



23RD NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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Resources and Development Committee supports bill to assist sanctioned Sawmill Chapter

FORT DEFIANCE, Ariz. – The Resources and Development Committee recently considered Legislation No. 0127-18, which seeks to release a portion of the Sawmill Chapter’s funds withheld due to sanctions to allow the chapter to obtain consultant services to assist with implementing its corrective action plan. The legislation directs the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller to release a payment of approximately \$20,000 to retain a consultant.

In 2003, the Budget and Finance Committee approved legislation to impose sanctions against Sawmill Chapter for the failure to implement its corrective action plan.

RDC vice chair Council Delegate Benjamin L. Bennett (Crystal, Fort Defiance, Red Lake, Sawmill), who sponsored the legislation and represents the community of Sawmill, asked for the committee’s support to allow the chapter to fix its sanctioned status.

“Sawmill Chapter has been sanctioned for nearly 15 years. The current chapter staff and officials are working hard to implement the corrective action plan, however, they need additional assistance. The chapter’s priority is to get out of sanction,” said Delegate Bennett.

RDC member Council Delegate Leonard H. Pete (Chinle) questioned how the consultant would utilize the funding to implement the corrective action plan.

“I am extremely concerned how the \$20,000 will be used at the chapter. How can the chapter justify the funding amount, because there is no budget or scope of work included in the legislation?” asked Delegate Pete.

According to Sawmill Chapter vice president Lewis Shirley, the consultant would work exclusively on the correction action plan. Since the sanctioning of the chapter the chapter has not had a stable long-term community services coordinator, which hindered the implementation of the corrective action plan, added Shirley.

RDC member Council Delegate Walter Phelps (Cameron, Coalmine Canyon, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Tside To ii) spoke in opposition of the legislation, stating that the chapter staff is responsible for

resolving the sanctions with assistance from the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development and the Office of the Auditor General.

“I do not support the funding request because it is the chapter staff’s responsibility to fix the corrective action plan. Consultants only want ‘the piece of the pie.’ It is extremely inappropriate if a consultant approached the chapter and promised to get them out of sanction with a \$20,000 price tag,” said Delegate Phelps. “It also raises the question if the chapter staff is capable to do their job duties and responsibilities.”

According to Administrative Service Centers senior program and project specialist Patricia Begay, the ASC office has been assisting the chapter with the last few corrective action plan measures, which are nearly complete.

The Resources and Development approved Legislation No. 0127-18 with a 2-1 vote. The Budget and Finance Committee will consider the funding request next and also serves as the final authority for the bill.

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