



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Teesto Chapter hosts public forum for the Transportation Stimulus Plan referendum



PHOTO: Council Delegate Tom Chee explains the Permanent Trust Fund balance during a public forum for the Transportation Stimulus Plan referendum held at Teesto Chapter on Oct. 19, 2017.

TEESTO, Ariz. – On Thursday evening, Teesto Chapter president Elmer Clark welcomed members of the Navajo Nation Council, the Navajo Division of Transportation, and approximately 40 community members as the chapter hosted a public forum to provide information and answers to questions, regarding the Oct. 24 public referendum for the Transportation Stimulus Plan.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) explained that the purpose of the referendum is to allow registered Navajo voters to determine whether or not the Navajo Nation should utilize \$216 million from the Permanent Trust Fund principal to fund the Transportation Stimulus Plan, which would improve a total of 480-miles of roads across the Navajo Nation over the course of a six-year period, or 20-miles of roads within each of the 24 regions of the Navajo Nation.

Delegate Witherspoon told the audience that the Transportation Stimulus Plan will provide four benefits that are greatly needed including, improving rough dirt roads in rural areas, creating at least 105 jobs for six to seven years, generating over \$5.8 million in taxes revenues for the Nation, and helping to reduce the transportation costs for schools, public safety, emergency management services, and for Navajo families by reducing maintenance costs on vehicles due to wear and tear.

“The poor roads, long distances to travel for mail, food, water, education, health care, employment and services makes transportation costly across Navajo. The poor road conditions in the rural areas create long travel times for children to travel to school and return home. The poor road conditions often make travel for elders and those in need of health care an all-day affair. The poor road conditions cause difficulty for law enforcement and emergency management services to respond quickly,” added Delegate Witherspoon.

Council Delegate Lee Jack, Sr. (Dilkon, Greasewood Springs, Indian Wells, Teesto, Whitecone), who represents the Teesto Chapter on the Council, spoke in support of the referendum stating that the need for road improvements in every Navajo community is overwhelming and that federal funding is not enough to help every region of the Navajo Nation.

“The \$54 million that the Nation receives from the federal government is only a drop in the bucket when you consider the size of our Nation and the number of roads,” said Delegate Jack.

Officials with the Navajo Division of Transportation also provided a presentation and explained that the Nation receives \$54 million annually from the Federal Highway Administration. They said the federal funds include pre-construction requirements such as clearances, which use a significant portion of the annual funds. They estimate that only \$37 million of the \$54 million is used for the actual construction or maintenance of roads after pre-construction costs are met.

NDOT officials also said that of the over 10,500 miles of roads on the Navajo Nation, only 1,500 miles are paved roads, and the remaining 9,000 miles are dirt roads. A comprehensive assessment conducted by NDOT in 2010 estimated that the overall cost to address all roads on the Navajo Nation would amount to over \$7.9 billion.

Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock) provided a summary of the Nation’s investments including the Permanent Trust Fund, which he said has reached over \$2 billion. He also clarified that if voters approve the referendum, the chapters in each of the 24 regions would determine which roads receive the funding for improvements – not the members of the Navajo Nation Council.

“We are simply giving the people the opportunity to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ as to whether or not they want to use their money for road improvements – it’s up to the people,” stated Delegate Chee.

The approved ballot language/question will ask voters the following:

“Should the fund principal of the Navajo Nation Permanent Trust Fund in the amount of \$216,000,000 over six years at \$36,000,000 per year be used to support the Navajo Nation Transportation Stimulus Plan?”

According to the Navajo Election Administration, polls will be open from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Oct. 24 to allow registered Navajo voters to cast their votes for the referendum.

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