



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council increases funding for Navajo Nation scholarships

WINDOW ROCK – On the second day of the 2018 Spring Council Session, Navajo Nation lawmakers approved Legislation No. 0445-17, which sought to allocate approximately \$1.6 million from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance to the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance, under the Department of Diné Education.

According to the legislation, the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance experienced a nearly 10-percent, or \$2 million budget cut for FY2018 from the Nation and federal funding, which resulted in about 6,400 scholarship and financial aid denials. Only 51-percent of Navajo college students were funded and 49-percent of applicants were denied.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinõn, Whippoorwill) recommended an amendment to reduce the amount of the allocation from \$1.6 million to \$1 million due to the fact that funding in the UUFB was limited and the scholarship office was able to receive additional funding from other sources.

Council members voted 19-0 to approve the amendment.

In response to the reduced allocation amount, Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) said that funding for scholarships should be increased and that there needs to be a stronger effort by the Nation to fund all scholarship and financial aid applicants.

“What’s the justification of only requesting for \$1.6 million for scholarships and financial assistance, because the Nation should be moving forward in trying to help as many Navajo students as we can. To my understanding, there is already a lot of paperwork and a lot of our young kids are denied for many purposes. On top of that, they have to fill out other applications for federal aid,” said Delegate Begay.

Delegate Begay added that there should be a recommendation to propose a revised policy to decrease denials to the oversight committee because students are trying to “survive to by supporting their families, or a lot of students get denied because their parents are working.”

In support of the legislation, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) said that the current process for students can be lengthy and there are many issues such as the loss of applications by the scholarship office and additional unnecessary paperwork.

“The students are doing their best and sometimes it is not enough funding to take care of their school costs. I assume they already applied when they first began college, so please don’t have them go through the re-application process. Just let them prove they are in school and just cut the check for them. In fact, I think in the next budget we should set aside a certain amount, and whoever at the end is denied, we would have that as a reserved fund and divide it among them,” said Delegate Tsosie.

Delegate Tsosie said the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance needs to keep track of the reasons for denials, denied applications, success rates of the students, demographics, and other data to inform the Council on the successes of the program, and how issues can be addressed during budget seasons.

The legislation states that the scholarship office will continue to pursue other funding sources including the Navajo Nation Permanent Trust Fund, and will seek matching funds of cost-share agreements with colleges and universities.

Council members voted 21-0 to pass Legislation No. 0445-17 with one amendment. President Begaye will have 10 calendar days to consider the resolution once it is delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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