

Council to help youth, veterans

Written by Staff Report

Friday, 25 September 2015 07:11

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Navajo Nation Council approved the 2016 budget. Following seven hours of debate concerning the many needs of the Navajo people, the Navajo Nation Council voted to approve the Nation's Fiscal Year Comprehensive Budget on Sept. 22.

The budget required two-thirds approval, or 16 supporting votes, to pass. Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), asked his colleagues to support the budget as opposed to considering a continuing resolution.

According to the legislation, the overall operating budget totals approximately \$620 million, including \$556 million for the executive branch, \$16 million for the legislative branch, and \$15 million for the judicial branch.

If signed into law, the budget will also allow each of the Nation's three branches of government to carryover unexpended funds from the current fiscal year to next year's budget to fulfill unmet needs – \$2.5 million for executive, \$1 million for legislative, and \$500,000 judicial.

The majority of Tuesday's discussion centered on the approval of seven amendments including one proposed by Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels), to carryover approximately \$215,000 from the current year's legislative budget to fund the creation of a Navajo Nation Youth Council to represent each of the Nation's five agencies.

The Council also unanimously approved an amendment by Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé alnaáoz't'l'í), to allow the Navajo Department of Veterans Affairs to carryover approximately \$538,000 to fund water/waste lines and power line projects for Navajo veterans.

Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill) sponsored an amendment to allow the carryover of approximately \$350,000 for the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources for repairs to include windmills and water wells on the Navajo Nation, including those in Navajo Partitioned Lands.

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Council also approved an amendment proposed by Council Delegate Nelson S. Begaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaiile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch' izhi) to reallocate approximately

\$51,000 from the legislative budget to be distributed evenly among the five chapters he represents to seek grant writers to benefit the communities.

The three remaining amendments include the approval of carryovers for various amounts for the Navajo Board of Election Supervisors, Office of Background Investigations, General Leasing Office, and the Office of Ethics and Rules.

Also included were several carryovers that were previously approved during budget hearings including \$100,000 for the Judicial Conduct Commission, \$670,000 for Facilities Maintenance, \$100,000 for Karigan Professional Office, and \$2 million for the Tourism Department.

Moments before voting on the budget, several Council members expressed support and opposition to the budget, including Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake), who urged his colleagues to vote against the legislation and to approve a continuing resolution to allow the Council additional time to redo the budget to "truly meet the needs of the Navajo people."

Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) urged his colleagues to support the budget to allow the government to work together to address the needs of the Navajo people.

Prior to Tuesday's debates among Council members, President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez also requested the support of the budget through a video message and written statement addressed to Council.

Upon the finalization of the Council's resolution, the budget will then be sent to the Office of the President and Vice President for consideration.

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