



Navajo Nation Council accepts Forest Lake Chapter request for \$3,000 stipend funding for FY2017

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Supplemental funding in the amount of \$3,000 for the Forest Lake Chapter was approved by the 24th Navajo Nation Council on Jul. 22 during the 2020 Summer Session. Legislation No. 0043-20 authorizes a one-time grant to cover chapter official stipends from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance (UUFB) for the fiscal year 2017.

Council Delegate Jimmy Yellowhair (Hard Rock, Forest Lake, Pinon, Black Mesa, Whippoorwill), sponsor of the supplemental appropriation legislation, explained that Forest Lake Chapter officials were not granted stipends for a number of public meetings they conducted in the 2017 fiscal year.

Council delegates asked for supporting documentation from the Forest Lake Chapter detailing reasons chapter officials were not paid and why the fiscal year 2018 chapter carryover funds were not used. The Forest Lake Chapter was also directed to provide supporting documentation for their request demonstrating how funds are administered at the Chapter.

Forest Lake Chapter President Fern Benally explained that the chapter worked with the Office of the President and Vice President, Delegate Yellowhair and Council Delegate Jamie Henio (Alamo, Ramah, Tohajilee) to identify how the fiscal year 2017 budget shortfall left Forest Lake Chapter officials without the appropriate compensation funding.

Both Delegate Yellowhair and Forest Lake Chapter President Fern Benally indicated that efforts to address the chapter's shortfall began with former Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Piñon, Whippoorwill).

"We were fresh out of other positions and did not know how to proceed with no guidance," said Forest Lake Chapter President Fern Benally during a Jun. 14 Budget and Finance Committee (BFC) session.

The Forest Lake Chapter was among five other chapters with less than 300 voters and therefore received less funding from the Navajo Nation due to the 50/50 formula in 2017.

The 50/50 formula was intended to ensure that each of the 110 chapters received an equal portion of half of the total appropriation. The remaining half would be divided proportionally among the chapters, using percentages based on the registered voter number in each chapter as of the appropriation date.

In considering the issues that created the shortfall, Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse'alnaozt'ii', Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To'Koi) pressed for the documentation requested by delegates at the Jul. 16 Naabik'iyáti' Committee. She voted green at the Naabik'iyáti' Committee with the assurance from the presenters that more detailed information would be brought forward at the Navajo Nation Council.

Delegate Yellowhair stated that he hoped a member of the chapter budget staff at the Division of Community Development (DCD) would be able to provide the requested information. In their place, Dr. Pearl Yellowman, executive director of the DCD, confirmed that a summary of allocations to chapters affected by the 50/50 rule to the Council was forwarded to the Council. However, a breakdown of the individual chapter allocations that the Council could use to correct the issue for all affected chapters would not be available from DCD staff until later that day.

The legislation failed a tabling motion, but in continuing the discussion, Delegate Yellowhair stated he was willing to either press forward with the vote or issue another tabling motion to wait for the documentation.

In response, Delegate Crotty expressed concern that the legislation was a temporary fix. She hoped to have a larger policy discussion on the capacity of local chapter governments in addressing these issues.

Delegate Crotty recalled the proceedings at the chapter level after the issue was identified. She indicated that many Navajo Nation chapters appear to not be exercising the authority that the Navajo Nation Council gave the local governments to fix budget issues. Delegate Crotty added, “Does it make sense for chapters, or maybe non-certified chapters, not to have carry-over authority if we have to continue to fix their issues here at Council?”

Following the statements, the 24th Navajo Nation Council then proceeded to approve Legislation No. 0043-20 with a vote of 18 in favor and 2 opposed.

Previously, the Resources and Development Committee voted to approve Legislation No. 0043-20 with a vote of 4 in favor and 0 opposed on Jun. 17. The Budget and Finance Committee also considered and approved the legislation with a vote of 3 in favor and 0 opposed on Jul. 14. The Naabik’iyáti’ Committee added additional discussion and approved the legislation with a vote of 20 in favor and 0 opposed on Jul. 16.

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