



## The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Council passes pieces of legislation addressing health, resources, and community development for chapters

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On its first day of a two-day special session, the 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council addressed several pieces of legislation, including items that would have eliminated chapter governance and legislation approving the operation of an elderly nursing home. The Council's passage of these pieces of legislation, among others, resulted in respectful pleas and applause from constituents sitting in the stands of the gallery floor.

One of the first items the Council addressed was old business legislation sponsored by Honorable Ernest Yazzie, which would have changed "chapters" to "community centers." Mr. Yazzie said his legislation responds to how chapter governments utilize their facilities to accommodate community needs such as hosting recreational and community events instead of exercising their local governmental authority. Contrary to Mr. Yazzie's belief, the Council voted against his legislation because chapters are legitimate political subdivisions where governmental decisions are made on a vote of 58-8.

The Navajo Nation Cross-Commission Agreements Act of 2010, also sponsored by Mr. Yazzie, failed to pass the Council floor by a vote of 37-26. Most Council delegates agreed that if the legislation passed it would have infringed on Navajo Nation sovereignty. The legislation would have allowed police forces from surrounding border towns to make arrests on the Navajo Nation.

"I cannot support this legislation on behalf of sovereignty," stated Honorable Leonard Chee. "One solution to this piece of legislation is to beef up our own police department."

Under new business, the Council began action with an attempt to override Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr's veto of Resolution CO-43-10, which would have amended provisions in the Navajo Nation Election Code. However, the override legislation, sponsored by Honorable Francis Redhouse, failed to get the 59 or more votes for passage. The Council voted 42-16 in favor. Mr. Redhouse's legislation would have prohibited individuals with prior felony convictions from becoming elected officials, including the elected positions of the President, Vice President and the Navajo Nation Council.

In legislation relating to health, community development and finance, the Council approved a supplemental appropriation of \$286,000 to operate the Hoosh Dooh Dii Tó Development nursing home. The Council approved the supplemental appropriation in an effort to help provide a nursing home on the Navajo Nation for Navajo elderly. The legislation was co-sponsored by Council delegates Tom LaPahe and Raymond Joe, who both represent the communities of Tachee, Blue Gap and Whippoorwill.

"This money will start the business," said Joe, asking his fellow colleagues for support. "The elders are in need of help. They have no one to care for them. We need your help."

Phyllis Begay, a volunteer for the Hoosh Dooh Dii Tó Development, informed the Council of the need for the nursing home. "The house is very beautiful," said Begay. "It is painted and has handicap accessibility. The rooms are nice and we have no staff. I have confidence in all of you to help us. This is for our grandparents. Some are in nursing homes far away. We need to get them closer to home. Please help us in this huge way."

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In an effort to help operate the nursing home, the Council requested Controller Mark Grant to identify money and to have the Budget and Finance Committee analyze the budget once again.

"Mr. LaPahe has always supported helping our elders," added Honorable Johnny Naize. "All these years, he has been here supporting us with our pieces of legislation. Let us help him, and the elders and the future Navajo employees by passing this legislation."

Legislation sponsored by the Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan narrowly passed the Council by a vote of 33-31. Speaker Morgan sponsored legislation amending Title 26 of the Navajo Nation Code in an effort to improve the Navajo Nation Local Governance Act. The Title 26 amendments allow chapters to hire a contract chapter manager to administer and continue enhancing the Five Management System used to operate LGA certified chapters' accounting systems. Whether the chapter manager is hired through the chapter or on contract, the law requires that the employee must protect the interest of the people and abide Navajo Nation laws.

In more action, the Council passed legislation improving local governance for communities throughout the Navajo Nation by amending Title 18 of the Navajo Nation Code. With a favorable vote of 35-31, Navajo communities impacted by natural resource development now have a voice in the approval, negotiations and development of natural resources, including mineral leases, prospecting permits, and similar contractual agreements between the Navajo Nation and other entities.

For many years, various community members of impacted chapters, particularly from the Black Mesa, Ariz., region, lobbied their elected leaders for drafting the legislation.

Fern Benally, a long time representative of Black Mesa United, Inc., a non-governmental organization on the Navajo Nation, addressed the Council and said, "I have listened to you here at the Council Chamber for four years and you have helped many of our Navajo people. And on this day, local governance is what we are requesting."

"The people living where the smoke rises should approve and make decisions for their community," added Honorable Amos Johnson, who represents the communities of Black Mesa, Forest Lake and Rough Rock. "With this legislation, our local people can make the choice of conducting business. We need to give them some authority."

Honorable Leonard Tsosie (Whitehorse Lake/Pueblo Pintada/Torreon) cautioned the Council about passing the legislation because of the possible conflicts the legislation could create among chapters negotiating mineral leases and energy-related agreements.

"If we approve this, all mineral leases and energy-related agreements will cause disputes among chapters such as what chapter should be involved and which should not be," said Tsosie. "The natural resources belong to all of the Navajo people. Over half of the Navajo Nation's own income comes from minerals. We will only be webbing ourselves. My chapter did not support this legislation. The entire Eastern Navajo Agency is skeptical of this legislation."

The Council also passed legislation changing Red Rock Chapter's name to the Tsé'Lichii' Chapter, as well as denying passage of Honorable Kee Yazzie Mann's effort to enact the 88-member Council Election Referendum Act of 2010. If the legislation passed, a referendum would have gone before Navajo voters during a 2012 special election to decide whether the Navajo Nation Council should be increased to an 88-member legislative body. Mr. Yazzie Mann's legislative referendum, if it were approved by the Navajo people, would not have taken effect until January 2014.

Day two of the special session will conclude with various items including the possible removal of Attorney General Louise Denetsosie and Deputy Attorney General Harrison Tsosie. For more information, please visit [www.navajonationcouncil.org](http://www.navajonationcouncil.org).