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Naabik'íyáti' Committee approves proposed Navajo Nation Council resolution declaring state of emergency regarding U.S. Highway 89

WINDOW ROCK – A proposed Navajo Nation Council resolution sponsored by Council Delegate Duane Tsinigine (Bodaway/Gap, Coppermine, K'ai Bii'Tó, LeChee, Tonalea/Red Lake) approving a state of emergency declaration for the Navajo Nation Western Agency due to the collapse of a portion of U.S. Highway 89 was unanimously passed by the Naabik'íyáti' Committee on Thursday with a vote of 13-0.

The legislation, which also encourages Navajo Nation departments to seek federal and state assistance to address the emergency, now moves onto the Navajo Nation Council for its consideration.

The Arizona Department of Transportation is requesting for an emergency declaration resolution before it proceeds with its reimbursement request to federal agencies for emergency funding to repair the road, said Delegate Tsinigine.

"I feel for these people that live in Marble Canyon, Bitter Springs, and Cedar Ridge to travel all the way back south to Gap, and then go back north 28 miles to get to their jobs in the City of Page and the Navajo Generating Station," said Delegate Tsinigine, also highlighting the longer commutes that Navajo students have to make in order to go to school in Page, Ariz.

While a number of Naabik'íyáti' Committee members were ready to vote for the legislation's approval, Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Navajo Mountain, Oljato, Ts'ah Bii Kin) motioned to make an amendment to the legislation, adding an additional line of language to the bill's body.

"Rather than having a 'feel good' legislation, let's put something teeth into this document," remarked Delegate Nez.

Delegate Nez's amendment directed the Navajo Division of Transportation and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to expedite all clearances necessary in preparing Navajo Route 20 for paving.

N20, a 28-mile stretch of dirt road from Bodaway/Gap to Coppermine, Ariz., is designated as an alternate route from the affected area into Page.

Additionally, the Navajo Nation urges the State of Arizona and federal agencies to release emergency funds to stabilize, repair, and reopen the damaged road portion as quickly as possible.

Furthermore, the Nation also asks officials to use emergency funding to pave the entire N20 route.

Delegate Nez's amendment recommendation was approved by a vote of 13-0.

“This legislation, with the exhibits, will declare federal emergency through the Stafford Act,” said Delegate Tsinigine. “We need to declare this as a federal emergency so we can get more funding through the federal government, through Congress.”

Currently, geotechnical work is being conducted to allow ADOT to decide if reconstruction of U.S. 89 is feasible, said NDOT director Paulson Chaco in his address to the committee.

If improvements to the damaged road are possible, it will take anywhere from six months to a year to complete the reconstruction, Chaco said.

Additionally, if the reconstruction time is expected to go beyond a year, ADOT may decide that it is necessary to reconstruct N20 for pavement.

If that is the case, it will take approximately four months for them to complete the pavement of 28-miles of N20, Chaco said.

Road surveys on N20 have already been conducted by BIA, said Delegate Tsinigine, and road construction on N20 is estimated to cost \$200 million. A substantial portion of costs involved will be reimbursed to ADOT from federal emergency funding sources.

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