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Council Delegate Jonathan Nez discusses decentralization initiative

MONUMENT VALLEY, Utah – Last Wednesday, Budget and Finance Committee vice chair Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Navajo Mountain, Oljato, Ts’ah Bii Kin) discussed the Navajo Nation’s regionalization/decentralization initiative to clarify its intent to constituents at the Navajo Mountain, Oljato, Shonto, Ts’ah Bii Kin Regional Council meeting.

The NOST Regional Council was formally established and recognized by the Resources and Development Committee in Oct. 2011, through the passage of resolution RDCO-38-11.

In August, the BFC allocated $3 million to fund the regionalization/decentralization project, which was later approved by the Navajo Nation Council during the FY2014 budget hearings.

“The [Navajo Nation] regionalization project now has $3 million available, but we need to implement a successful plan of action to begin creating regional agencies throughout the Nation to create councils, such as this one,” said Delegate Nez.

According to Delegate Nez’s report, current decentralization efforts focus on providing services to chapters at an agency level to avoid the lengthy bureaucratic process of the central government.

Delegate Nez said that decentralization is a systematic delegation of authority to the middle and lower level management. However, framing policies and major decisions related to the Nation as a whole, will remain the responsibility of the central government.

“We are transitioning from the Local Governance Support Centers to regional agencies that will add a planner, attorney, and accountant, and they will assist the chapters with more technical and complicated issues that can be handled at the local level,” said Delegate Nez.

The regionalization/decentralization initiative would not remove chapter officials, because it is still important that each Navajo community is represented at the local level, stated Delegate Nez.

Delegate Nez also discussed phasing out LGSC, explaining that staff will not be laid off. Instead, their positions will transition to the new regional agency offices to continue working at the middle government level and to provide direct services such as chapter budgets, accounting, regional planning, etc. to chapters.
“The keyword we need to keep in mind through the regionalization process is ‘transition,’” said Delegate Nez. “I want to clarify to the chapters and community that their officials and staff will still be available, but services will soon be provided closer to your areas without having to wait for action at the central government level.”

Navajo Nation Division of Community Development senior project/program specialist Peggy Sue Nez, stated that her office is currently working on proposals to finalize the number of regional agencies, staffing, and services that will be offered to the chapters.

She said that a summit for leaders at the local level would take place to further clarify the regionalization/decentralization efforts.

Delegate Nez commended the NOST Regional Council for being one of the first functioning regional organizations currently established.

“A lot of the regionalization discussion originated here at these four chapters, and you should be proud that you are a model to other agencies who will soon follow suit,” said Delegate Nez.

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