



24th Navajo Nation Council expresses concern over Sihasin Fund

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Last week, the 24th Navajo Nation Council held a Special Session in which eight (8) legislations were approved and two (2) legislations failed, however, with the Sihasin Fund being frequently utilized and seeking funds from, concerns over if the 24th Navajo Nation Council would expend all funds before the installment of the 25th Navajo Nation Council.

Out of the 23 legislations set before the Council, nine (9) legislations requested a total of over \$55 million from the Sihasin Fund. Many of the legislation sought funds for the construction of community building projects for various chapters across the Navajo Nation.

Sponsors for each legislation spoke on the benefits of diversifying their community and providing a centralized building for community members and surrounding areas to receive assistance. Other projects sought to be granted funding for the repair and maintenance of service facilities that have been in the legislative process since last year.

Sponsored by Hon. Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) and co-sponsored by Hon. Raymond Smith, Jr. (Klagetoh, Wide Ruins, Houck, Lupton, Nahat'á Dziil), Legislation No. 0159-22 was approved and will allocate \$10,031,897 from the Sihasin Fund for the Mariano Lake Chapter Multipurpose Building Project.

In October, the 70 year old Mariano Chapter House was demolished as it was deemed to have outlived its useful life. In replacement, the community decided to construct a multi-use facility that would utilize alternative power sources such as solar power.

Legislation No. 0075-22, sponsored by Hon. Carl R. Slater (Round Rock, Rock Point, Tséché'izí, Lukachukai, Tsaile-Wheatfields), was approved and will appropriate \$10,000,000 from the Sihasin Fund to establish a new Outdoor Recreation Fund for the Navajo Nation along with the related Expenditure Plan.

Hon. Slater noted that with the approval of funds, \$1,000,000 would be immediately available while the remaining shall be used for funding awards and reinvestment. Supporting the legislation, Hon. Slater mentioned the benefits of investing in more diverse recreational areas would drive tourism on the Navajo Nation.

In light of recent discussion surrounding the continued use of Sihasin Funds coupled with Legislation No. 0109-22 failing, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council decided to defer their legislations until the next Navajo Nation Council Special Session.

Legislation No. 0109-22 would have allocated \$18,880,105 from the Sihasin Fund to NavaMill Lumber & Logging Company for its proposed forest products business to be constructed in Sawmill Chapter

Continued concerns over the issue brought forth questions about the up-to-date remaining

balance of the Síhasin Fund. Robert Willie, Accounting Manager for the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller, shared the current unaudited un-appropriated balance being \$148,690,316.

Hon. Jamie Henio (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee) expressed to his colleagues his intention to continue pushing forward Legislation No. 0176-22 as in the past when it was initially brought forth before the Council for consideration last year during discussions on the appropriation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds but was never approved.

The 24th Navajo Nation Council approved the legislation, which will allocate \$10,159,542 from the Síhasin Fund to replace the Ramah Navajo School Board drinking water system. Hon. Henio's agent, Ramah School Board Inc. Superintendent and Principal David Nez, spoke on how the waterline has had frequent breaks and jeopardizes the only water source for the school, housing, and nearby establishments in the remote community.

Additionally, Legislation No. 0198-22 was approved which will appropriate \$3,468,000 from the Síhasin Fund for a multipurpose building at Aneth Chapter. Hon. Charlaine Tso (Mexican Water, Tółikan, Teec Nos Pos, Aneth, Red Mesa), sponsor for the legislation, expressed how the project would be a great resource for not only Aneth Chapter but for surrounding communities.

"I am thankful for the support and collaborative work from Aneth Chapter Officials, the Utah Navajo Trust Fund, Darrell Williams, and the support from my colleagues of the 24th Navajo Nation Council," said Hon. Tso. "This project will serve multiple purposes for the community and provide resources for future development. This has taken several years of planning, development, and there are many behind the wheel that helped steer this into the path of growth."

However, Legislation No. 0023-22, sponsored by Hon. Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock), failed as it did not meet the two-thirds vote requirement. The legislation would have amended certain sections of the Navajo Nation Code to transfer Legislative oversight over veteran services to the Naabik'iyáti' Committee.

Due to unforeseen circumstances regarding the attendance, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council motioned for their respective legislations to be deferred to the next Special Session however, the vote failed. Afterwards, a motion to adjourn was made which initially failed; however, a change of vote ended the Special Session close to 10:00 P.M. (MDT).

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