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**Budget and Finance Committee votes down
legislation to approve \$5.2 million for water projects**
Legislation moves on to the Naabik'iyátí Committee

WINDOW ROCK – At a special meeting on Wednesday, the Budget and Finance Committee voted to oppose Legislation No. 0352-12 which aims to approve supplemental funding from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance in the amount of \$5.2 million for contractual services for regional water plans.

The legislation was first brought before the BFC on Mar. 6, where no action was taken because budget documents in the legislation were for fiscal year 2012, instead of the current year.

The Resources and Development Committee had previously considered the legislation on Jan. 8, and referred it to the BFC with a “do pass” recommendation with no amendments.

Reginald Shirley, senior hydrologist with the Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources, said the regional water plans would evaluate existing water systems, develop alternatives for future water supplies and development needs, and provide cost estimates.

According to the legislation, regional water plans are designated for numerous chapters, preliminary engineering reports, Kayenta water development, and the Rough Rock water well.

As many as 23 chapters will benefit from the funding, Shirley said.

The legislation immediately drew skepticism from some BFC members over the motive of the funding proposal and who the funding would benefit.

BFC member Council Delegate Lorenzo Curley (Houck, Klagetoh, Nahata Dziil, Tsé Si áni, Wide Ruins) questioned why the Department of Water Resources does not request funding for water projects more often.

If the department had routinely performed these types of studies and proposals, they could be helping the entire Navajo Nation, Delegate Curley said.

“This seems like a pork barrel type of legislation, which is designed to benefit only certain folks and all the other chapters will not benefit from these services,” Delegate Curley added.

BFC member Council Delegate Danny Simpson (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahi, Whiterock) questioned why none of the Eastern Agency chapters were included in the legislation.

“If plans like this are going to be funded, other chapters need to be incorporated,” said Delegate Simpson. “If we don’t do it now, those chapters will be left out for many more years.”

BFC member Council Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch’ izhi) questioned if any services had already been contracted to any particular company and if so, Delegate Begaye asked if all Navajo Nation procurement were followed.

Shirley assured BFC members that the projects had not been contracted to any companies and that the Department of Water Resources would comply with all Navajo Nation procurement policies.

“I would support this if the legislation answered all of our questions, but it does not,” Delegate Begaye concluded.

BFC vice-chair Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Navajo Mountain, Oljato, Ts’ah Bii Kin) warned Shirley that the legislation would draw even more questions and concerns when it is brought before the Naabik’iyátí Committee.

Delegate Nez also questioned the feasibility of the proposed projects, specifically the proposed Shonto to Black Mesa Regional Water Plan.

After an hour of debate, BFC members opposed the legislation with a vote of 1-2. Legislation No. 0352-12 now moves on to the Naabik’iyátí Committee for consideration.

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