whiterock) said a change in board members is necessary to improve NHA and to provide more homes for Navajo people.

According to the legislation, NHA completed 26 homes in 2016, 50 homes in 2015, and 21 homes in 2014, while failing to expend large amounts of annual federal funding.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) spoke in support of the legislation, adding that the lack of proper management at NHA has led to wasteful spending and a severe shortage of homes for students, elderly, veterans, and families.

“When you have people living in storage units that is a testament to the mismanagement at NHA,” stated Delegate Tsosie.

The Council was also informed that congressional members and staff recently visited the Navajo Nation and shared their concerns over the performance of NHA and noted that the Navajo Nation could face one of several repercussions including having the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development take over the housing program, having a cap placed on federal funds that the Navajo Nation receives, or having a freeze placed on NHA funding.

Speaker Bates, President Begaye, and Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) recently issued a letter to the current board members outlining their concerns and disappointment with the current state of NHA, and requested the immediate resignation and/or removal of NHA's managing officers.

Delegate Shepherd serves as the chair of the Resources and Development Committee, which has oversight authority over NHA.

Prior to taking action on the legislation, the Council met with President Begaye who said he fully supports the legislation, adding that he has met many people throughout the Navajo Nation who have told him that they have "given up" on trying to obtain housing through NHA. He added that many times housing applicants are told that their documents have been misplaced and many have been on waiting lists to receive housing for years. He also noted that many Navajo people are now resorting to purchasing and living in storage units due to the lack of housing on the Navajo Nation.

Since the Council approved the changes to the NHA board in January, the board positions have been advertised and approximately 30 individuals have submitted applications. President Begaye stated that interviews are ongoing and that he wants to have new board members selected by the end of the week.

Prior to voting on the legislation, the Council also approved an amendment directing NHA to ensure the safety of all official documents due to concerns with the questionable practices of NHA and the possibility of NHA destroying, damaging, or removing documents and property.

The Council approved Legislation No. 0145-17 with a vote of 16-4. President Begaye will have ten calendar days to consider the resolution once it is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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