



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council hears community concerns regarding “fracking”

COUNSELOR, N.M. – Over 100 people were in attendance on Monday at Counselor Chapter house as the Navajo Nation Council hosted a public hearing to hear directly from those who support and oppose hydraulic fracturing, also known as “fracking”, on the Navajo Nation.

During the day-long public hearing a total of 50 individuals were provided five minutes each to share their concerns regarding potential health impacts, environmental impacts, economic benefits, and many others.



PHOTO: Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie addresses the public at Counselor Chapter house during a public hearing held in Counselor, N.M. on May 8, 2017.

Speaker LoRenzo Bates along with Council Delegates Leonard Tsosie, Davis Filfred, and Amber Kanazbah Crotty were in attendance at the public hearing, which drew a diverse audience ranging from youth advocates, community groups, state and federal officials, officials from Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company, and others.

Several of the individuals opposed to hydraulic fracturing asked the Council members to support and advocate for the issuance of a moratorium to place a hold on oil drilling until studies and monitoring of land and health impacts are completed.

The Counselor Chapter has begun a group called the “Counselor Health Impact Committee” which is tasked with assessing health and environmental impacts through monitoring and by surveying local community members. Teresa Seamster spoke on behalf of the group and said despite not having much funding the group has been able to compile a brief report based on their initial work.

Several community said they were in attendance to support their elders who had signed lease agreements with oil companies to drill on their allotment lands, adding that many of the elders

did not understand the terms of their contract due to language barriers and were not aware of potential health impacts when signing their agreements.

Board members from Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company spoke in support of oil drilling and highlighted the economic benefits that the Navajo Nation has received from coal and oil revenues for decades.

One official stated that the Bureau of Indian Affairs stated that the Nation has received hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue over the decades. They also stated that the company takes extensive safety measures when conducting oil and gas drilling.

In his closing remarks, Delegate Filfred noted that in 2016 he sponsored legislation to recommend and request the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency, Division of Natural Resources, and the Department of Health to conduct scientific studies and to hold workshops with impacted communities regarding the potential impacts of hydraulic fracturing. The Council's Naabik'iyáti' Committee approved the legislation in August 2016.

"I recommended the scientific study because I need tangible evidence," stated Delegate Filfred.

Delegate Tsosie said that as leaders, the Council members are told that both sides are right when it comes to determining if "fracking" is good or bad, and that it is the responsibility of the Council to seek a balanced solution.

"Past leaders authorized the lease agreements for resource extractions and now we are seeing the benefits and the impacts," stated Delegate Tsosie, also noting that he has never heard of any Navajo individual turning down a lease agreement to allow drilling on their land and that he respects their land rights to enter into such agreements.

Delegate also recommended that the Navajo Nation EPA and other entities increase air and water monitoring in the communities to gather more scientific evidence and insight in the potential affects of hydraulic fracturing.

The Council scheduled the public hearing after the Naabik'iyáti' Committee considered and tabled Legislation No. 0025-17 on March 9. The legislation requests the United Nations to conduct a field hearing regarding the impacts of hydraulic fracturing. Along with the tabling motion, a directive was issued to schedule a public hearing to hear concerns from impacted communities.

Prior to concluding the public hearing, Speaker Bates said that now that the Council has heard directly from impacted communities, the next step will be to meet with several tribal entities to seek some middle ground on the "fracking" issue and to put forth options.

The Naabik'iyáti' Committee is expected to consider Legislation No. 0025-17 on May 25. The Naabik'iyáti' Committee serves as final authority for the bill.

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