



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee urges Navajo programs to close out and expend external funds

WINDOW ROCK – On Monday and Tuesday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee held a two-day report session to receive an external funds reversion report from the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller and to allow divisions and programs to receive budget and grant closeout procedures from the Navajo Nation Office of Management and Budget.

According to a report provided by the NNOOC, reversions of funding from the federal government and state agencies have decreased, as well as contracts and grants cash deficits from FY2008 to FY2015. However, actual cash returned to the federal and state agencies from FY2008 to FY2015 have slightly increased.

In relation to the external funding reversions, NNOOC also reported that many awarded funding and grants have been inactive for some years, or have not been sufficiently closed out, causing the Navajo Nation to lose out on potential funding and reimbursements.

HEHSC member Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Beclabito, Cove, Gadi'i'áhi/To'Koi, Red Valley, Tooh Haltsooi, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Tsé ałnáoz't'í) expressed disappointment in the reversion of external funding over the span of several years, stating that much of the funding should have already been spent and used to provide direct services to Navajo citizens.

“Knowing that there are over \$50 million in reversions, we need to ensure accountability on this issue. If we knew about the problem since FY2012, then that is four years too late for Navajo people who needed these services,” said Delegate Crotty.

Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President chief of staff Arbin Mitchell stated that his office is working with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice to look into disciplinary policies and possible action for divisions and programs that fail to expend external funding or have neglected grants that need to be spent within a specific timeframe.

HEHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) said that deficiencies he has observed over the years concern internal processes that need to be revised and updated.

“A lot of forms and requisitions that are submitted to the finance office are not processed on time, and we know there is understaffing, but there has to be a way to increase efficiency in the processes without breaking the bank,” said Delegate Hale.

Delegate Hale added that staff tend to be the only individuals trained on important finance related systems and data programs, however, he stated that division directors and program managers also need to be trained so the departments are “all on the same page” when important questions are asked of them regarding closing out accounts.

Navajo Nation controller Jim R. Parris said his office has looked into program accounts and has been aggressive in closing out external funding and grants to ensure reimbursements are issued to the Navajo Nation, and will continue to collaborate with OPVP, NNOMB, and division directors to end the long-term problem of reversions and closeouts.

Delegate Hale said the goal of the committee is to have programs succeed in providing direct services to the Navajo people, and it starts with leadership to communicate their goals so that the Nation can maximize the use of external funds.

HEHSC members voted 4-0 to accept reports from the Navajo Nation Division of Human Resources, Department of Health, and the Department of Diné Education on day one. On day two, HEHSC members voted 3-0 to accept reports from the Division of General Services and the Division of Social Services. An update report on the closeouts will be provided at a later time.

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