



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council to seek a different avenue to increase funding for Navajo Nation senior citizens needs

WINDOW ROCK – On Tuesday, the second day of the 2017 Fall Council Session, the 23rd Navajo Nation Council considered Legislation No. 0020-17, which sought to adopt a Síhasin Fund Senior Citizens Expenditure Plan. The legislation aimed to allocate approximately \$10 million from the Síhasin Fund to the Navajo Nation Trust Fund for senior citizen services.

According to the legislation, the \$10 million would be deposited into the Navajo Nation Trust Fund for senior citizen services in a segregated account, which would not “mingle” with the actual trust fund dollars. Since the funding would be derived from the Síhasin Fund it must follow the guidelines of Resolution No. CD-68-14, which established the Síhasin Fund with settlement funds that the Navajo Nation received from the federal government in 2014.

The bill goes on to state that only the earned interest would be utilized from the allocation and would go toward planning and development of regional infrastructure supporting economic and community development, including housing for senior citizens.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’í’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz’t’í’í) worked with the Navajo Area Agency on Aging to develop the expenditure plan to specifically target renovations and the replacement of several dilapidated senior citizen centers that provide services such as programming, activities, support, and meals.

“What I bring before my colleagues is not just an individual approach to dealing with our senior citizens’ quality of life,” said Delegate Crotty. “This isn’t dumping money on the problem or moving money around. It is funds targeting infrastructure, housing, and economic development. We sent out a comprehensive report regarding the state of buildings of the senior centers.”

Delegate Crotty said that the assessments were conducted in accordance with a Condition of Appropriation that was issued to the Navajo Nation Facilities Maintenance Department. The department then partnered with a Navajo-owned design and architecture firm to aid with the building assessments and cost analysis.

Indigenous Design Studio + Architecture, LLC was tasked with assessing existing senior citizen center facilities on the Navajo Nation and providing recommendations for renovation and construction. The report stated that the average age of the centers are about 27-years old, and that overall, senior center buildings are maintained and cared for satisfactorily considering the low budgets that are allocated annually for maintenance.

Additionally, the company assessed over 80 senior citizen centers, and using a national rating system for building structure integrity the firm determined that nearly 60 senior centers were deemed to be in “poor” condition. The common trend of issues with senior centers included lack of drainage control or planning, lack of compliance with the standards of the American Disabilities Act in the interior and exterior of the facilities, a need for electrical upgrades, a need for HVAC upgrades, and roof repairs.

Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) said he supported the efforts of Delegate Crotty, however, he felt that the interest income from the \$10 million would take years to generate and would not be enough to renovate and replace senior center facilities.

“I would like to ask if we can redo this legislation. We are only getting roughly \$300,000 per year, and that’s about \$3,000 allocated to each senior center each year. The initiative should do a direct investment of these dollars, and utilize a loan type of program and fix all these senior citizens centers across the Navajo Nation. I know I initially said I supported this legislation, but I thought it was going after the principle or a \$3 million bond, or investment loan to fix the centers,” said Delegate Damon.

Delegate Damon offered to work with Delegate Crotty and the Navajo Area Agency on Aging to draft a new plan to increase funding for not only the renovation and replacement of senior centers, but could contribute to the overall services for elders such as assistance, meal programs, and necessities such as eyeglasses and dentures.

Council voted 11-11 to disapprove Legislation No. 0020-17. Although the legislation failed, Delegate Crotty said she would continue to work with the Navajo Area Agency on Aging and Council to develop a new plan to increase funding for Navajo elders.

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