

Navajo Nation Council overrides Begaye veto

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 05 January 2018 08:36



WINDOW ROCK – With a vote of 22-0, the 23rd Navajo Nation Council unanimously supported an override of President Russell Begaye’s veto of the Navajo Nation Veterans Trust Fund Income Act, during a special session held on Dec. 22. The Council approved the Veterans Trust Fund Income Act during the Fall Council Session in October. Begaye subsequently vetoed the resolution on Nov. 6, which is subject to override pursuant to Title II of the Navajo Nation Code.

Council Delegate Tom Chee (Shiprock), who sponsored the override legislation as well as the legislation approved by the Council in October, has previously explained that the intent of the bill is to clarify specific definitions within the Navajo Nation Code that guide the administration of funds that are held in the Veterans Trust Fund to provide more dollars for direct services for Navajo veterans.

Chee also noted that the language contained in the legislation resulted from numerous meetings and discussion held over several months with veterans groups and organizations, the Department of Justice, and the Office of the Controller.

“I thank the veterans for their support and I also thank my colleagues for supporting the veterans with their votes today,” Chee said. “The overall goal in this process is to increase annual funding to provide direct services for Navajo veterans.”

Many veterans were seated in the gallery of the Council Chamber on Friday, to show their support for the override of the president’s veto. Various veteran’s organizations have passed resolutions supporting the override including the Navajo Nation Veterans Advisory Council, Northern Navajo Agency Council, Western Navajo Veterans Organization, Northern Agency Veterans Organization, Shiprock Chapter Veterans Organization, and others.

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Furthermore, Chee emphasized that the legislation does not “cease” funding for the veterans housing program, nor does it diminish the growth of the Veterans Trust Fund principal.

According to an analysis provided by the Office of Legislative Counsel, the president’s veto memorandum dated Nov. 6, misquoted and incorrectly presented the new language approved by the Council by negating the word “income,” which changes and mischaracterizes the application of the amended language.

“When the word ‘income’ is correctly included, the president’s argument that the ‘amendment directs the entire 4% to now be appropriated into the Trust Fund income’ fails. The amendment does not co-mingle the separate set-asides to the Veterans Trust Fund and to the Housing Program for Veterans. The amendment, in fact, only changes the character of the annual set-aside to the Trust Fund and does not affect the Housing Program for Veterans’ annual appropriation, i.e., set-aside, at all,” states the analysis from the OLC.

Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) has also introduced Legislation No. 0191-17, a separate bill that would increase the annual set-aside from four-percent of the Nation’s annual revenues to 10 percent. He previously stated that the bill will maintain an investment into the principal of the Veterans Trust Fund and increase the amount of annual funds that provide direct services to veterans.

The Navajo Nation Council approved Legislation No. 0466-17 with a vote of 22-0 and serves as the final authority for the bill.

Staff Reports