



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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25th Navajo Nation Council approves extension for crop insurance



Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Brenda Jesus and Navajo Department of Agriculture Director Leo Watchman presented Legislation 0246-23 during the 2024 Spring Session.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - During the second day of Spring Session on Tuesday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council voted to extend the Síhasin Fund reserve of over \$10.9 million for the annual premium for the crop insurance program administered through the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture.

“Crop insurance is a critical resource for our farmers in years of drought. It provides funding back to our producers and farmers,” said legislation sponsor and Resources and Development Committee Chair Brenda Jesus (Oaksprings, St. Michaels).

Crop insurance is designed to provide coverage on pasture, rangeland, and forage acres, and is based on a rainfall index that determines precipitation within an area.

The program was initially implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Pasture, Rangeland, and Forage Pilot Insurance Program. The Navajo Nation has participated in this program since 2016.

The legislation extends the Síhasin Fund guarantee to reserve the annual premium for the crop insurance program to 2028. The legislation originally sought \$19,835,612 from the Síhasin Fund for the annual premium.

According to the Department of Agriculture, the Navajo Nation has received over \$110 million through the program since 2016. Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty questioned why the legislation requests the Navajo Nation to subsidize the annual premium when the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) has funds available.

"I need to see a breakdown of how our ranchers and farmers are benefitting from the AIF and why you're asking the government to subsidize these costs. How much funding does the Department of Agriculture have and what is eligible for use for their insurance premium?" Council Delegate Crotty asked.

RDC Chair Jesus said that approximately \$51.3 million of the AIF is currently committed to 54 chapter agriculture projects. Chair Jesus also indicated that since 2016, the Navajo Nation has received an average of \$12.5 million annually equaling about a 65 percent of return.

Controller Sean McCabe noted that investing in the AIF is a solid decision for the Nation.

"It turns a profit. Interest and revenues do exceed expenditures," McCabe said.

Budget and Finance Chair Shaandiin Parrish (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) proposed an amendment to reserve approximately \$10.9 million from the Sîhasin Fund for the annual premium. \$9 million will be subsidized from AIF Premium set aside for the remainder of the total.

Many Council Delegates agreed that one goal of the AIF is to use the indemnity payments to cover the annual premium, making the AIF self-sufficient.

"Out of a \$19 million investment, we've now seen five times the return that has subsidized income to our farmers. These funds are critical when the Nation experiences decreases in precipitation that impacts our farmers and ranchers. Thank you for assisting our Navajo farmers and ranchers," Chair Jesus said.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council voted 20 in favor and two opposed for Legislation No. 0246-23, which required two-thirds approval, or 16 supporting votes. Once the resolution is certified by the Legislative Branch and delivered to the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President, the President will have ten calendar days to consider the resolution.

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