



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 17, 2015

MEDIA CONTACTS

Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Budget and Finance Committee takes action on important items at its first regular meeting of 2015

WINDOW ROCK – On Tuesday, the Budget and Finance Committee approved a legislation that would allocate funding for the Legislative District Assistant Program, and a report regarding funding of the Decentralization Initiative.

Legislation No. 0019-15, sponsored by Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau), seeks to approve approximately \$1.2 million for the Office of Legislative Services to administer the Legislative District Assistants Program.

“Firstly, this legislation will create jobs for our people. These jobs will [provide an] income for individuals who will be hired as LDA’s to support their families. Secondly, as our work continues, I heard a comment from a colleague say, ‘I wish I could be at three places at one time,’” said Delegate Yazzie.

Delegate Yazzie said the LDA Program would allow each delegate one assistant to provide general support, address inquiries from constituents, attend meetings, and serve as a liaison to their respective chapters. He also noted that when the Council was reduced from 88 members to 24 members, the workload significantly increased for council delegates and spurred the need for additional staff support.

“There are young, highly educated professionals wanting to come back to the reservation, to help the chapters, the Nation, and move the Nation forward. Yet twice now, the President has line-item vetoed [this initiative]. This is a third attempt,” said BFC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Naa’tsis’Áán, Oljato, Ts’ah Bii Kin).

BFC members voted 4-0 to approve the legislation, which now moves forward to Council for consideration. The Naabik’yátí’ Committee approved the bill on Feb. 4.

BFC members also received a report from the Decentralization Program manager Robert Begay, Office of the President and Vice President chief of staff Arbin Mitchell, and Division of Community Development director Leonard Chee.

The report focused on \$3 million that was allocated to the Decentralization Initiative, which was signed into law by President Ben Shelly last fall, and has yet to be utilized.

The decentralization initiative seeks to establish 16 Administrative Service Centers to provide direct services to chapters at the local level, to lessen the hurdles that agencies face when trying to obtain services that are generally available in Window Rock, where the central government functions.

The written report provided by Begay states that 25 of the 38 positions at the ASC's have been filled, 13 of the 16 ASC's have opened, and the target date of completion is March 31. However, Begay said the centers are currently operating on a \$1.2 million budget, which is not sufficient to operate beyond March 31.

"One of the questions that you guys had specifically asked was, where is the \$3 million budget? That question is a valid question, but as you heard from the chief of staff [Arbin Mitchell], it's on hold. It's not by the Council, the Council doesn't put it on hold, it's the President that put it on hold. So that question is really for the President," said Begay.

BFC member Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) expressed his concern regarding the hold on the funding, and questioned the President's reasoning for withholding the funding.

"I would like to propose a directive, for the President's staff to come back before the BFC on March 3. At that time, give us a direct answer, if the President is or isn't going to release the \$3 million," said Delegate Damon.

Mitchell informed the BFC members that he would meet with President Shelly on the status of the \$3 million to discuss what needs to take place in order to release the funds to the ASC's.

BFC members passed the report with a vote of 3-1, with one directive.

###

For news on the latest legislative branch activities, please visit www.navajonationcouncil.org or find us on Facebook and Twitter, keywords: Navajo Nation Council