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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Judicial Committee Chairperson Kee Allen Begay wants the Navajo people to know about the referendum election legislation he is sponsoring during the Navajo Council Summer Session

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Judiciary Committee Chair Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Many Farms/Round Rock) wants to let the Navajo people to know that he is sponsoring a legislation that approves a supplemental appropriation for a special referendum election relating to the expenditure of the Navajo Nation Permanent Fund Principal.

The legislation no. is 0355-07.

“During the 2007 Navajo Nation Summer Session, that starts July 16, as Chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the Navajo Nation Council, I will sponsor Legislation No. 0355-07 to request from the Navajo Nation Council a supplemental appropriation in the amount of \$243,892.23 for use by the Navajo Election Administration to Conduct a Special Referendum Election,” Begay said. “If this legislation is passed, funding will be appropriated to conduct a special referendum election.”

The 21st Navajo Nation Council is scheduled to meet July 16th-20th at the Navajo Council Chamber in Window Rock, the capitol of the Navajo Nation central government.

He said, “The special Referendum election will be conducted by the Navajo Election Administration and the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors who will prepare and place on a ballot a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question for you to decide through your vote.”

The “yes” or “no” question will have language to the following: “*Shall the Navajo Nation expend \$152,976,219.00 in Navajo Nation Permanent Fund Principal for Public Safety, Judicial and Detention Facilities within the Five Agencies of the Navajo Nation?*” according to Begay. “This will be the exact wording that will be used, asking you, if you will agree or vote “yes” to expend the Permanent Fund Principal.”

The Permanent Trust Fund was established in 1985 by the Navajo Nation Council.

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The Fund is funded through the setting aside of 12 percent of any and all projected revenue of the Navajo Nation and is then invested in stocks and bonds.

Currently, the investments are an estimated \$998 million in Fund Principal, and about \$18 million in Fund Income, he said.

"If Navajo people, the voters, vote "yes" during the Referendum, then \$153 million dollars will be taken out of the Permanent Trust Fund and used to pay for long overdue replace of our courts, jails, and police facilities, which were built more than 50 years ago," Begay said. "By Navajo law, the Fund Principal may not be expended or utilized, except through a referendum adopted by a two-thirds (2/3) majority of those voting, in this case, voting "yes" in a special election open to all registered Navajo voters."

Begay explained the reasons for the Navajo people consideration in voting 'yes' include that the Judiciary Committee of the Navajo Nation Council oversees the Judicial Branch. He said this is has been one of the many avenues that the Judiciary Committee has pursued in order to bring about safe and decent facilities for the Navajo Nation Justice and Criminal systems.

Begay said, "In order to achieve the following: protection of the public's safety; protection of tribal sovereignty; provide quality service to the Navajo people and assure the public and those wishing to conduct business within our great Navajo Nation, we must have a firm dispute resolution forum through our Judicial System. Alleviate the rising crime rates on the Navajo Nation."

The sales tax increase of one (1) cent will not resolve the lack of adequate jails and courts immediately, and may prolong the issues of .crimes and the negative impacts on our society, he said.

"For these reasons, this referendum will be conducted in a very democratic process of asking you directly - the Navajo People – whether you want the use of our Permanent Trust Fund to be used in this manner for the benefit of you and the Navajo Nation," Begay said. "We can no longer, as a Navajo Nation, rely on the Federal Government; simply put; current BIA facilities is a prime example of how the Federal Government treats us as our Trustee. Closure of dilapidated BIA buildings such as BIA dormitories and related school facilities has been what we have become accustomed to. We must find the solutions from within while at the same time continue to knock on the doors of our Congressmen, Governors, Senators and others who will listen to our plight."

Begay observed that the establishment of the Permanent Fund 20 years ago, the notion was that 20 years from then, that generation was to benefit from this funding for the betterment of Navajo Nation.

"Twenty years ago, was I not part of that future generation?" Begay said. "Twenty years ago, the notion was to get an education and return to Navajo Nation to help out our Navajo People. I'm I not here doing what was expected of then young generation and help the Navajo people?"

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Begay adds that Navajo people “may hear many of our leaders’ say we should not touch the Permanent Trust Fund but let it grow to \$1 or \$2 Billion over another 20 years or so period of time.”

“Why do we have to wait another 20 years when we have tremendous needs now?” he said. “There has got to be a plan in place, a vision for our future, so that we start providing basic services to our Navajo and non-Navajo people on the Navajo Reservation. To assure them that that the Navajo people are safe and that they have adequate facilities to incarcerate offenders for their crimes committed and to provide adequate courts for our Judges, staff and the public for the adjudication of their legal affairs in cases involving civil, criminal, and peacemaking. Is the waiting of the Permanent Trust Fund to reach \$1 or \$2 Billion Dollars more valuable to us then our immediate needs?”

He said he “understands and respect those individuals who are against this supplemental appropriation to conduct a special referendum election, and they do have reasons of keeping the Permanent Trust Fund intact so that it will continue to grow.”

“I respect their position. However, I also respect a democracy that will enable you, the voter, to make the ultimate decision by voting either “yes” or “no”. After all, it’s your money,” Begay said. “In closing, be reminded, that the Navajo Nation will not have a prosperous economic development base if we do not have adequate courts throughout our great Nation and if we do not have provide adequate public safety and jails that will alleviate crimes from occurring throughout the Navajo Nation leaving some of you to be victims with no protection because there are no jails, period. Regretfully, we have had to close Chinle jails including the police station and we are doing our best to keep Tuba City jails open. With that, I appreciate your attention and I will move forward to do all that is realistically possible to continue to advocate on behalf of the Navajo Nation in this regard. Thank you.”