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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE
LAST UPDATED _____

SPONSOR Begaye HB 31

SHORT TITLE Navajo Nation Mobile Internet Training SB _____

ANALYST Weber

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY07	FY08		
	\$628.0	Recurring	General Fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From
Indian Affairs Department
Public education Department

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

House Bill 31 appropriates \$628 thousand from the general fund to the Indian Affairs Department for expenditure in fiscal years 2008 and 2009 to operate two mobile internet training sites for Navajo Nation chapters located wholly or partially in New Mexico in order to provide internet services and training to the Navajo people.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of \$628 thousand contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of Fiscal Year 2009 shall revert to the general fund.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The Indian Affairs Department notes.

The initiative funded by this bill addresses the “digital divide” that exists between Indian country

and the rest of New Mexico. It would complement the internet access currently available to all Nation citizens at Chapter Houses with relevant training. Simply having access to the internet does not translate into the ability to use the resource, which this legislation would help address.

Given the far-flung and remote geographic nature of the Navajo Nation, the ability to use the internet is vital to the well-being of its citizens. The internet can provide citizens with access to government and other crucial services, such as the Telehealth program. Telehealth's purpose is to utilize modern communications like the internet to ensure the distribution of our scarce health-care services and information to our most remote citizens. Without both internet access and aptitude, such programs are unlikely to realize their purposes.

This bill received the endorsement of the 2006 Interim Indian Affairs Committee. It also received the endorsement of Zuni Pueblo which would also like to see such programs considered for other tribes in New Mexico.

The Public Education Department emphasized the educational opportunities more internet training would open up to the Navajo communities. Educational statistics indicate that 50% of the Navajo population has no high school diploma and 1.3% have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. The Navajo population has a below-poverty rate of 49.4% and a median annual income of \$12,000. In the Digital Inclusion 2006 Project Report, Dr. Paul C. Godfrey of Brigham Young University suggests that the Navajo Nation needs assistance via language proficiency and digital technology to transition into the 21st Century. In this report, he stresses that these resources be affordable, attainable and accessible. His report speaks to the enhanced productivity and income and improved career prospects that come from digital technology.

MW/sb