



The 21st Navajo Nation Council

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Council ends day four with passage of Hotel Occupancy Tax Amendments Act of 2010, approves Wind Energy Project at Gray Mountain

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On day four, the 21st Navajo Nation Council passed the Hotel Occupancy Tax Amendments Act of 2010, the approval of a Wind Energy Project on Gray Mountain and the confirmation of William J. Platero as a permanent District Court Judge.

On a unanimous vote, the Council passed the Hotel Occupancy Tax Amendments Act of 2010 in an effort to provide credits for taxes paid at a nondiscriminatory hotel occupancy tax imposed by townships or local government subunits of the Navajo Nation.

Sponsor Bobby Robbins said the hotel occupancy tax credits would help with the tourism industry and provide essential government services to the Toh Nanees Dizi Chapter. "People from various places come to Toh Nanees Dizi Chapter to experience the culture, the natural beauty, the dinosaur tracks and various other wonders in this region," added Robbins.

In another unanimous vote, the Council approved lease negotiations between the Navajo Nation, Sempra Generation and International Piping Products, Inc., for a Wind Energy Project at Gray Mountain in Cameron Chapter. The 500 megawatt Wind Energy Project at Gray Mountain is a grassroots effort led by the community members of the Cameron Chapter.

"This matter has been under discussion and in planning for three years now," said Bobby Robbins, a cosponsor to the legislation. "My agent, Sempra, has been working with the Cameron Chapter quite some time. Jack Colorado, Raymond Maxx and I began working with Cameron and as you know the people of Cameron support this legislation."

According to the lease negotiations, Sempra Generation will fund 100 percent of the \$1.25 billion Wind Energy Project with construction completed by 2013. The project would create more than 400 construction jobs and 30 permanent jobs for Cameron Chapter and the Navajo Nation. The Wind Energy Project would generate lease revenue of \$1.3 million per year for Cameron Chapter and \$3.7 million per year for the Navajo Nation for 20 years.

Mitch Dmohowski, director for Commercial Development at Sempra Generation, said working with Cameron Chapter has been a community based initiative that will create much needed jobs and a sense of pride for the community.

"I support this project and let me tell you why," added Amos Johnson, "The Navajo Nation has a coal mine, for example and we give up tons of coal for pennies. What do we get back from our coal? We waived our sovereignty, water and tax money and here we are talking about wind that does not take anything like coal. I would like to commend the chapter for taking this initiative forward."

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Opponents of the legislation disagreed with the notion that Sempra will have 80 percent ownership of the facility, and the Navajo Nation 20 percent and preferred Cameron to go with NTUA because the Navajo Nation would have 51 percent ownership like the wind project at Big Boquillas Ranch.

The Council also confirmed the permanent appointment of Honorable William J. Platero as a Navajo Nation District Court Judge and voted 53-5 to amend Title 11 of the Navajo Nation Code, making the conviction of a felony a disqualifying offense for candidates running for public office in the Navajo Nation.

In addition, the Council voted favorably on a proposal to amend Resolution CS-37-10, the continuing resolution that currently operates the Navajo Nation government at 90 percent of the FY 2010 Budget for six months of FY 2011. Despite the favorable vote, the proposal fell short of the 59 votes needed for passage, 41-21.

Instead of keeping the continuing resolution at 90 percent of the FY 2010 Budget for six months, Young Jeff Tom sponsored legislation to make up the 10 percent difference, essentially changing the 90 percent to 100 percent, in an effort to eliminate confusion at the chapter level from funding sources, he said, are available.

Tom, who lobbied his colleagues to adopt Resolution CS-37-10 during the Council's 2011 Budget Session, said much needed services at the chapter level have been grounded, which has disrupted the operation of chapter governments. He also said these amendments would restore stipends of chapter officials to \$500, instead of the \$250 they receive under the continuing resolution.

"Chapters have stopped paying insurance for their tribal vehicles and senior citizen vans because there is still confusion about the continuing resolution," added Tom. "The amendments to the continuing resolution would address these discrepancies experienced at the chapter level and provide food for grandmas and grandpas."

Critics such as Lorenzo C. Bates and Leonard Chee, who are members of the Budget and Finance Committee, said the adoption of Tom's proposal would put the Navajo Nation in deficit by an additional \$40 million. Currently, the Navajo Nation is in a budget deficit of over \$27 million.

"The continuing resolution, even if we delete the 90 percent, will not accomplish the restoration Mr. Tom is proposing," Chee said. "If we had adopted the original budget recommendation from the Budget and Finance Committee, we were still headed to cuts and services anyway, just like every other entity. The adoption of the legislation will not solve that problem; we would only be creating more of a deficit."

Katherine Benally, who voted in favor of the legislation, issued a directive after the main motion to have vans and tribal vehicles ungrounded with the assistance of the Navajo Division of Finance, who processes payments for insurance on tribal vehicles.

Tomorrow, the Council will reconvene to address two supplemental appropriations that were tabled earlier in the week. For more information, please contact www.navajonationcouncil.org.

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