



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Naabik'íyáti' Committee demands accountability from newly confirmed NHA board members



Photos: Newly appointed Navajo Housing Authority Board of Commission members (from left to right) Sean McCabe, Derrith Watchman-Moore, and Kris Beecher, who were confirmed on May 25, 2017 by the Naabik'íyáti' Committee.

WINDOW ROCK – On Thursday, the Naabik'íyáti' Committee confirmed Sean McCabe, Derrith Watchmore-Moore, and Kris Beecher to serve on the Navajo Housing Authority Board of Commissioners, each serving in specific roles to address the housing needs of the Navajo Nation. The new board members fill three of the current five positions on the board.

Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahí, Whiterock) who sponsored the three confirmation legislations, said the newly appointed board members were vetted by the Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker, Office of the President and Vice President, and Resources and Development Committee designee Council Delegate Benjamin Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill).

According to the legislations, McCabe would fulfill his roll in contributing financial management knowledge through his Certified Public Accountant experience, Watchman-Moore would contribute knowledge regarding business management, and Beecher would fulfill the role of the tenant and homebuyer representative.

Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) commended the selection of the appointed board members, however he

raised concerns regarding the conditions of home structures within the area of the five chapters he represents.

“The federal government gave a lot of funding to our Nation, yet we still have an overwhelming amount of Navajo people that do not have homes. What struck me in supporting the decision to appoint new board members is that many of our Navajo people are living in storage houses and we need to make the necessary changes to stop that,” said Delegate Begay. “They deserve adequate houses, not sheds.”

Delegate Begay provided a letter to the three board members that included chapter resolutions and housing assessments, and said he looks forward to working with the NHA Board of Commissioners to begin constructing and properly rehabilitating housing within his communities, as well as throughout the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi’i’áhi/To’Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz’t’l’í) expressed her appreciation to the new board members for pursuing and accepting the positions as commissioners, and stressed the need for improved accountability within the NHA.

“Your experience is what we are looking for, so how we can change the needs of NHA for the Navajo people? There is minimal conversation within that department and there are amazing people at NHA that work hard to push projects forward, but it’s the people at the top. They are being compensated, but they have to be responsible and accountable to the community needs,” said Delegate Crotty.

Delegate Crotty said that Navajo Technical University is in the process of constructing homes for Navajo families, and that younger Navajo citizens have expressed that they want homes built for their grandparents. She added that the board must always keep youth and elders at the forefront of their planning when constructing houses, and be placed at the top of NHA’s priority list.

In agreement, Council Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizí) stated that the issues with the upper management of the NHA needs to be addressed immediately.

“The board needs to revamp the upper management. If you don’t revamp the upper management, then the same problems are going to happen. They will be telling you what to do and no changes will be made,” said Delegate Tso. “We need to show the federal government that their dollars are building homes and that we are doing what we said we would do.”

Delegate Tso added that the former Bennett Freeze area should be listed as a priority because many homes have been rehabilitated by the owners many times over the years, and now there is not much more they can do to save their dilapidated homes.

Karis Begaye, legal counsel to the Office of the President and Vice President, stated that the Office of the Auditor General would conduct a forensic audit on the NHA in response to concerns over financial activities.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Speaker of the 23rd Navajo Nation Council LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, T'iis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) informed his colleagues that the NHA board would be invited back to provide a report to Council to explain their strategy to make changes within NHA and how they would begin approaching the housing issues on the Navajo Nation.

Naabik'íyáti' Committee members voted unanimously in-favor to confirm the three commissioners, and serves as the final authority on the bill. The remaining two board positions will be filled at a later date when legislations are introduced.

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