FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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Budget and Finance Committee receives report regarding Branch Chiefs meeting

WINDOW ROCK – The Budget and Finance Committee received a report on Tuesday, regarding an update of a Branch Chiefs meeting held on June 3, between Speaker Pro Tem LoRenzo Bates, President Ben Shelly, and Chief Justice Herb Yazzie.

Pro Tem LoRenzo Bates (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, Tiis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse’Daa’Kaan, Upper Fruitland), who also chairs the BFC, said the Branch Chiefs discussed issues such as employee step-increases, the recent approval by the federal government to allow the Navajo Nation to begin land leasing, proposed indirect and fixed costs rates, and the Decentralization/Regionalization Initiative.

“Our ultimate goals of the meetings are to improve communication between each branch, and set priorities for the Navajo Nation for the upcoming FY2015 year, in respect to each branch’s responsibilities,” said Pro Tem Bates.

Pro Tem Bates said the U.S. Department of the Interior recently approved a streamlined process that grants the Navajo Nation the authority to approve land leases without the involvement of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. However, this excludes mineral and rights-of-way leasing.

Another key issue that was discussed is a proposed step increase for Navajo Nation employees. Bates said that the Navajo Department of Personnel Management reported that the Navajo Nation is 13% below the national average for salaries.

In support of the proposed employee step increases, BFC member Council Delegate Mel Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’a’a) said he believes the increase in Navajo Nation employee salaries would be beneficial, and reminded committee colleagues of the potential issues that may arise regarding the hiring of new personnel.

“If the salaries increase, then the Nation may have to limit the amount of persons hired annually by the Nation, because it is a possibility that we may run into a funding shortfall for personnel,” said Delegate Begay. “We cannot risk any type of potential instability.”
At the conclusion of the report, Pro Tem Bates said the Branch Chiefs also discussed the Decentralization/Regionalization Initiative, proposing that attorney's be provided at the local chapter levels to ensure their needs are being met with professional legal advice.

“[The Navajo Nation Department of Justice] did admit that they get a lot of requests from chapters and it gets caught up in the bureaucratic process, so they felt like they weren’t giving the proper attention to their needs,” said Pro Tem Bates.

BFC members voted 4-0 to accept the report.

The next scheduled Branch Chiefs meeting is set for June 9.

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