



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Resources and Development Committee addresses utility services for Navajo chapters

TSE BONITO, N.M. – On Monday, the Resources and Development Committee received a report from the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, Office of the Controller, Office of Management and Budget, and the Office of the President and Vice President regarding utility disconnections that continue to impact Navajo chapters.

The report also provided information related to the Gaming Net Distribution Fund, which states that the distribution policy will allocate gaming revenues to the 110 chapters in a manner that recognizes both the immediate and long-term needs of the Navajo Nation, specifically for capital projects and utilities, which includes telephone, internet, energy, water and sewage, and solid waste disposal.

RDC chair Council Delegate Alton Joe Shepherd (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Lichíí, Steamboat) stated that the purpose of placing the report of the committee's agenda was to develop solutions and recommendations to avoid utility disconnections at chapter facilities due to issues with billing payments.

"This year, there were 21 chapters that had electric disconnections. Many of these chapters had to stay open for services and they had to work in the dark. The chapters cannot operate without electricity. The gaming revenue fund should be streamlined to make the process easier for chapters to pay their utility bills," stated Delegate Shepherd.

According to Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, six chapters within the Chinle service area, five chapters within the Kayenta service area, six chapters within the Dilkon service area, three chapters within the Shiprock service area, and one chapter within the Tuba City service area have experienced electrical disconnections this year.

In response to questions raised by RDC vice chair Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill) over the processing of utility payments, OPVP legal counsel Karis Begaye stated that internal processing of the gaming revenue fund for utility payments has caused delays, which resulted in disconnections. Internal policies could resolve the issues and concerns, added Begaye.

Division of Community Development executive director Carl Smith, said that chapters need to submit required documents on a timely manner to utilize the gaming revenue funds and that the division will provide training sessions for chapters that need assistance with the process.

Delegate Shepherd directed all involved entities to amend their internal policies to make the process easier for chapters to issue payments for their utility bills and to report to the RDC members on their progress within 30-days.

The Resources and Development Committee accepted the report with a 4-0 vote.

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