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NNHRC addresses area concerns with Farmington Community Relations Commission

FARMINGTON, New Mexico—The Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission presented three critical race related issues to address with Farmington commissioners but not before stating the impasse that derailed efforts to hold a joint conference about the issues raised in 2011 and again today.

NNHRC held their regular commissioner meeting for November today at the Navajo Agricultural Products Industry conference room to accommodate a request by the City of Farmington's Community Relations Commission to discuss another attempt at a hosting conference.

"Last year we expended an enormous amount of time and resources for the conference about issues you have before you today of which you didn't want to address," said Leonard Gorman for NNHRC. "We were at an unfortunate impasse about the conference."

In 2011, NNHRC wanted to publically address third party reports which pertained to law enforcement.

Today, law enforcement was the third critical item on the NNHRC's meeting agenda, which was titled, "Increase Awareness of Law Enforcement Services in City of Farmington." Two Farmington commissioners remained for this topic while others had prior commitments passed the noon hour and left.

The two critical topics the full Farmington Commission participated in included "Abusive Consumer Relations in Border Towns," and "Navajo Inebriates and Need to Provide Appropriate Shelter: Navajo Nation should provide appropriate funding to address pressing inebriate and shelter issues."

In addressing abusive consumer relations against Navajo consumers, DNA Peoples Legal Services Senior Attorney Nicholas H. Mattison presented. He was invited by NNHRC.

"We were at an unfortunate impasse about the conference. ... about issues before you today of which you didn't want to address."

Mattison explained that though he's not opposed to commerce because nobody wants people impoverished he also elaborated on Navajo people being fraudulently induced to enter car dealership loans. He continued to explain how abuse against Navajo consumers often time creates a cycle of poverty.

"We do have a number of cases at our office addressing dealership abuse and other goods and services," said Mattison.

During Mattison presentation, he mentioned his office's contact with the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. With that lead in, NNHRC staff members took the opportunity to hand out the U.S. CFPB's Office for Older Americans' brochure stating, "... [w]e are here to empower seniors to ask questions and to give older Americans the information they need to make informed choices about their money." NNHRC is also building a rapport with the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Following Mattison presentation, Gorman explained that often times these predatory practices requiring complicated financial decisions are aimed at older Navajos.

The last topic the full commission from Farmington heard from the NNHRC addressed publically intoxicated individuals on the street, street inebriates.

Because the Navajo Nation's sovereign position as a "dry" jurisdiction where only casinos serve alcohol, Navajos go to towns selling alcohol to buy it.

Albert Long, senior program and project specialist for the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral Health Services said the same question is asked. "What Should Navajo Nation Do?"

Gorman explained that Navajo people have purchasing power. He questioned where the money spent on alcohol is funneled. That money could be used as a resource he explained.

Gorman shared strategies with NNHRC commissioners and Farmington Commissioners to appropriately address the reduction of inebriates in border towns.

"We need to identify where that money goes to channel the funds to Navajo services," said Gorman.

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