



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

October 25, 2017

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### **Budget and Finance Committee supports legislation to restore funding to the Navajo Nation comprehensive budget**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Tuesday during a special meeting, the Budget and Finance Committee considered legislation that would amend the Navajo Nation FY2018 Comprehensive Budget to appropriate unallocated funds, which stemmed from certain items that were line item vetoed by President Russell Begaye.

In Sept. the 23<sup>rd</sup> Navajo Nation Council passed Council Resolution No. CS-53-17 to approve the comprehensive budget, and on Sept. 30, President Begaye signed the resolution and exercised the presidential line item veto authority to eliminate certain items, resulting in nearly \$8.1 million of unappropriated funds.

According to the legislation sponsor BFC vice chair Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinõn, Whippoorwill), a leadership meeting was held between Council members and President Begaye to discuss the unappropriated funds.

“I am sure all my colleagues are aware of our meeting with President Begaye regarding the line item vetoed items within the comprehensive budget, and in our discussion, certainly we brought forth an agreement to restore some items. We would like to bring [this legislation] forth for your consideration,” said Delegate Witherspoon.

The Office of the President and Vice President issued a memorandum to the BFC stating that the legislation did not reflect the agreement reached at the leadership meeting, and recommended seeking funding for the Grazing Officials, Eastern Land Board, and the Farm Boards from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance.

In opposition of the OPVP’s recommendations, BFC member Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreón, Whitehorse Lake) said the funding for the officials and boards is to aid in preventing tax issues with the federal government.

“I don’t think we need to cater to the president. Let him be answerable to the people that he always talks about. If the grazing committee members aren’t going to get their increases, he’ll

have to face that during his reelection, and be held accountable. Let the IRS get after the Grazing Committee members and it's the President's fault. It's that simple," said Delegate Tsosie.

Delegate Tsosie added that the Council should look into amending the Navajo Nation Appropriations Act to improve the budget process and allow fair allocation of funding to all programs on the Nation.

BFC chair Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) called for the vote on the bill, which resulted in a tie vote of 2-2.

Delegate Damon provided his reasoning for voting in favor of the legislation to break the tie, and said he opposed the recommendations by the OPVP and supported the bill as it was initially drafted. He added that the funding is drawn from the Permanent Trust Fund income, not the principal amount.

"I support the measure the way it is right now, but I don't support the measure in moving the dollars back to the Permanent Trust Fund income because as indicated last year, President Begaye utilized those same dollars to help fund [the Navajo Area Agency on Aging]," said Delegate Damon, adding that "those dollars are not actually in the Permanent Trust Fund income fiduciary fund, but they are an unallocated amount, as recommended in last year's budget per the Navajo Nation Department of Justice."

Delegate Damon said the legislation is only allocating the unappropriated funds that came from President Begaye's line item vetoes, and that the president supported the same measure and approved similar amendments to the FY2017 comprehensive budget. Funding was never drawn from the Permanent Trust Fund principal and cannot be allocated without the approval of a two-thirds referendum vote of registered Navajo Nation voters, added Delegate Damon.

BFC members voted 3-2 to approve Legislation No. 0430-17, and the bill moves forward to the Naabik'iyáti' Committee. The Navajo Nation Council serves as the final authority on the bill.

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