



24th Navajo Nation Council

Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 10, 2019

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Naabik'iyáti Advances Appointment, Defers Census Legislation for Refinement

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Navajo Nation Council Naabik'iyáti' Committee convened Thursday, May 9 to consider three legislations at the Council Chamber in session that lasted until 9 pm.

In considering Legislation 0083-19, which is sponsored by Delegate Charlene Tso (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teechospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) and confirms President Jonathan Nez's nomination of Deannah Neswood-Gishey to lead the Division of Social Services, the delegates highlighted a wide range of issues that are impacted by department programming.

"You have worked in the trenches. You've worked with families, children, and all aspects of social services, but there are concerns with your division," stated Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi).

A constant theme of the delegates questions to Neswood-Gishey were management, employee turnover, training, and community-based direct service concerns.

Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) requested Neswood-Gishey's assistance in partnering with the Navajo Nation Police Department to combat human trafficking with prevention efforts.

"We have 27,000 square miles and that's a lot of area to cover. What would you do? It's really about prevention for our Navajo children," stated Delegate Brown.

Delegates Amber Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé alnáo'z't'l'i) and Daniel Tso (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) noted the important impacts DSS programs have on youth and elders.

"There's over 1000 children in the [foster care] system. As a nation, what's our plan to restore them," Delegate Crotty asked. "I want every Navajo social worker to know that we have their back. Our people are not vulnerable. We're being targeted."

Delegate Daniel Tso asked whether senior center managers receive training on elder abuse, explaining that elder care needs to remain a priority.

Neswood-Gishey explained that she started at DSS 27 years ago as a social worker. In her time with the division, she's learned that it is critical to be proactive and not reactive. Therefore, in her first three weeks in the acting position, she's focused on program assessments, filling vacancies, and reclassifying positions to accurately indicate the work staff are performing.

Her confirmation passed unanimously and is now eligible for full Council consideration.

Legislation 0093-19 failed to pass the Committee in a 5-12 vote. Naabik'iyáti' is the final authority for the legislation.

Sponsored by Delegate Nathaniel Brown, the legislation requested the federal government to intervene and facilitate further dialogue on the closure of the Navajo Generating Station and the Peabody Kayenta Mine.

At the request of Division of Economic Development Director JT Willie, the delegates entered executive session to discuss what he deemed sensitive matters related to the decommissioning of NGS.

Delegates considered scheduling a work session on the legislation before finally determining to vote on the matter that evening.

For the final legislation under consideration, 0100-19, the committee elected to table it until the next Naabik'iyáti Committee meeting in order to ensure appropriate geographic representation on the Nation's Census 2020 Complete Count Commission.

The legislation confirms Speaker Seth Damon's (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) appointments of one delegate from each agency to the Commission; the President and Council have traditionally each appointed five members to the Commission.

All five of President Jonathan Nez's appointments were from Arizona.

In the intervening time, the Speaker will meet with the President to guarantee that Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona have appropriate representation of the Commission.

Census data is critical for federal funding formulas and both the executive and legislative branches are working diligently to ensure the Navajo Nation is not undercounted.

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