



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Resources and Development Committee requests transparency in broadband infrastructure costs and funding



RDC Chair Brenda Jesus (center), Vice-Chair Casey Allen Johnson (left), and Delegate Shawna Ann Claw (right) request a detailed financial report from NTUA to ensure transparency and accountability.

SANDERS, Ariz. – On Friday, January 24, the Resources and Development Committee (RDC) convened to address concerns regarding the financial accountability of the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) and its broadband infrastructure projects. Delegates Brenda Jesus, Casey Allen Johnson, Shawna Ann Claw, and Otto Tso raised critical questions about the costs, funding allocations, and oversight of broadband initiatives, particularly those supported by federal pandemic relief funds.

Chairwoman Brenda Jesus called for a comprehensive cost analysis and a detailed financial spreadsheet from NTUA within 30 days. She also requested clarification on NTUA's agreements with broadband providers, such as Verizon and AT&T, including the financial terms associated with co-locating on NTUA towers.

"The Council must establish fair market value for these services to ensure that Navajo citizens are not overpaying for essential internet access. We need to know how much these corporations are paying to use our infrastructure," Jesus emphasized.

Vice Chair Casey Allen Johnson questioned the rationale behind installing fiber-optic lines in areas already served by broadband towers.

“Why should we duplicate efforts and incur additional costs when existing infrastructure is already in place? Are these companies paying excessive fees for access, especially when federal grant funds were used to develop these projects?” Johnson asked.

Delegate Otto Tso echoed concerns about the financial transparency of pandemic-era funding, specifically the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and CARES Act funds allocated to broadband expansion. Tso demanded a clear report detailing how much ARPA funding has been spent, what remains unallocated, and whether NTUA sought additional financial support beyond its initial funding. He also highlighted the lack of oversight over NTUA and expressed concerns about rising utility costs for Navajo households.

“We need full transparency on how these funds have been spent, which projects have been defunded, and what our people are actually paying for internet service,” Tso stated.

Delegate Shawna Ann Claw underscored the need for stronger regulatory oversight and called for the Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NNTRC) to be present at the next RDC meeting. She expressed concerns about Navajo Nation Broadband Office’s \$240 million funding request, noting that all ARPA funds had already been allocated. Claw also emphasized the need for further discussion on the implementation of the E911 emergency response system, which is critical for public safety.

“NNTRC has regulatory authority under Title 2, but we need to ensure full accountability,” Claw stated.

The committee also questioned NTUA’s role in broadband deployment, pointing out that while the entity is responsible for infrastructure maintenance, third-party companies actually provide broadband services. NTUA representatives indicated that they would provide additional information about which companies utilize NTUA towers in future meetings.

The RDC has requested a detailed financial report from NTUA, including profit margins, operational costs, and broadband service pricing, to ensure transparency and accountability. The committee is also calling for a joint meeting with the Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission and NTUA officials to discuss pricing structures, regulatory oversight, and the financial impact on educational institutions that use NTUA-managed broadband infrastructure.

The Council has demanded a full breakdown of NTUA’s agreements with broadband providers, specifically outlining co-location fees for towers and the financial terms with companies such as Verizon and AT&T.

To ensure continued oversight, a follow-up hearing is scheduled for February 24, 2025, or the first Monday of March, where NTUA’s financial disclosures and compliance with these requests will be reviewed.

Jesus concluded, “As leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure that these funds are used effectively and equitably. Our people deserve reliable, affordable broadband, and we will continue to hold our enterprises accountable.”

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