



Navajo Nation Council – Office of the Speaker

Contact: Jerome Clark

Phone: (928) 871-7160

Cell: (928) 637-5603

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

www.navajonationcouncil.org

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NEWS RELEASE:

Naa’bik’iyati Committee takes immediate action to respond to the needs of college students

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Naa’bik’iyati’ Committee of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council, during their January 5 meeting, took immediate action to resolve the funding issues with Navajo Nation scholarship after hearing a report from the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship & Financial Assistance (ONNSFA).

The report was provided by Maxine Damon, Senior Financial Aid Counselor for Fort Defiance Agency, and Sheila Tsosie, Senior Accountant, in which they stated that funding issues stemmed from delays from the federal government.

“Our contract ended in December 2011 and we renegotiated the contract for 2012,” Damon added. “The renegotiation is based on a timeline of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and currently we still have one more meeting to attend on January 18 and after that we should receive our funding.”

After hearing the brief report, Council Delegates were given the opportunity to comment on the situation of delayed funding for Navajo Nation college students.

Both Council Delegates Duane Tsinigine (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K’ai’Bii’To, LeChee, Tonalea/Redlake) and Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) commented that the President’s office, the scholarship office, and the Office of the Controller should have made prior arrangements to ensure that students received financial support.

Delegates also cited that this was not the first time this has occurred and asked the presenters why protocols are not in place to protect the educational endeavors of Navajo Nation college students.

"I'm going to sponsor legislation and I hope you will all sign on with me as co-sponsors so that we can do whatever is necessary. I am going to direct our Legislative Counsel and Department of Justice to treat this as an emergency item. We cannot fail our children, our students, the way

the Executive Branch has. Let's get money to our students now," stated Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta).

Speaker Johnny Naize (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) asked the Department of Justice how the situation of delayed funding was handled in the past.

"How it was handled in the past was that the Controller's Office lent the money to the scholarship office then when the BIA money came in it was replenished," Dana Bobroff, Deputy Attorney General for the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, commented. "Legislation was not required but the Controller's office should get authorization from the Budget and Finance Committee."

The Naa'bik'iyati' Committee unanimously voted to give the recommended directive to the Office of the Controller and Council Delegate Benally also decided to sponsor legislation as a safe measure to the directive given to the Office of the Controller.

A memorandum was immediately drafted to Mark Grant, Controller, which stated that "the Nabikiyati Committee of the Navajo Nation by unanimous vote made a directive to the Office of the Controller."

It further stated that Controller's office will "Advance funds in the amount of \$6,000,000 into the Office of the Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance (ONNSFA)...for scholarship funds for the 2012 Spring Term for 3000 plus Navajo college students.

"The funds are to be replenished at such time funds from the Bureau of Indian Affairs are appropriated to the Navajo Nation. Coordinate all required procedures with the ONNSFA to ensure the checks are mailed to the universities and colleges by no later than next week, Friday, January 13, 2012."

Delegate Benally's legislation was also drafted and signed yesterday and is currently available at <http://www.navajonationcouncil.org> (Tracking Number 0005-12) for the five day public comment period.

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