



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Navajo Nation strengthens Tobacco Tax to address addiction and curb youth usage of nicotine products



Council Delegate Carl R. Slater (right) and other advocates joined President Buu Nygren (center) as he signed Legislation 0145-24.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On Friday, Nov. 8, Budget and Finance Committee Vice Chair Carl R. Slater joined Navajo Nation President Dr. Buu Nygren as he signed Legislation 0145-24 into law, amending the Tobacco Products Tax to include electronic smoking devices and nicotine products.

The legislation seeks to address tobacco and nicotine addiction by increasing the existing Tobacco Products Tax and extending it to cover nicotine and electronic vaping devices.

Council Delegate Slater, who sponsored the legislation, thanked President Nygren for signing the bill, emphasizing its potential to reduce tobacco and nicotine use among Navajo youth.

“We’ve seen the tobacco and nicotine industries evolve to target our young people in new ways, making them lifelong users dependent on these harmful substances,” Council Delegate Slater said. “Our traditional and sacred tobacco serves a much different purpose. It’s not about quick gratification, but about purifying our minds so our thoughts are strong, clear, and aligned with our teachings.”

According to the 2017 Navajo Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 41 percent of high school students reported having smoked cigarettes, and 40 percent had used vaping products. The survey

also found that 11 percent of Navajo high school students reported using smokeless tobacco products.

The newly implemented Nicotine Products and Electronic Smoking Products Tax applies a 22 percent tax rate to nicotine and electronic smoking devices. It also increases taxes on tobacco products, including an additional 12.5 cents per cigarette, \$3.85 per ounce of smoking tobacco, snuff, and chewing tobacco, \$1.25 per ounce of plug or twist tobacco, \$2.50 per package of small cigars, and \$3.62 per larger, single cigar.

Council Delegate Slater highlighted how the Fund Management Plan for the new tax will support the Office of Traditional Culture and Spiritual Healing, which has not been funded since its creation. Additionally, the new tax revenue will support the Department of Health's projects in partnership with traditional Navajo healer non-profit organizations.

"This has never been done before, and we want to ensure that the funding serves its intended purposes," Slater said. "We're all eager to see how it will be implemented. This is an opportunity to learn, improve, and ultimately do better for our people."

President Nygren reinforced the sacred role of tobacco in Navajo culture, emphasizing that its use should be rooted in ceremony and respect.

"When it comes to tobacco, or anytime we think about using smoke, we should do it to bless ourselves and connect with who we are as Indigenous people," President Nygren said.

President Nygren also thanked Council Delegate Slater and all those who supported the passage of the legislation, which passed unanimously during the 2024 Fall Council Session.

"I commend all of you for your efforts. This is instrumental legislation, and it's exciting to see how these taxes will grow," President Nygren said. "From here, we'll work to ensure that these funds are used to support our traditional healers."

Council Delegate Slater concluded by thanking the attendees for their support, including members of the Air is Life Coalition, Executive Director of the Navajo Tax Commission Effie Edsitty, Forest Lake Chapter President Mae Gilene Begay, and 24th Navajo Nation Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr.

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