

Budget Committee seeks solutions to expedite financial assistance for Navajo veterans

Written by gallupsun
Friday, 05 January 2024 13:36

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz — The 25th Navajo Nation Council's Budget and Finance Committee received a report from the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration regarding challenges that hinder veteran's assistance payments from being processed on a timely basis on Jan. 2.

"As chairwoman of the Budget and Finance Committee, I'd like to reassure our Navajo veterans that the Committee is looking into these issues and challenges because we're not hearing any communication from the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration on these issues," BFC Chair Shaandiin Parrish (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) said.

Regarding veterans assistance payments, Navajo Nation Veterans Administration Executive Director Bobbie Baldwin said simple data entry errors and miscommunication have caused setbacks that can take two to eight weeks to rectify.

BFC member, Council Delegate Lomardo Aseret, said constituents from his chapter areas have reported issues with address corrections and updates, submission of marriage licenses, and misspelled names causing their checks to be delayed.

"Something as simple as a name sequence can monkey-wrench this process. If the first name and last name of the veteran is in the wrong order, they must come back to the Office of the Controller to change these things," he explained. "We, delegates, have to answer to the veterans on these issues."

Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah (Crotty Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse'alnaozt'i'i', Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To'Koi) said it seems that OCC is causing the hold up.

"What is the internal support that OCC is providing?" she asked.

The archaic process of updating profiles and data through one central office is an issue that the Navajo Nation has long sought to fix through modern data entry processes.

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“Many of these issues seem to be data based,” BFC Vice Chair Carl R. Slater said. “What is OOC’s plan for digitizing this process?”

According to OOC Accounting Manager Robert Willie, there is only one person who enters and corrects this data within OCC. Willie proposed initiating a standard monthly date for all veterans assistance payments to be issued.

“We need to set a date to have these payments out to the veterans,” he said. “By doing this, we can put in place a timeline to have all errors corrected before payments are made.”

Until improvements are made, Crotty recommended that the Veterans Administration continue to provide reports to the BFC at each regularly scheduled meeting.

“What are the next steps? How can OOC and the Veterans Administration address staffing issues to fix this problem?” Crotty asked. “We need to implement best practices and address the limitations that exist within OOC.”

Navajo Nation President Dr. Buu Nygren and Vice President Richelle Montoya were in attendance for the report.

The Budget and Finance Committee voted four in favor and zero opposed to accept the report and will continue meeting with the OOC and Veterans Administration to expedite assistance for Navajo veterans.

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