



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Council confirms directors for Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency and Division of Transportation

WINDOW ROCK – Last Wednesday, the Navajo Nation Council confirmed Dr. Donald D. Benn as the director of the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency and Garret Silversmith as the director of the Navajo Nation Division of Transportation.

Legislation No. 0244-15, sponsored by Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat), confirmed Benn as director of the NNEPA, who was appointed by President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez in May 2015.

Benn is originally from Lukachukai, Arizona. He is Tsi'naajinii (Black Streak Wood People) and is born for Dzitł'ahnii (Mountain Cove Clan). His maternal grandfather is Tábaqhá (Waters Edge Clan) and his paternal grandfather is Bit'ahnii (Folded Arms People).

Benn received his Bachelor of Arts in Chemistry from the University of New Mexico, Master of Science in Chemistry from New Mexico State University, and Doctorate of Philosophy in Chemistry, also at NMSU.

During the discussion, Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) raised concerns regarding the Gold King Mine Spill that affected public and private agricultural and ranching operations in the northern part of the Navajo Nation.

“It really bothered me how you were handling the Gold King Mine Spill, along with others such as the [Navajo Nation] Attorney General and the President,” said Delegate Tsosie. “What we found out was that the testing company that was testing results for the Navajo Nation is the same testing company providing results to the U.S. EPA. I think you need to be honest with us on those things.”

Delegate Tsosie added that the state of Colorado had over 400 mines, and suggested that Dr. Benn's office develop an emergency response plan in case another mine spill occurs that could affect the Nation.

Benn responded to Delegate Tsosie's concerns and said he has visited many communities that were impacted by the spill, and provided as many updates and information to the farmers and

ranchers, while continuing to remind the U.S. EPA of its responsibility to the Nation to provide solutions and resources. He added that he would increase efforts to provide updates to Council regarding the spill and other environmental issues on the Navajo Nation.

Council Delegate Nelson S. BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch' izhi) commended Benn on his collaboration with the Lukachukai Chapter on a recent water initiative.

"He has really helped our chapter there. He has helped me with proposals to the U.S. EPA to get water services to thousands of homes – this was under his leadership and I want to thank him for that," said Delegate Begaye.

Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Piñon, Whippoorwill) said he had initiated legislation to direct NNEPA to begin developing aquifer protection laws. Benn responded that he had set a timeline for March to begin sending out public notices and to reclassify aquifers after evaluating them.

Following the discussion, Council voted 14-3 to confirm Dr. Benn as the director of the NNEPA.

Legislation No. 0369-15, sponsored by Council Delegate Benjamin Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill), confirmed Garret Silversmith as the director for the Navajo Nation Division of Transportation, who was also appointed by President Begaye and Vice President Nez.

Silversmith is originally from Fuzzy Mountain, New Mexico, located approximately 12 miles north of Fort Defiance, Arizona. He is Táchii'nii (Red Running into the Water Clan) and is born for 'Áshjǫ́hí (Salt People). His maternal grandfather is Tódíh'í'nii (Bitter Water Clan) and his paternal grandfather is Honágháahnii (One Walks Around Clan). He currently resides in Keams Canyon, Arizona.

Silversmith received his Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering in 1993 from New Mexico State University. He is married and has three daughters.

Council immediately voted 14-1 to confirm Garret Silversmith as the director for the NNDOT.

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