



## 23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Navajo Nation opposes the closure of the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On Thursday, the Naabik'iyáti' Committee approved Legislation No. 0130-18, establishing the Navajo Nation's opposition to the closure of the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation, which was created to oversee the relocation of Navajo people who were affected by the Navajo-Hopi land dispute settlement, in accordance with Public Law 93-531.

The continuation of the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation came into question after executive director Chris Bavasi, announced to the House Appropriations Committee in February 2016 that it would be able to close the office at the end of fiscal year 2018 – at the end of September 2018.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To ii), has strongly opposed the closure and called on the federal government to meet and discuss any possible changes with Navajo Nation leaders before any decisions are made.

“The same day the Naabik'iyáti' Committee approved this resolution is the same day we met with both DOI Deputy Secretary John Tahsuda and Mr. Jerold Gidner with OST and congressional offices in Washington D.C., reminding them to provide adequate tribal consultation with Navajo Nation before taking any significant actions involving ONHIR,” stated Delegate Phelps.

The resolution passed on Thursday asserts that the original obligations contained in the Navajo Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974, are obligations that ONHIR must complete, as it was the statutory obligation when Navajo people were relocated. It also insists and requires consultation with the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation.

On April 12, the Navajo-Hopi Land Commission also passed a resolution opposing the closure. Delegate Phelps, who serves as the chair of the NHLC, contends that the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation has not yet completed its obligations because there remains a list of needs that includes roads, power lines, water lines, community facilities such as chapter houses, Head Start buildings, senior centers, and others.

The listing also identifies “unknown and other costs” associated with mining contamination, uranium mining waste contamination in the Nahata Dziil community where many relocatees reside, repair or replacement of faulty constructed homes, and the need for impartial reviews of denied relocatee cases.

Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins), who represents the Nahata Dziil Chapter on the Council, has long advocated for the continuation of the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation to help local residents who were relocated into homes that were poorly constructed and many who continue to live in dilapidated structures.

Delegate Smith said the homes that were provided through the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation now require renovations or replacements depending on the level of deterioration to the homes. He said although some families did receive new homes, the structures were poorly constructed and many have cracking foundations, broken walls, and many other issues.

The Naabik’iyátí’ Committee approved Legislation No. 0130-18 on Thursday by a vote of 10-0 and serves as the final authority for the bill.

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