



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Navajo Nation Council supports the establishment of the Navajo Veterans Housing Program



PHOTO: (left to right) Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. and Fort Defiance Agency Veterans Organization Vice Commander Ryan Sandoval present Legislation No. 0021-18 during the second day of the 2018 Summer Council Session at the Council Chamber in Window Rock, Ariz. on July 17, 2018.

WINDOW ROCK – During the second day of the 2018 Summer Council Session, the 23rd Navajo Nation Council voted in support of Legislation No. 0021-18, establishing the Navajo Veterans Housing Program within the Navajo Veterans Administration.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) said the housing program would be tasked with administering policies and procedures, which would be recommended by the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council and require the approval of the Council’s Health, Education, and Human Services Committee.

“The primary purpose of the program will be to prioritize housing needs for Navajo veterans so that we can house more and more veterans as this program develops,” said Delegate Begay. “The

program would help to streamline the process of building homes, ensure quality homes are built, and to work with states and directly with the U.S. Veterans Administration to seek additional housing benefits for Navajo veterans.”

The Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council, the Northern Agency Veterans Organization, and the Fort Defiance Agency Veterans Organization submitted supporting resolutions that were attached to the legislation as well.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsoie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) questioned how the program would be funded, especially when the Nation is anticipating a decline in revenues in the coming years.

In response, Delegate Begay said the legislation was the first step in the process and that there would be separate legislation to consider a plan of operation for the housing program and to consider funding options.

In 2013, the Council approved resolution CS-48-13 sponsored by Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), which amended the Navajo Nation Veterans Trust Fund policy to provide funding for the construction of new homes for veterans in each of Nation’s five agencies.

The veteran’s administration, under the Office of the President and Vice President, had issues that were outlined in an audit report produced by the Office of the Auditor General in 2017. The report contained eight audit findings including the lack of financial and expenditure documentation, lack of quality homes built, veteran eligibility issues, and veterans’ dissatisfaction upon receiving their completed homes.

These issues prompted Council Delegate Steven Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’a’a’) and Tohatchi Veterans Organization Commander and Fort Defiance Veterans Agency Organization Commander Olin Kieyoomia, to meet with officials from the Southwest Indian Foundation to discuss the possibility of providing pre-constructed homes for veterans on the Navajo Nation.

In December 2017, the Fort Defiance Veterans Agency Organization requested the assistance of Speaker LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland) to facilitate meetings between the foundation and Navajo Nation officials. Speaker Bates coordinated a meeting, which eventually led to the formation of the partnership and the recent signing of a contract to provide 10 new homes for Navajo veterans.

Delegate Begay said he intends for the program to build off the success of the partnership of the Nation and the Southwest Indian Foundation.

At the conclusion of Tuesday’s discussion, the Navajo Nation Council voted 19-1 to approve Legislation No. 0021-18. The President will have 10 calendar days to consider the bill once the resolution is delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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