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April 10, 2014

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Naabik'iyáti' Committee takes quick action on several key legislations

WINDOW ROCK—Naabik'iyáti' Committee members convened at approximately 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, and approved two key legislations including a bill which opposes the use of disparaging references to Native people in professional sports franchises and a bill seeking to override Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly's veto of a proposed "junk food tax" within the Navajo Nation.

Prior to taking legislative actions, Council Delegate Elmer Begay (Dilkon, Greasewood Springs, Indian Wells, Teesto, Whitecone) announced that the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation and Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Co. will meet on Friday at 10 a.m. in Flagstaff, Ariz.

Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) informed committee members that a public hearing will be held on Sunday in the community of Klagetoh, to address the proposed "Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act."

Additionally, Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) announced that a town hall meeting is scheduled to take place at the Steamboat Chapter House, beginning at 9 a.m. on Friday, to discuss the proposed "Navajo Rangeland Improvement Act," and an additional public hearing will take place at the Ganado Chapter House on Saturday.

Following the announcements, committee members addressed Legislation No. 0078-14, sponsored by Council Delegate Joshua Lavar Butler (Tó Nanees Dizi), which opposes the use of disparaging references to Native people in professional sports franchises was first considered and tabled by the Naabik'iyáti' Committee on March 27.

Delegate Butler has previously stated that the use of terms such as, "Red Skins" by the Washington Redskins—a professional football team of the National Football Association—promotes discrimination, racism, and ignorance toward Native Americans.

"This unfortunate practice of using such insulting names as Redskins without regard to Native people and our unique identity has to stop," stated Delegate Butler on March 27, while urging his committee colleagues to "blaze the trail" for other tribes to take a stance against disparaging references to Native people.

In addition, Delegate Butler cited the psychological ramifications of disparaging remarks on Navajo youth and provided a brief history of the term "redskins," explaining that bounties were once offered for the murder of "redskins."

“What do our youth think of themselves when they see team names and mascots that ridicule and deride our culture?” asked Delegate Butler. “This becomes a roadblock preventing them from achieving success, and being secure in their identity as a Native person, as Diné”

The Naabik’iyátí’ Committee, which serves as the final for Legislation No. 0078-14, approved the bill with a vote of nine supporting and two opposing.

Following the passage of Delegate Butler’s legislation, Naabik’iyátí’ Committee members also approved Legislation No. 0083-14, which seeks to override President Shelly’s veto of Council Resolution CJA-04-14.

Resolution CJA-04-14, the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2013 which was sponsored by Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahi, Whiterock) sought to impose a two-percent sales tax, in addition to the Navajo Nation’s current five-percent sales tax, on “junk food” sold within the Navajo Nation.

Council approved the legislation during its Winter Session held in January. However, President Shelly vetoed the resolution, citing a “lack of regulatory provisions” as it relates to overseeing the collection of the sales tax among other issues, addressed in a memo dated Feb. 12.

The override legislation is sponsored by Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels).

According to the legislation, “junk food” is defined as sweetened beverages and pre-packaged and non-prepackaged snacks low in essential nutrients and high in salt, fat, and sugar including snack chips, candy, cookies, and pastries.

The tax revenue generated would be allocated for use by chapters to develop wellness centers, community parks, basketball courts, walking, running and bike trails, swimming pools, community gardens, family picnic grounds, and health education classes.

Naabik’iyátí’ Committee voted 8-3 on Thursday to approve the legislation, which now proceeds to the Navajo Nation Council for final consideration. The bill will require two-thirds approval, or 16 supporting votes, to override President Shelly’s veto.

The Naabik’iyátí’ Committee members adjourned at approximately 2 p.m.

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