



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Navajo Nation Council enacts the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2013**

**WINDOW ROCK** – On the final day of the Winter Session the Council voted 12-7 to enact the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2013, which imposes a two-percent sales tax, in addition to the Navajo Nation’s current five-percent sales tax, on “junk food” sold within the Navajo Nation.

In his opening address to Council, legislation sponsor Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahi, Whiterock) said the sales tax increase is part of an overall effort to promote healthy living and to bring awareness to the diabetes epidemic that is affecting a growing number of Navajo People.

“Each one of us here has a relative that’s diabetic and we face that fact every single day,” said Delegate Simpson.

According to the legislation, “junk food” is defined as sweetened beverages and pre-packaged and non-prepackaged snacks low in essential nutrients and high in salt, fat, and sugar including snack chips, candy, cookies, and pastries, excluding nuts, nut butters, and seeds.

The legislation also states that all of the revenue collected from the two-percent sales tax will be deposited into a Community Wellness Development Projects Fund to be administered by the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, following the development of a fund management plan.

The revenue will be used by chapters to develop wellness centers, community parks, basketball courts, walking, running and bike trails, swimming pools, community gardens, family picnic grounds, and health education classes.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) expressed skepticism, saying the sales tax increase would potentially drive consumers to purchase “junk food” off the Navajo Nation to avoid paying the tax and might end up benefitting businesses in border towns.

Despite the uncertainties expressed by Delegate Tsosie, he voted in favor of the legislation largely due to a sunset clause which was added as an amendment to the bill by the Naabik’iyátí’ Committee on November 7.

The sunset clause states that the two-percent sales tax will expire at the end of calendar year 2018, unless extended by the Navajo Nation Council.

Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) said he supports the efforts to promote healthy living and deterring the diabetes epidemic, however, he also stated that imposing the sales tax increase is a decision that should be left to Navajo People in the form of a referendum.

Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch' izhi) expressed appreciation to members of the grassroots organization known as the "Diné Community Advocacy Alliance" who worked with Delegate Simpson for two years to develop the legislation at the urging of community members.

"You have really opened the eyes of the people. You've truly opened my eyes and you've truly opened the delegates' eyes and it's starting to reach the chapters as well," Delegate BeGaye said. "You've done a good job. We need to figure out how we can all continue to work together to continue lowering the diabetes rate."

Also speaking in support of the bill, Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Navajo Mountain, Oljato, Ts'ah Bii Kin) said that public awareness needs to continue even after passage of the bill.

"People out there are talking about this and it's even international and national news," said Delegate Nez. "I see this as a step toward self-sufficiency and an exercise of our sovereignty and if we move this forward I think it will show that we are the leader of American Indian nations."

Following the passage of the Healthy Diné Nation Act, Council members also passed Legislation No. 0290-13, a separate bill also sponsored by Delegate Simpson that eliminates the current five-percent sales tax on fresh fruits and fresh vegetables.

President Shelly will have 10 calendar days to consider the bills once they are sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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