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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee opposes the legalization of marijuana in Arizona

WINDOW ROCK—During a special meeting held on Tuesday, Health, Education, and Human Services Committee members voted 3-0 to approve Legislation No. 0071-14, requesting the Navajo Nation to oppose Arizona H.B. 2558.

On Feb. 3, Arizona Rep. Ruben Gallego D-Phoenix (District 27), introduced H.B. 2558 which outlines provisions for the taxation and regulation of marijuana within the State of Arizona.

If approved, the bill would also permit individuals 21 years of age or older to consume, purchase, and transport up to an ounce of marijuana and allow individuals to grow up to five marijuana plants. However, the use of marijuana in public would remain prohibited.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said the legalization of marijuana would add to the many problems the Nation is already facing such as substance abuse and domestic violence.

“We’re not in a capacity to allow such because we already see the effects of alcohol, so legalizing marijuana is not the right path for the Navajo Nation,” Delegate Hale stated.

Also included in the legislation packet are two chapter resolutions from Oak Springs and St. Michaels chapters, which are both represented by Delegate Hale, opposing the legalization of marijuana. Both resolutions cite the harmful effects of the drug on adolescents and young adults, particularly high school and college students.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi) informed his committee colleagues that the Tó Nanees Dizi Chapter unanimously passed a similar resolution to oppose marijuana legalization on March 9, adding that the resolution will be added to Delegate Hale’s legislation in the form of an exhibit.

In his address to Tó Nanees Dizi chapter members on March 9, Delegate Butler said the Navajo Nation is a sovereign nation and should maintain its current law under Title 17 of the Navajo Nation Code which prohibits the possession of marijuana.

“This is not the way to generate money for the state. We know Arizona has no money, but this is not the way to go—regardless of the possible tax revenue the state may generate,” stated Delegate Butler in reference to supporters of H.B. 2558 who have cited tax revenues as a major upside to legalizing marijuana.

“We all know the negative effects of drugs on our children and families, and this is the last thing our community needs,” concluded Delegate Butler.

Legislation No. 0071-14 now goes to the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee for final consideration.

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