



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Navajo Council concludes day two of 2009 spring session

Legislation to extend terms of president, vice president and Council delegates for two more years fails 21-54

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The 21st Navajo Nation Council concluded day two of their 2009 spring session on April 21 by entertaining two items in old business and three items in new business.

In old business, Legislation No. 0740-08, sponsored by Bobby Robbins Sr. (Coalmine Canyon/Toh Nanees Dizi), was tabled for the second time by a motion by Ervin M. Keeswood Sr. (Tse Daa Kaan) by a vote of 43-46. This was the second tabling; the first on Jan. 29 prompted a work session in March for the Council to ask questions.

This legislation is related to community development and finance to approve the To’Nanees’Dizi Local Governance Tax Code. This legislation proposes the approval of the revised and finalized amendments to the tax code.

This legislation garnered intense Council debate concerning the fairness of surrounding chapters of Tuba City. Some Council members believed communities affected were not included in this decision to tax. Several members suggested surrounding communities be re-introduced to the intent of taxing and the Tuba City chapter should vote on it first, then it should come back to the Council for consideration.

Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto) expressed his concerns about the tax code.

“I ask that you give support to this legislation,” Nez said. “The Navajo Local Governance Act was put in place for local communities, local chapters to become self sufficient – this is one intricate part to moving forward and to fend for themselves.”

The second item in old business was Legislation No. 0132-09, sponsored by LoRenzo C. Bates (Upper Fruitland) failed 35-43. This legislation is related to finance to amend the Navajo Nation 2009 fiscal year budget by eliminating the Permanent Fund Set Aside in its entirety for the third quarter of Navajo Nation Fiscal Year 2009 that will approve restrictions of certain expenditures by the Controller of the Navajo Nation and to enact a selective hiring freeze.

Several Council delegates disagreed with this particular legislation and several felt too much power would be given to the Controller of the Navajo Nation.

Some delegates supported the legislation.

“Vote green on this legislation, the people entrusted us with the leadership as legislators,” Orlanda Smith-Hodge said. “As a legislator, we look for all positive and good things for our community members, we need to advocate for them. All money Council has appropriated goes back to the people – money they are entitled to. We foresee, recommend and vote in their best interest.”

In new business, Legislation No. 0145-09 passed 73-3 with no discussion. This legislation relates to education to enact the Education Committee Meetings Amendment Act of 2009.

Legislation No. 0041-09, sponsored by Lawrence T. Morgan, failed 52-22 and needed 59 votes to pass. This legislation was related to intergovernmental relations to enact the Office of Legislative Counsel Amendments Act of 2009 to amend Title 1 and 2 of the Navajo Nation Code.

The legislation would have given the Chief Legislative Counsel more authority in issuing legal opinions on behalf of the Navajo Nation, particularly the legislative branch — independent of the other departments and branches.

"All we are asking for are the tools to provide better legal services to the standing committees, the Office of the Speaker, the Intergovernmental Relations Committee and the Navajo Nation Council," said Seanez.

A majority of the Council supported the legislation, but the bill needed 2/3 of the Council's vote to pass. Some Council delegates felt that the Navajo Attorney General should be the only authority to issue such legal opinions and some delegates believe unfair and biased opinions are currently being issued by the current Attorney General. Other delegates believe an elected Attorney General may be the solution, while others blame the current occupant of that post.

In other Council action, Legislation No. 0046-09, sponsored by Ernest D. Yazzie, Jr. (Baahaali/Church Rock) and Orlanda Smith-Hodge (Cornfields/Greasewood Springs/Klagetoh/Wide Ruins), relates to intergovernmental relations to enact the Navajo Nation Election Consolidation Act of 2009 failed 21-54.

If passed, this legislation would have amended the Navajo Nation Election Code to combine Navajo Nation general and chapter elections so that only one major election within the Navajo Nation is held every four years.

This legislation was highly criticized by several Council delegates, because it would have extended terms for the president, vice-president and Council delegates for two more years to align the elections. Several delegates said the Navajo electorate should be the ones to decide such action.

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