Naaʼbikʼiyati Committee holds work session

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Naaʼbikʼiyati Committee of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council held a work session on December 16 and received three reports during their session.

The Committee received reports from Eric Borasky (Snowbowl Owner); Vice President Rex Lee Jim and staff members from the Navajo Division of Health; and Ron Duncan (Interim Director of Navajo Head Start), Dawn A. Yazzie (Executive Office Director), and Cheri Espinosa (Attorney for Department of Justice).

Borasky included in his presentation graphical information indicating the dependent relationship between snowfall and skier visits to the Snowbowl Ski Facility from 1981 to 2011 and it also included information on potential job creation if snowmaking were implemented.

But Borasky’s main objective was to seek the support of the Navajo Nation in soliciting the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and the Department of Agriculture in order to change Snowbowl’s current permit to use reclaimed water for snowmaking to also include groundwater.

Borasky stated, “The reason for being here today is to give you information and to respectfully request that the Navajo Nation consider assisting us with changing the source of water from reclaimed water in Flagstaff to natural groundwater coming from deep wells in Fort Valley."

After Borasky’s report, Council Delegates were given the opportunity to comment on the use of groundwater for snowmaking.

"I think we will still see some division internally within our Navajo Nation but I think the main issue was the use of reclaimed water and the desecration,” commented Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie. “It raised the ire of Native peoples and Navajo people. It would have been nice if we had talked a long time ago.”

Council Delegate Katherine Benally stated that "It doesn’t matter when this started and who started this and the fact that it is still there does not make it right. It was wrong then and it is
still wrong today. However, it is just the mere fact that it is the dominant society marching on with what they call progress and what we, Native Americans, call greed.

“To us Navajo Women, that is a very sacred mountain. Not only is it our mother but it is also where our mother resides. For me, that is why I don’t agree with it but what are we to do? Talking with each other and making decisions mutually maybe the only way to go."

Council Delegate Tsosie added, "I don't respect the U.S. Supreme Court decision. I think they are wrong when it comes to our religious use and the well being of Navajo people. I think it would go a long way if you made the comment that you were wrong."

Currently, Council Delegate Walter Phelps is sponsoring legislation (0420-11) to support the use of groundwater for snowmaking on San Francisco Peaks that will be coming before Naa’Bik’iyati later this week. The legislation also came before Resources & Development Committee where it failed to pass.

Vice President Rex Lee Jim and the staff of Navajo Division of Health presented on their initiative to change from a division to a department.

"The Navajo Division of Health would like to become the Navajo Department of Public Health,” Vice President Rex Lee Jim commented. “We have met and talked about this initiative extensively and that is what we would like to report to you because it is important for us, Diné people, to start taking care of ourselves again."

According to handouts, “NDOH proposes to elevate functions, responsibilities and services to become a state-like health department and establish the Navajo Nation Department of Health (NN DOH) through a Title 2 enabling legislation amendment 2012.”

Council Delegates were given the opportunity to offer comments and recommendations to the presenters on their initiative.

“Your proposed changes are interesting but I was sitting here thinking, is this the solution? I don't think it is. I think the Navajo Division of Health needs to complete a self evaluation to determine what the solution is," commented Council Delegate Tsosie.

"I am in full support of this plan because it will allow some regulation to happen on the Navajo Nation," stated Council Delegate Benally.

“I envision the public health as an agency that can facilitate as a regulatory role and I appreciate the significance and need for that," Council Delegate Walter Phelps commented. “But, I would also like to hear about where the funding is coming from to support all the changes that will be taking place.”
Council Delegate Mel R. Begay stated that "As a nation, we need to take a good look at what our health department is trying to provide and what they are currently seeking. I think we should give them the opportunity to make those changes.”

The final report received by the Committee was an update on the status of Head Start, which included information about the possible termination of the grant, funding, and rebuilding the program.

Dawn A. Yazzie reported that in April 2010 a Triennial Federal Review identified “11 deficiencies and 18 non-compliances.”

Two deficiencies were eventually corrected but “reviews found that some of the deficiencies and non-compliance appeared to be not correct,” which is problematic because “when head start programs do not correct deficiencies and non-compliance issues, the program grant is terminated.”

Although the Navajo Nation was verbally informed about the uncorrected deficiencies and non-compliance, the Nation still has not received a final written report.

Cheri Espinosa, the attorney from Department of Justice, requested the Committee to enter into an executive session in order to protect information in ongoing appeals.

The next Naab’ik’iyati Committee Meeting will take place on Thursday, December 22, 2011 at 10:00 AM in the Navajo Nation Council Chambers. The agenda for the meeting will be available later this week at http://www.navajonationcouncil.org.

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