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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE 1/29/07

SPONSOR Begaye LAST UPDATED _____ HB 98

SHORT TITLE Research and Teaching of Navajo Language SB _____

ANALYST Wilson

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY07	FY08		
	\$277.9	Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Higher Education Department (HED)

Indian Affairs Department (IAD)

Public Education Department (PED)

University of New Mexico (UNM)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 98 appropriates \$277,886 from the general fund to the board of regents of the University of New Mexico for a program of research and teaching of the Navajo language.

The UNM Department of Linguistics intends to use these funds to hire faculty and offer teaching assistantships; teaching will serve young Navajos in order for the Navajo language to be preserved.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of \$277,886 contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of fiscal year 2008 shall revert to the general fund.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

IAD and the Navajo Nation provided the following:

- The Navajo Nation recognizes the importance of preserving and perpetuating that language for the survival of the Navajo Nation. Instruction in the Navajo language shall be made available for all grade levels in all schools serving the Navajo Nation. Navajo language instruction shall include to the greatest extent practicable: thinking, speaking, comprehension, reading and writing skills and the study of the formal grammar of the language. This program has the potential to complement the Tribe's efforts.
- HB 98 seeks to preserve and strengthen Navajo culture through reinvigorating use of the Navajo language. Language is an essential element of Navajo life, culture, and identity and its use is in steep decline. While many elders continue to speak the language fluently, younger Navajos are increasingly limited to speaking only English. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of English-speaking only Navajos between the ages of 5 and 17 has increased from 11.8% in 1980 to 48.7% in 2000. This sharp increase imperils the preservation of the Navajo language and the tribe's culture at large.
- HB 98 seeks to address this negative trend by providing funding to the University of New Mexico for a program of research and teaching. It received the endorsement of the 2006 Interim Indian Affairs Committee. Zuni Pueblo has also endorsed the bill, although Tribal leaders emphasized their desire to see similar programs for all New Mexico Tribes.

This proposal was submitted to HED by UNM and was not included in the HED recommendations for FY08.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

The University of New Mexico currently provides instruction in the Navajo language in Albuquerque and Gallup. Students at UNM Albuquerque may elect a concentration in native languages in pursuit of Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctor of Philosophy degrees. Classes already offered in Navajo language instruction include elementary, intermediate, and advanced Navajo language, basic medical Navajo, written Navajo, creative writing and advanced reading, and Navajo linguistics. However, some of these courses are not offered regularly. UNM also works in cooperation with Diné College to ensure coursework transfer between the two institutions. According to UNM's Linguistics Department website, it "recognizes the important contribution that Navajo language study at Diné can provide to the program as a whole at UNM.

In December, the federal government signaled the importance of this issue when President Bush signed the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act into law. Named for a late New Mexico native language teacher and advocate for the preservation of the Tewa language, it creates a variety of new programs and appropriations for language preservation programs. Among those lobbying for passage of the bill were several World War II era Navajo Code-Talkers.

DW/mt