



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

## 25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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### **25th Navajo Nation Council approves amendment to oil and gas lease in Red Mesa Chapter, raises concerns for impacted communities**



**Council Delegate Rickie Nez and NNOGC CEO John A. Brooks presented Legislation 0027-24, adding additional acreage to an oil and gas lease in Red Mesa Chapter.**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – On Tuesday, the 25th Navajo Nation Council approved Legislation 0227-24, amending a 1953 Bureau of Indian Affairs oil and gas lease by adding an additional 80 acres to the lease that had previously been relinquished back to the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Rickie Nez (T'iistoh Sikaad, Nenahnezad, Upper Fruitland, Tse' Daa' Kaan, Newcomb, San Juan), sponsor of the legislation, along with his agent, Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company (NNOGC) President and CEO John A. Brooks, explained that the additional 80 acres would meet well spacing requirements and allow lessees to drill an additional well. Council Delegate Nez and CEO Brooks were also joined in their presentation by Navajo Minerals Department Manager Rowena Cheromiah.

The presenters highlighted that since 1957, more than 1.14 million barrels of oil have been produced from the leased lands, generating royalty payments to the Navajo Nation over the past several decades.

Several council delegates raised concerns about the intent of the amendment, calling for additional reports from the Navajo Minerals Department. These reports would include environmental assessments, impact studies, feasibility studies, and a community benefit plan from NNOGC regarding the added acreage.

The additional acreage is located in the Red Mesa Chapter, in San Juan County, Utah.

“Companies continue to impact Navajo communities without providing direct benefits to them,” said Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse’alnozt’i’i, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To’Koi). “I’d like to request a copy of the community benefits plan that NNOGC is proposing for the impacted communities.”

Council Delegate Curtis Yanito (Mexican Water, To’likan, Teenospos, Aneth, Red Mesa), whose constituents will be affected by the lease amendment, emphasized that he has repeatedly requested public hearings in all five of his chapters. Yanito also called for protection of spring water wells.

“Navajo-Utah residents are concerned about the issues presented today,” Yanito said. “The presenters mentioned a public outreach meeting in Red Mesa Chapter, but that meeting occurred years ago. Public outreach has not taken place in all five of my chapters.”

Regarding the outreach in Red Mesa Chapter, Council Delegate Germaine Simonson (Hard Rock, Forest Lake, Pinon, Black Mesa, Whippoorwill), who hails from Black Mesa, a region heavily impacted by coal extraction, questioned the manner in which NNOGC obtained chapter approval.

“On the flyer you shared, it shows you were giving out pellets and propane at your public outreach meeting,” she said. “That appears to be bribery to gain people’s approval.”

Delegates also inquired about the royalty payments that would be generated specifically from the additional acreage approved in the amendment.

“Although this legislation has been discussed at the community level and in committee, there are still too many unknowns that should have been addressed in this presentation,” Council Delegate Crotty remarked. “We need to see a proposed community benefit plan for the impacted community.”

The 25th Navajo Nation Council voted 14 in favor and seven opposed to approve Legislation 0227-24. Once certified and delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren will have up to ten calendar days to consider the resolution.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council adjourned its 2025 Winter Session on Tuesday, Jan. 28.

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