23rd Navajo Nation Council
Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 23, 2017

MEDIA CONTACTS
Jared Touchin (928) 221-9253
Jolene Holgate (928) 380-4174
Crystalyne Curley (928) 286-7918
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Resources and Development Committee receives report regarding telecommunication expansion efforts on the Navajo Nation

LEUPP, Ariz. – During its regular meeting on Tuesday, the Resources and Development Committee received a report from a private consulting company called the Wireless Working Group, which is seeking support from the Navajo Nation to aid in expanding telecommunication infrastructure throughout Navajo land.

According to the report, the working group aims to collaborate with wireless companies such as CellularOne, Verizon Wireless, AT&T, and any other carriers on the Navajo Nation to develop plans to improve overall wireless service and expand telecommunication infrastructure, such as the installation of smaller cellular towers on water towers, school campuses, chapter houses, etc.

WWG representative Brian Gilbert, said that wireless carriers may "roll-out" 5G services in the near future, in which the Navajo Nation would be able to take advantage of faster cellular data speeds that could promote services such as telemedicine, improve public safety by disseminating emergency alerts faster, and implement a high-speed 9-1-1 service.

RDC member Council Delegate Jonathan Perry (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse'ii'ahi, Whiterock) thanked the working group for their efforts to expand telecommunications, and raised concerns regarding cellular "dark zones" throughout the Navajo Nation, which could hinder emergency announcements such as AMBER Alerts.

"I have been working on these same issues for the Eastern Navajo Agency because we have a lot of dark areas out there. I've been working with Navajo Technical University in terms of telecommunication infrastructure, and I ask for your support in coming together and collaborating because we want to improve public safety and ensure that emergency alerts reach all Navajo citizens," said Delegate Perry.

Delegate Perry, who serves as the vice chair of the Naabik'íyáti' Committee's Sexual Assault Prevention Subcommittee, said they have been working to aid in implementing a comprehensive AMBER Alert system on the Navajo Nation. He recommended that the working group also provide a report to the subcommittee regarding telecommunication infrastructure in order to garner additional support for their efforts.

Gilbert stated he understood the challenges of improving cellular coverage, such as access to land areas for installing towers, and said the WWG are open to meeting with Navajo Nation leadership and entities to discuss policy changes that would allow for expanding telecommunication infrastructure.

RDC member Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tsidi To'ii) said he supports the efforts of the Wireless Working Group, and recommended that a leadership session be held with the inclusion of Navajo agencies that could aid in expanding telecommunication infrastructure throughout the Nation.

"It would be helpful if these agencies talked together first before the leadership meeting, so we are not listening to different initiatives and stories. I think it's better to look at this whole telecommunication issue from a global perspective," said Delegate Phelps.

Delegate Phelps said his constituents that reside in the Former Bennett Freeze Area have had several issues when it comes to the lack of cellular coverage in their communities, and since the area is now pursuing development, it should include telecommunication coverage and be one of the priority areas during the discussion at the proposed leadership session.

RDC chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) said the committee will coordinate with the Navajo Nation Land Department, Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, and Navajo Nation Telecommunication Regulatory Commission to hold the leadership session, and will provide further information on the meeting at a later date.

RDC members voted 3-0 to accept the report.

# # #

For news on the latest legislative branch activities, please visit www.navajonationcouncil.org or find us on Facebook and Twitter, keywords: Navajo Nation Council