



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Naabik'íyáti' Committee confirms the appointment of Seraphina A. Nez to the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission

TSE BONITO, N.M. – Last Thursday, the Naabik'íyáti' Committee approved Legislation No. 0016-17, which confirmed Seraphina A. Nez to the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission, a seven-member board that represents six regions and one at-large community representative to represent communities affected by past uranium mining.

According to the legislation, the purpose of the advisory commission is to study the impacts of past uranium mining and uranium processing on the Navajo Nation. They are also tasked with proposing amendments to policies, laws, and regulations, if needed, to address the mining impacts within Navajo communities to the Navajo Nation President and Council.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) informed committee members that the Central Navajo Agency Council and Tachee/Blue Gap Chapter supported the appointment of Nez to the commission through resolution from both entities.

“Ms. Nez has the support of her community and the Central Navajo Agency, and they feel she is the right person for this position. She has a vast knowledge of uranium issues and has experienced the impacts of it herself, as well as her family,” said Delegate Begay.

Delegate Begay added that she also served as a spokesperson for the Tachee Uranium Concerns Committee, a grassroots community organization that was founded by Nez's mother Helen Nez. Nez's family have been outspoken regarding the impacts of uranium mining and have continually served as advocates on behalf of affected communities, said Delegate Begay.

Nez is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and is originally from the community of Tachee/Blue Gap. She will serve as a commission member representing the Central Navajo Agency.

Council Delelgate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) asked Nez how she would promote balance on the commission in terms of developing reports and recommendations.

“The reason why I ask the question is because if the commission is all one-sided, then their advice could be construed as bias. When the commission is staffed with all anti-uranium people, then the report to me means nothing because you are one-sided. I hope that there is a balanced view so it can encourage a good discussion and a good debate,” said Delegate Tsosie.

Delegate Tsosie also suggested that the commission consult with communities regarding uranium issues because some allottees may rely on revenues stemming from natural resources and should be included in the discussion when making recommendations.

Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahí, Whiterock) said when the commission was developed, it was created to address the impacts of uranium mining and how the contaminated areas have affected Navajo people, as well as remediating old mining sites.

“They wanted to provide recommendations on how uranium has impacted areas from the oldest community member to its youngest child. They not only participated in the discussion, they participated in the research,” said Delegate Perry. “No matter what area of the Navajo Nation you are from, contamination does not know jurisdiction—it travels by water, land, dust, [and] wind.”

Delegate Perry said he supports the appointment of Nez and recommended that if she is confirmed, the commission will need to begin prioritizing their tasks to remediate areas. He added that the commission serves as a voice for the Navajo citizens affected by uranium mining and should continue to work for their best interest.

Naabik’íyáti’ Committee members voted 16-0 to confirm the appointment of Seraphina A. Nez to the Diné Uranium Remediation Advisory Commission. The committee serves as the final authority on the bill.

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