



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Budget and Finance Committee approves waste management agreement with San Juan County, New Mexico

WINDOW ROCK – On Tuesday, the Budget and Finance Committee considered Legislation No. 0103-16, which is a request to amend the Joint Powers Agreement between the Navajo Nation and San Juan County, New Mexico regarding the operation and maintenance of solid waste compactor and transfer stations within the county that services approximately 19 Navajo chapters.

According to legislation sponsor Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland), the joint agreement would allow Navajo citizens to continue utilizing waste transfer stations in the communities of Shiprock, Upper Fruitland, and Sand Springs. The transfer stations are currently managed by San Juan County, who also carries out delivery and disposal of trash at Crouch Mesa.

“Up until four years ago, the county covered all expenses associated with the transfer stations, which included staff, trash pickup and delivery, and designated dumpsites. It wasn't until revenues from the county began to decline and they reached out to the Navajo Nation for assistance, because a significant amount of Navajo citizens utilize their services,” said Speaker Bates.

Speaker Bates said that if the Navajo Nation were to completely take over the management of the transfer stations, it would cost nearly \$491,000 to acquire the facility, not including the additional funding needed annually to maintain and operate the facilities. The joint agreement would allocate approximately \$264,000 to San Juan County to continue aiding in waste management services for the surrounding Navajo communities.

He added that the funding would go towards operations, maintenance of the facilities, equipment, staffing, and trash pick up/delivery. The Navajo Nation would not assume any liability because San Juan County would continue to be responsible for all operations and insurance of the transfer stations.

BFC vice chair Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinõn, Whippoorwill) said it is very helpful when counties collaborate with Navajo chapters to aid in waste management and share costs.

“I think that it is very helpful to have communication with the counties and make these agreements. I know in Navajo County, we do not have any such agreement. I know that chapters have their own transfer stations and pay for all the costs,” said Delegate Witherspoon. “I would be interested in seeing how these types of agreements are being done by other entities.”

Delegate Witherspoon added that the Navajo Nation Solid Waste Management Program indicated that it could cost nearly \$173 million to fund waste transfer stations and landfills for Navajo chapter areas.

BFC member Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai'biit'ó, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake) questioned if chapters have budgeted funding for waste management services in their communities.

“I know my chapters do not do that, they don't budget for solid waste stations and they depend on the counties. They need to begin doing something about the trash. How can we as a Council encourage the chapters to begin land use planning and budget for waste transfer stations and management?” asked Delegate Slim.

BFC members voted 4-0 to approve the bill.

On Thursday, the Naabik'iyáti' Committee considered the legislation and approved a directive with a vote of 12-0, for Council members to attend a waste management work shop on June 14, and to begin working with the Navajo Nation Solid Waste Management Program and Navajo Nation Division of Community Development to develop a waste management plan to work with counties and look into costs associated with implementing transfer stations in each chapter.

Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Łichíí, Steamboat) said that a waste management plan would encourage cost sharing and job creation throughout the Navajo Nation.

“I would like to thank the Speaker for this legislation because this opens the doors to opportunities. It is a lot of money to take our trash off of the reservation. We always talk about job creation and about being innovative, so this could be something that can become a reality in the near future,” said Delegate Shepherd.

Naabik'iyáti' Committee members voted 11-1 to approve Legislation No. 0103-16, and serves as final authority on the bill.

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