



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 1, 2016

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Navajo Nation Council approves referendum measure to support the Navajo Nation Transportation Stimulus Plan

WINDOW ROCK – Last Thursday during a Council Special Session, the 23rd Navajo Nation Council approved Legislation No. 0354-16, which seeks to refer a referendum measure to Navajo citizens regarding the proposed expenditure of a portion of the Navajo Nation Permanent Trust Fund principal balance to support a Transportation Stimulus Plan, which could potentially be on the upcoming Navajo Nation election ballot on Nov. 8.

According to the legislation, a referendum question would be posed to Navajo citizens as to whether the fund principal of the PTF in the amount of approximately \$216 million over the span of six years at \$36 million per year, should be utilized towards supporting the stimulus plan. To access the PTF fund principal, a referendum measure is required to seek the approval of Navajo citizens.

If the legislation were approved and signed into law by President Russell Begay, the referendum measure would require two-thirds majority vote of registered Navajo voters for the stimulus plan to be implemented, as stated in the legislation.

The Transportation Stimulus Plan would provide 20-miles of non-paved road improvements in each of the 24 regions that each council delegate represents for bridge and gravel development, which would require approval by the Navajo Nation Division of Transportation. The funds for the stimulus plan could also be leveraged to obtain additional external funding from county, state, and federal agencies.

Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) said it was important that the referendum ballot not only explain the purpose of the stimulus plan, but should also include the proposed expenditure plan of the funding.

“By allowing some kind of expenditure guidance, it allows the proponents of this referendum to explain to the Navajo voters how it works. It shows them the proposed plan. We try to think of these things and make sure to incorporate them [on the ballot],” said Delegate Tsosie.

He added that an amendment made at the Naabik'iyáti' Committee to the stimulus plan allowed for more flexibility to allow council delegates and their communities to determine which roads they would like to prioritize in their area.

Council Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahat'a Dził, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) raised concerns regarding the proposed amounts within the stimulus plan, and asked if the costs were "locked in" if the referendum should pass.

Legislation sponsor Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To'ii) said if the referendum should pass, the amounts within the stimulus plan could be amended once the final expenditure plan has been approved, however, the overall total amount would not change.

"The opportunity is still going to be there for additional resources to be infused into our chapters, and that's why it's entitled as a 'stimulus plan.' The federal government is never going to increase T-TIP funds," said Delegate Phelps. "I encourage you to work with NNDOT and identify which roads are a priority in your community."

At the conclusion of the discussion, Council members voted 19-1 to approve Legislation No. 0354-16 with one amendment to swap an exhibit within the resolution. President Russell Begaye will have 10 calendar days to consider the legislation once the resolution has been sent to the Office of the President and Vice President.

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