

‘Air is Life Act’ passed by Navajo Nation Council

Written by Staff Reports

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Bill lauded by health advocates

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council passed Legislation No. 0174-21 by a vote of 20 in favor and 3 opposed, which enacts the Nítch' éí Bee Ííńá - Air is Life Act of 2021, Oct. 19.

The bill prohibits the use of commercial tobacco products in enclosed, indoor workplaces or public places, and within 25 feet of any indoor area across the Navajo Nation.

“The Air is Life Act is important to the livelihood of our families. Now more than ever, we need to protect the quality of our sacred, life-giving force, our air,” said Delegate Carl Slater (Round Rock, Rock Point, Tséché'izí, Lukachukai, Tsaile-Wheatfields). “This legislation is more important than profit. It is about protecting the lives of our casino workers, our tribal employees, and our loved ones from the harm of smoking commercial tobacco.”

The Air is Life Coalition has been working for the last 13 years to educate the public on the dangers of secondhand smoke and to organize communities behind a comprehensive smoke-free bill.

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“The long hard lobbying efforts of the Air is Life Coalition are to be commended,” said Chairman Daniel Tso (Littlewater, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake, Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Ojo Encino, Counselor). “The perseverance of Dr. Patricia Nez-Henderson and her team deserves recognition. I am honored to have been asked to sponsor this historic legislation. The Council has spoken that the health of the Navajo people is valuable and not to be gambled with.”

Dr. Patricia Nez-Henderson, an original coalition founder and current vice president of the Black Hills Center for American Indian health, continues to share her concern for the lives of Navajo youth actively smoking in higher numbers today.

“The health of our people is important to our future,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh). “Health studies and the data show us that you live a shorter life with every cigarette you light or secondhand smoke you inhale. This legislation ensures we end it in our public places and tribal office buildings for the safety of all.”

Upon certification by Speaker Seth Damon, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez has 10 days to either veto or approve the resolution.

“Níłch' éí Bee Ííńá represents the oxygen we breathe to live and exist everyday,” said Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chííłchinbii'tó). “We need to protect our people at all costs and this includes our hard working staff employed by the casinos. We all know the health risks from commercial tobacco, including deadly cancers. Life is sacred and this legislation sends that message.”

Heath, Education, and Human Services Committee (Chairman Daniel Tso is the bill sponsor, with Speaker Seth Damon, Delegate Carl Slater, and Delegate Nathaniel Brown as co-sponsors.

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