23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 20, 2017

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Navajo Nation Council approves funds for summer youth employment, urges President to approve funding

WINDOW ROCK – During a special session held on Monday, the Navajo Nation Council approved two separate legislations that would allocate a combined total of over $3.6 million to provide Navajo high school and college students the opportunity to gain work experience while earning funds to use for tuition, school supplies, and other expenses, if the resolution is signed and approved by President Russell Begaye.

Council members voted to approved Legislation No. 0166-17, sponsored by Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels), which provides $1.4 million for the Office of Diné Youth to hire students in each of the five agencies. The Council approved the legislation by a vote of 18-3. If the president signs and approves the resolution, the $1.4 million would be distributed to each agency office as follows:

$203,000 - Chinle Office of Diné Youth
$394,800 - Crownpoint Office of Diné Youth
$330,400 - Fort Defiance Office of Diné Youth
$242,200 - Shiprock Office of Diné Youth
$229,600 - Tuba City Office of Diné Youth

When the legislation was considered by the Naabik'íyáti' Committee on June 8, Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) stated that while he supports the efforts of the Office of Diné Youth, he believes there should be stronger outreach and efforts from ODY to hire youth that reside in very rural communities.

To address his concern, at the start of Monday's special session Delegate Damon introduced Legislation No. 0219-17, an emergency bill that seeks the approval of nearly $2.2 million for the Navajo Nation's 110 chapters.

Under the terms of the legislation, each chapter could receive up to $35,000 based on the chapter's current available balance for summer youth employment. Any chapter with $35,000 or more in their youth employment fund, would not be eligible to receive more funding and any chapter with a negative balance would only receive up to $35,000. According to Delegate Damon,

the funding would allow chapters to hire as many as 50 students during the summer, depending on each chapter's current available funding for summer youth employment.

Information provided by the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, which oversees the Nation's 110 chapters, shows that a majority of chapters have summer youth employment funding available while several other chapters have a zero or negative balance.

Prior to voting on the legislation, the Council approved an amendment stating that the supplement funds shall not be distributed until a chapter's current balance for summer youth employment is depleted, and requiring chapters with a negative balance to bring their account current in order to receive the supplement funding. The Council voted 12-9 in support of the amendment.

If the president signs and approves the resolution, the approximate total of $2.2 million would be distributed to each agency as follows:

$341,000 - Chinle Agency
$563,000 - Eastern Agency
$561,000 - Fort Defiance Agency
$292,000 - Northern Agency
$405,000 - Western Agency

The resolution also directs the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of the Controller, and the Division of Community Development to update the chapter summer youth employment fund balances within seven calendar days, if signed and approved by the president.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Council approved Legislation No. 0219-17 with a vote of 17-4. President Begaye will have 10 calendar days to consider the two resolutions once they are delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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