



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

MEDIA CONTACT:

nnlb.communications@gmail.com

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Naabik'íyáti' passes legislation to amend tobacco tax to include electronic smoking and nicotine products



Delegate Carl Slater (Right) and Dr. Patricia Nez Henderson (left) discuss adding electronic smoking and other nicotine products amending the existing tobacco product tax on Navajo Nation.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Navajo Nation's Naabik'íyáti' Committee unanimously supported Legislation 0145-24 on Thursday, September 26, 2024.

Sponsored by Delegate Carl Slater, the bill aims to amend the existing tobacco products tax and enact a new tax on electronic smoking and nicotine products. The legislation is designed to deter tobacco use, support cessation, particularly among Diné youth, and is projected to result in long-term healthcare cost savings for the Navajo Nation.

The tax increases will also generate significant revenue, a portion of which will be directed to the Office of Traditional Cultural and Spiritual Healing (OTCSH) under the Navajo Department of Health (NDOH). The OTCSH will use the funds to enhance the well-being of the Diné people and to preserve traditional cultural teachings and practices. While the office was authorized under NDOH's enabling legislation, it has never been funded.

"This legislation will increase the tobacco products tax, and it will also include other products that are currently not taxed, such as nicotine pouches and electronic smoking devices," said Delegate Slater during the session. "What we're trying to do in this legislation is use taxation as

a deterrent from getting stuck in the vicious cycle of nicotine addiction. We all know the public health issues that affect our people, and one of them is a high rate of nicotine and tobacco product usage.”

Dr. Patricia Nez Henderson with the Air is Life Coalition, added, “Electronic cigarettes and vaping devices are being used by the industry to lure youth and teens. It’s a method that’s used to introduce them to seemingly harmless products, and later graduate them to cigarettes.”

Chair Shaandiin Parrish proposed an amendment to expand the eligible recipients of NDOH grants funded by the tax. The amendment was passed with 12 votes in favor and one opposed. Delegate Slater explained that this change was necessary to ensure the flexibility of the funding distribution process and allow for broader participation by various health organizations.

The legislation includes provisions to allocate a portion of the generated tax revenue to the Navajo Nation’s Department of Health. The department will direct these funds toward traditional healing practices and education initiatives aimed at distinguishing between commercial tobacco products and sacred traditional use.

The projected long-term healthcare cost savings from the legislation are estimated at \$41.7 million. “Every dollar that goes into the treatment of preventable diseases caused by nicotine addiction is a dollar that could be spent on other healthcare needs. With a very constrained fiscal situation in our healthcare system across the Navajo Nation, it’s incredibly important for us to pass this legislation,” said Delegate Slater.

Legislation 0145-24 passed unanimously, with a vote of 12 in favor and none opposed, moving onto the Navajo Nation Council for final consideration during the Fall Session in October. If approved, it will represent a significant step in the Nation’s efforts to curb nicotine addiction, reduce smoking rates, and support cultural healing practices.

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