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NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION SUMMARY

The Navajo Nation Council passed several important items during its special session held October 30 – November 1, 2006.

The Council approved emergency funding for the Department of Water Resources in the amount of \$1.5 million. The supplemental appropriation, sponsored by Willie Grayeyes (Inscription House/Navajo Mountain), will help to bring water to the remote community of Navajo Mountain, which was hit with two major disasters this year, including forest fire and heavy rainstorm.

Grayeyes said that the disasters damaged the only water shed that supplies portable water to the community's three schools, health care facility, 25-unit housing sub-division and 90 scattered homes. Currently, residents must haul water for their own needs as well as the needs of livestock. Grayeyes told the Council that funding for Phase I for water development construction has been secured. The community will now seek matching funds with the \$1.5 million allocation.

The legislation passed by a vote of 63 in favor and 2 opposed with three amendments which included appropriating \$161,440 for the Division of Community Development Solid Waste Management Program; \$161,000 for the DCD Weatherization Program; and \$50,000 for fixed cost litigation.

In a strong vote in favor of helping Navajo veterans, the Council unanimously approved setting aside funds annually to the Veterans Trust Fund, with legislation sponsored by Larry Anderson (Fort Defiance). Anderson said that the trust fund receives very little money and only the interest from the fund can be spent, which only amounts to around \$2,000 per agency.

There is very little that can be done with that money, Anderson said. In the meantime, veterans are suffering from high unemployment rates and deplorable housing conditions, among other things.

The Council went further than the annual 2 percent set-aside he was asking for when Omer Begay, Jr., (Cornfields/Greasewood Springs/Klagetoh/Wide Ruins) moved to increase the set-aside to 4 percent of projected Navajo Nation revenues with a second by Orlanda Smith Hodge (Cornfields/Greasewood Springs/Klagetoh/Wide Ruins).

The Historical Trust Asset Mismanagement Litigation Trust Fund, sponsored by Ervin Keeswood (Tse'Daa'Kaan), was established during the special session by a vote of 47 in favor and 0 opposed. The trust fund is in response to the *Cobell* litigation.

Keeswood told Council that with thousands of acres of allotted land, the Navajo Nation also had an issue with mismanagement of tribal assets. He also said that there are specific deadlines that the nation must work with in the litigation process.

Another fund, the Gaming Development Fund, sponsored by Lawrence Platero (Tohajiilee), was also established during the special session. Such a fund is needed to account for gaming revenues. The Navajo Nation receives some funds from slot machine rentals and accounting for the spending of the revenues is required by the National Indian Gaming Regulation Association. According to the law passed, the Controller of the Navajo Nation would establish policies and procedures pertaining to the fund and authorize and approve expenditures. The establishment of the fund passed by a vote of 60 in favor and 8 opposed, with one amendment.

The other legislation concerning gaming that passed was approval of a memorandum of agreement between Hogback Chapter and the Navajo Nation, sponsored by Ervin Keeswood, by a vote of 61-6. The agreement concerns revenue sharing if gaming happens in the community. The MOA is similar to the agreement between Tohajiilee Chapter and the Navajo Nation, which sets the formula for revenue sharing at 10 percent for the Chapter and 90 percent for the Nation for the first five years. Beyond that, the Chapter would receive 5 percent while the Nation would receive 95 percent.

Keeswood also sponsored legislation to change the name of Hogback Chapter to Tse'Daa'Kaan, which passed by a vote of 49-0. Keeswood noted that the name Hogback had been given to the Chapter by non-Navajos and the community wanted to change it back to its Navajo name.

Also receiving a name change during the special session was the former Crownpoint Institute of Technology, now known as Navajo Technical College. Education Committee Chairperson Wallace Charley (Shiprock) sponsored the act upon direction by the Committee, whose members saw the expansion of educational services offered by CIT and wanted its name to reflect that for future students. The Navajo Technical College Act passed by a vote of 48 in favor and 0 opposed.

Furthermore the Council approved legislation to recommend amendments to the regulations promulgated under the Federal Exposure Compensation Act by a vote of 58-0. The recommended amendments were sponsored by David Tom (Beclabito/Gadiiahi). Council also approved use of \$1,234,000 from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to purchase Counselor Trading Post Properties, with legislation sponsored by Harry Willetto (Nageezi/Ojo Encino/Counselor) by a vote of 52 in favor and 1 opposed.

Tabled at the special session were amendments to the Navajo Nation sales tax sponsored by Kee Allen Begay (Many Farms/Round Rock) to increase by 1 percent in order to benefit Judiciary and Public Safety efforts, amendments to the Eastern Navajo Agency Land Boards sponsored by Lavern Wagner (Pueblo Pintado/Torreón/Whitehorse Lake) and amendments to the Navajo Nation Election Code to clarify the qualifications provisions sponsored by Curran Hannon (Oak Springs/St. Michaels).