



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Budget and Finance Committee recommends approval of supplemental funding for scholarships for Navajo students

WINDOW ROCK – During a special meeting held on Wednesday, the Budget and Finance Committee issued a “do pass” recommendation by a vote of 3-0 for Legislation No. 0445-17, which seeks the Navajo Nation Council’s approval of supplemental funding from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance in the amount of \$1.6 million for the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance to provide Navajo students with scholarship funding.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) was joined by ONNSFA department manager Rose Graham in requesting the committee’s support for the request to increase scholarship funding that would directly help Navajo students attending accredited institutions of higher education or accredited vocational training schools.

According to ONNSFA’s 2016 annual report, a total of 12,887 individuals submitted scholarship applications. ONNSFA was able to fund 6,486 students, or 51-percent of the total number of applicants, using approximately \$20.4 million that included federal funds, general funds, trust funds, and corporate funds. A total of 6,401 applicants were denied funding in the same year.

BFC member Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), called on ONNSFA to develop a strategy to change policies and funding mechanisms in order to increase annual funding for students. He also questioned why the federal government is not doing more to uphold its treaty obligation to provide for education for Navajo students and encouraged the office to look into how they may gain more funds through the treaty obligations of the federal government.

“We need to do better for our students,” said Delegate Tsosie. “How can we claim to love our students when the denial rate is that high?”

Delegate Tsosie also recommended that the Council consider reallocating funds from programs in the next budget cycle to provide more scholarship awards to Navajo students.

BFC member Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K’ai’Bii’To, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake), said the distribution of scholarship awards by chapters needs to be improved

to prevent the reversion of scholarship funds due to the lack of efficiency in tracking documents and awards students.

Graham said the progress of securing additional funds is often stifled due to the bureaucracy involved in submitting forms and other paperwork at the federal level to comply with federal contracts. She also stated that the office is working on strategies and plans to obtain increased funding in the coming years.

BFC member Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) asked the ONNSFA to consider prioritizing how the office awards scholarship funding to students, whether its based on the number of semesters a student has completed or how close the student is to graduating with a degree.

At the conclusion of Wednesday's discussion, the Budget and Finance Committee approved Legislation No. 0445-17 with a vote of 3-0. The Naabik'íyáti' Committee and the Navajo Nation Council will consider the bill next.

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