



## Navajo Nation Council – Office of the Speaker

Contact: Jerome Clark

Phone: (928) 871-7160

Cell: (928) 637-5603

[nnlb.communications@gmail.com](mailto:nnlb.communications@gmail.com)

[www.navajonationcouncil.org](http://www.navajonationcouncil.org)

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### NEWS RELEASE:

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## **Naa'bi'iyati' Committee Work Session, NHA and supplemental appropriations**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – The Naa'bi'iyati Committee of 22<sup>nd</sup> Navajo Nation Council held a Work Session on March 29 to hear a report from the Navajo Housing Authority (NHA) and to discuss the proposed supplemental appropriations.

### **Navajo Housing Authority Report**

The Committee previously gave the directive, with a vote of eleven (11) supporting and four (4) opposing, at the March 14 Naa'bi'iyati meeting to receive a report from NHA and representatives from the Denver HUD Office and the Southwest HUD Office.

The request to hear from NHA and HUD representatives resulted from discussions around legislation 0094-12, during which concerns about NHA practices were strongly voiced by the members of the Resources & Development Committee.

Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), during the discussion on legislation 0094-12, expressed concerns about the need to hold NHA accountable in housing plan development.

Legislation 0094-12, sponsored by Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Navajo Mountain, Oljato, Ts'ah Bii Kin), deals with "endorsing and supporting the Fiscal Year 2012 Navajo Nation Housing Plan for the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-determination Act of 1996 (NAHASDA) Indian Housing Block Grant Funding."

In their March 29 report during the Naa'bi'iyati Work Session, NHA covered monitoring, oversight, compliance, fiscal management, strategic expenditure, management initiatives, administrative changes, and congressional appropriations.

The report provided an opportunity for Council Delegates to express the housing concerns and housing needs of the communities they represent.

"I would like to challenge NHA to give veterans a chance and to give them a key to a home," Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau). "We are going to continue fighting for veterans here."

Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oaksprings, St. Michaels) also expressed concerns for veterans and veterans' families who are already in homes but sometimes continue to face problems because of housing policies. Council Delegate Hale gave an example of a veteran's widow who was struggling with housing policies that prevented her children and grandchildren from living with her.

The issues expressed by Diné communities and relayed by Council Delegates during the Work Session were clear: housing for Diné people needs improvement and it is an immediate concern for many families.

"We seek changes so that we can provide better housing for Navajo people," commented Council Delegate Leonard Tsoie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake). "The report that was given is something that we are used to and it is more of dog and pony show but the real picture is what we see out there."

Housing concerns expressed by Council Delegates on behalf of the communities they represent included the following: the desire for homes not located in clustered developments, a review of occupancy policies, homes for veterans, filling vacant homes, high rent issues for low income families, home availability for higher income families, and Bennett Freeze rehabilitation.

Although Council Delegates expressed a wide range of concerns to NHA and HUD representatives, it is clear that Council is concerned about the housing needs of Navajo communities.

### **UUFB Supplemental Appropriations**

The Council is tasked with the responsibility of deciding on legislations that could appropriate all or part of \$41,958,762 currently in the Unreserved Undesignated Fund Balance.

The discussion at the Work Session revolved around how Council would proceed in appropriating the supplemental funds while remaining fiscally responsible.

"There are 32 legislations totaling \$53,321,223 which exceeds the available UUFB funds of \$41,958,762," Dominic Beyal, Executive Director of the Office of Management and Budget, stated in a memorandum to Council. "Of the 32 legislations, there are 20 primarily for the Executive Branch, 11 for the Legislative Branch, 2 for the Judicial Branch, and 6 for the Chapters."

Legislations seeking supplemental funding include, but are not limited to, funds for chapters, transportation, employee housing, solid waste management, grazing, farms boards, and scholarships.

“Additionally, also as of March 28, there are approximately 37 more funding proposals currently in the Executive Branch Signature Approval Sheet (“SAS”) review process,” Beyal added. “These proposals request a total of \$40, 897,242 and could be introduced as legislation at any time.”

One suggestion on dealing with supplemental funding legislations was to refer supplemental legislations back to the oversight committees so that priorities could be established by the committees; that option would have utilized processes outlined in 12 NNC § 820.

Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) suggested that Council establish guidelines for evaluating and discussing legislation seeking supplemental funding.

Other Delegates suggested that the priority should be addressing emergency needs then forwarding the remaining UUFB to the next budgeting cycle.

Council Delegate Benally felt that prioritizing the legislations was not the route to go since all the legislations were a priority to the sponsoring delegate.

“I think every delegate who sponsored funding requests feels like what they are pushing, what they are moving forward is important,” Council Delegate Benally stated. “It may not be important to the rest of us, but to the delegate who is sponsoring the legislation it is important to him or her, so who is to say that it is not a priority?”

The Committee informally agreed to involve President Ben Shelly in the discussion as a next step so that he has the opportunity to offer input and contribute to the dialog.

With twenty (20) legislations for the Executive Branch and a number of proposals going through the Executive Branch SAS process, President Shelly’s involvement in Council’s discussion on supplemental appropriations will help to maintain the fiscal stability of the Navajo Nation.

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