



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council approves funding increase for Navajo Technical University and Diné College

WINDOW ROCK – On the second day of the Summer Council Session, the 23rd Navajo Nation Council considered Legislation No. 0032-16, which seeks to amend the Diné Higher Education Grant Fund to increase the distribution funding for Navajo Technical University from \$3.5 million to approximately \$4.2 million.

In July 2004, the Navajo Nation Council established the grant fund through Resolution CJY-39-04 to distribute an annual allocation to NTU, Diné College, and the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance.

According to the legislation, the current annual distribution states that NTU receives \$3.5 million, Diné College \$4.2 million, and ONNSFA \$3.5 million.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the funding increase is needed for NTU is to expand its academic, vocational, and technical education programs, develop additional advanced degree programs, and to increase and improve classrooms, dormitories, and faculty housing.

“NTU has come a long way in terms of establishing itself as a successful college, and it’s obvious that they will continue working towards being innovative and create new educational opportunities for Navajo students,” said Delegate Hale. “Increasing the fund distribution allows them to stay at the top-tier of quality education.”

Delegate Hale said the college is seeking national accreditation, has an award-winning culinary program, and seeks to establish the Navajo Nation’s first police academy in Chinle. He added that enrollment has grown to over 2,000 students in which 98-percent are Navajo, and graduation and retention rates at NTU surpasses other state colleges that serve Navajo students.

NTU was first established in 1979 as the Navajo Skills Center and became a technical institution in 1985. The college was later renamed Navajo Technical College, and is now designated as Navajo Technical University after its programs expanded in the last several years.

Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaille/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’izhí) expressed support for the legislation, however, he said he had concerns regarding the

allocation amount for Diné College, which has not changed since the inception of the grant fund distribution law in 2004.

“I notice that this would be the second increase in fund distribution to NTU, but we cannot forget that Diné College also has several successful programs and costs have increased. Investing into our educational institutions is paramount and should match the increase of costs that all colleges are currently facing,” said Delegate BeGaye.

Delegate BeGaye proposed an amendment to Council members to include an additional increase in the fund distribution to Diné College from \$4.2 million to \$4.7 million.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) raised concerns regarding the amendment and stated that a performance report needs to be submitted by the college before they receive an increase in funding.

“We need to know where the money is going and ensure we are getting the results we want to see. We are actually hurting the students when we don’t ask for accountability. At the moment, we should not be increasing these amounts because we are in trying times. I say we reduce the fund distribution for Diné College and NTU until we see how successful their programs are,” said Delegate Tsosie.

Delegate Tsosie suggested that if the colleges do receive the increase in funding, that a significant portion go toward scholarships for the students to increase their success at the colleges.

In support of the amendment, Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) commended the colleges on the Navajo Nation and stressed the importance of the Navajo language and culture programs that both colleges developed in addition to their academic and technical curriculum.

“[The colleges] should be a citadel of culture and language learning, and students should be able to learn the philosophical thinking of the Navajo. We should not bend to the western way of thinking, but continue to promote the expansion of our colleges through traditional processes,” said Delegate Chee.

Delegate Chee added that the advancement of degree programs should include doctoral studies for language and culture, as well as a law school.

Council members voted 16-4 to approve the amendment.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Navajo Nation Council voted 17-3 to approve Legislation No. 0032-16 with one amendment. The President will have ten calendar days to consider the bill once it is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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