



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee supports interest income increase for the Navajo Nation Veterans Trust Fund

RAMAH, N.M. – The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee considered Legislation No. 0191-17 on Monday, which seeks to amend the Navajo Nation Veterans Trust Fund interest income allocation that is used in providing direct services for Navajo veterans.

According to legislation sponsor Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh), he stated that the trust fund currently receives a four-percent set-aside from the Navajo Nation's total annual revenue, in which two-percent goes towards the Veterans Housing Program and two-percent goes towards the trust fund's principal balance.

He went on to say that of the current two-percent that goes into the Veterans Trust Fund principal, approximately 96-percent of that set-aside is reinvested directly into the principal balance, and the remaining four-percent of the remaining amount is interest income that is annually appropriated to the Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs.

"What this legislation does is it increases the interest income appropriation from four-percent to 10-percent, which would improve services to Navajo veterans. This is not to be confused with the four-percent set-aside, that is a separate issue," said Delegate Damon. "We are seeking to increase the interest income amount, and we are not dipping into the trust fund's principal amount."

Delegate Damon said the increase may not be enough to address all the needs of Navajo veterans, gold star mothers, and surviving military spouses, but it is a start and he will continue to push the legislation forward in hopes to garner support from the Navajo Nation Council.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé a'náoz't'l'i) expressed her support for the legislation and said that the policy in issuing assistance checks to veterans needs to be amended.

"There needs to be a streamlined process for our veterans to get their money. How can we get the checks out of accounts payable and into the veterans' hands? As an official, I can submit a claim and receive a reimbursement in a few days, so how can we do this for assistance checks? As

chair of the Budget and Finance Committee, I think it can be done at your committee level,” said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty added that much of the delay in issuing checks to veterans is due to the lengthy methods in processing checks and the use of outdated computer equipment. She said the BFC might be able to tackle the issue through the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller and Office of Management and Budget.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Norman M. Begay (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee) proposed a directive to the acting director of the DNVA to provide a financial report to HEHSC regarding spending, check processing, and any other financially related matters at the DNVA.

HEHSC members voted 5-0 to approve Legislation No. 0191-17, with one directive. The legislation moves forward to the Budget and Finance Committee and the Navajo Nation Council serves as final authority on the bill.

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