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Budget and Finance Committee receives report regarding the Gaming Net Revenues Distribution Fund

WINDOW ROCK – On Tuesday, the Budget and Finance Committee received a report from the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller and Navajo Gaming Regulatory Office regarding the Navajo Gaming Net Revenue Distribution Fund that is to be allocated to all 110 Navajo chapters.

The Navajo Nation Council established the Gaming Revenues Fund Management Plan, which states that the distribution policy will allocate gaming revenues to chapters in a manner that recognizes both the immediate and long-term needs of the Navajo Nation, specifically for capital improvement projects and utilities.

According to the report, chapters have to submit proposals to the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller, who in turn reviews the budget request to ensure all information is correct and that it meets the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act federal guidelines. If the proposals meet all requirements, then funding is awarded to the chapter through direct payment to the vendors.

BFC member Council Delegate Mel R. Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a') expressed concerns regarding the revenue distribution process and educating chapters on options that are available to them.

“I think it is important to have presentation material that outlines the process. What the chapters are telling me is that they do not know what the process is, and I think it is important to revisit this and get that to them. The process I see presented is not working for the chapters,” said Delegate Begay.

NNOOC general accounting manager Robert Willie informed Delegate Begay that his office and the NNGRO have been visiting chapters to provide information on the gaming revenue distribution process, and said he would update the current process to meet the needs of the chapters.

BFC chair Council Delegate Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) said he was disappointed that the process has caused much confusion to chapters and that they have not received any funding yet.

“The casinos have been operating for almost eight years and the chapters still have not received one dime from the revenues,” said Delegate Damon. “We need a work session to clarify the process and find ways to streamline their proposals so they can start utilizing the funds.”

BFC vice chair Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinoñ, Whippoorwill) had questions regarding where the funds are currently “parked.”

Willie responded saying that the gaming revenue allocated to the chapters are sitting in an account that is not earning interest, reserved for the chapters. The Navajo Nation Department of Justice added that the process calls for proposals to be “shovel-ready” before the funds are expended to the chapters and NNOOC will pay vendors directly.

BFC members voted 5-0 to accept the report, with one directive to hold a work session in January to reevaluate the gaming revenue distribution process.

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