



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council approves the reallocation of funds for fire and rescue services for Navajo communities in San Juan County, New Mexico

WINDOW ROCK – During a special session of the Navajo Nation Council held on Wednesday, Council members unanimously approved the reallocation of approximately \$417,000 within the Navajo Nation Department of Fire and Rescue Services to continue fire and rescue services for the communities of Shiprock, Newcomb, and Ojo Amarillo – located in the northern portion of the Navajo Nation within San Juan County in New Mexico.

The Navajo Nation and San Juan County entered into a Memorandum of Agreement in April, after the county requested assistance in the amount of \$832,000 to continue providing fire and rescue services to the three communities. President Russell Begaye opted to have the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety assume full control over operations of the three fire stations, which includes all related expenses and liabilities that will become recurring expenses for the Navajo Nation each year.

The MOA states that the county agrees to continue operating the three fire stations until the Navajo Nation assumes full control and in return the Nation would pay the county approximately \$67,000 a month to do so.

Legislation co-sponsor Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) on Wednesday asked for the support of his colleagues to continue providing the services for the safety and protection of people residing in the three communities.

Arbin Mitchell, chief of staff for the Office of the President and Vice President, and Department of Fire and Rescue Services chief Larry Chee have previously indicated that the Department of Fire and Rescue Services is prepared to assume full control in early October and that the funding would be used to ensure that the communities are provided services.

During Wednesday's discussion, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) said he did not agree that the funding should only benefit one area of the Navajo Nation when many other communities are in need of fire and rescue services as well. He called on the Department of Fire and Rescue Services to develop a comprehensive plan to cover the entire Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Tuchoney Slim, Jr. (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai'Bii'To, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake) said he is supportive of the legislation, while also noting that rural communities in his legislative district are also in need of fire and rescue services and questioned if Navajo Housing Authority could use their funding to construct additional fire stations in communities throughout the Navajo Nation.

The Navajo Nation was initially scheduled to assume full control of the three fire stations on Oct. 1, however, San Juan County Commissioners met on Tuesday and approved a three-day extension that will allow the county to continue operations until the conclusion of the Northern Navajo Nation Fair in Shiprock.

During the San Juan County Commissioners meeting, District 13 president Richie Nez presented a signed letter from District 13 officials opposing the transfer of fire and rescue services to the Navajo Nation, citing uncertainty over the Nation's ability to maintain current services and response times. District 13 is comprised of several chapters in the impacted service area.

"District 13 Leadership is concerned that local communities and chapters served by the 3 San Juan County, NM Fire Districts have not been provided any type of progress or status reports (Hiring, Training Personnel, & Transfer of Equipment and Property) nor has District 13 Leadership been contacted for input/recommendations by the NN and its Fire Department," the letter states.

With the approval in place, the Navajo Nation Department of Fire and Rescue Services is now scheduled to assume control of the fire stations on Oct. 4.

At the conclusion of Wednesday's discussion, the Navajo Nation Council approved Legislation No. 0285-16 with a vote of 17-0. President Russell Begaye will have ten calendar days to consider the Council resolution once it is sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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