



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Law and Order Committee hears reports from Labor Commission, Office of Hearings and Appeals and Ethics and Rules Office



PHOTO: The Law and Order Committee hears a report from Anslem Bitsoi, Director of Navajo Nation Labor Commission (left) and from Lewnell Harrison, Acting Director, Ethics Rules Office (right).

CHURCH ROCK, N.M. – Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock) and Council Delegates Steven R. Arviso (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake) Nathan Notah (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’a’a) of the Law and Order Committee (LOC) received reports from Navajo Nation Labor Commission, Office of Hearings and Appeals and Ethics and Rules Office during a regular meeting held on Monday.

“White collar crimes are off the charts right now,” said Harrison.

A report was presented by Lewnell Harrison, Acting Director for the Ethics and Rules Office, which handles grievances of all elected officials including politically appointed staff. Harrison reported that the ERO currently has 139 pending cases. He stated that the workload is large and that the office has minimal staff to address the cases in a timely manner.

The ERO is requesting assistance from Department of Information Technology to perform maintenance and widen the server room as there is not adequate ventilation causing overheating and shutdown of equipment impacting daily workflows.

Due to the sensitivity and potential risks of personal safety that ERO employees face, the office is requesting field equipment such as bullet proof safety vests, GPD devices while investigating

in remote areas, high resolution cameras to document surveillance and an additional unmarked vehicle to conduct surveillance and serve legal documents. The ERO is in process of identifying additional training for investigators as white collar crimes on the Nation are on the rise.

Harrison advised since the late 1999, ERO has over \$1.9 million dollars of uncollected restitution from convictions of former Navajo Nation Employees, with only 14% of the funds being collected thus far.

“Are there any deadlines ERO has to collect the remaining restitution,” asked Notah. Harrison responded confirming there is no deadline and efforts to collect will continue.

LOC Chair Charles-Newton suggested imposing public penalties such as utilizing local newspapers to publish the names of the convicted employees, offense and amount of restitution owed in efforts to entice the offenders to complete their terms of conviction. Currently, ERO’s standards of conduct violations tend to be resolved with public apologies removal from office and/or financial discipline. Any amount over \$1000.00 is considered an automatic forfeiture of office.

“When someone is found guilty of a crime, it is public record, I think we need to look into sponsoring a legislation to make law that any offender with unpaid restitution to the Navajo Nation should be posted in local newspapers because the Navajo people need to be aware, especially during election time,” said Newton.

Navajo Nation Labor Commission (NNLC) Director Anselm Bitsoi delivered a written report regarding the department’s caseload, equipment, and facility needs.

The NNLC oversees Navajo Nation employee grievances. Bitsoi provided an overview on current case load of 142 cases for Fiscal Year 2024, and a total of 23 cases closed for Fiscal Year 2023.

NNLC also requested additional funding to address disability access including converting restroom facilities so they are handicap accessible, including installing hand rails, designating handicap parking spaces and other disability accommodations.

LOC Chair Charles-Newton suggested the NNLC seek assistance for the renovations through ARPA funding Resolution CJY38-22, which approved \$13 million dollars from the UUFB to renovate certain Navajo Nation Government facilities to provide access for disabled individuals.

Additional funding needs of NNLC include updating workstations, such as color printers, computers, and laptops. NNLC indicated they have been operating under technology and equipment from 2007 and previously resorted to purchasing work items out of pocket, in addition to performing routine maintenance and completing minor repairs within the facility. LOC accepted both reports by 2 in favor, 0 opposed and 3 not voting.

“Thank you all for presenting your reports, this certainly brings light of obstacles and issues. Navajo Nation people are tired of this behavior, they are tired of a slap on the wrist and the unethical behaviors still continue. We need to hold our officials accountable and reinforce penalties, it will take a lot of effort, however we need to address this,” said Arviso.

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