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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., urges BIA to find funding to make December social service payments

BIA waits two weeks before Christmas to phone Nation to say it's out of money for Navajo assistance

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., expressed serious displeasure to the Deputy Regional Director of the Navajo Region Bureau of Indian Affairs in a letter Wednesday regarding the BIA's failure to identify funds to make a \$1.5 million funding transfer for Navajo social service programs and then waiting until this week to inform the Navajo Nation.

On Monday, the BIA notified the Navajo Nation's Contracting Officer by phone that it has no money available to make the payment. Among the programs that will be affected are General Assistance, Child Welfare Assistance, Adult Care Services, Tribal Work Experience Program and Miscellaneous Assistance.

These programs include direct assistance payments to more than 4,000 Navajo households with almost 19,000 Navajo beneficiaries.

"I am strongly requesting that the Navajo BIA Regional Office reconsider its position that there are no additional funds and make all efforts, including looking to the 2006 appropriations, to immediately identify sufficient additional funding to fund the Nation's scheduled December payments," President Shirley wrote to Tim DeAsis, BIA Deputy Regional Director in Gallup, with a copy sent to Acting BIA Director Jim Cason in Washington, D.C.

Late Wednesday afternoon, BIA Acting Regional Director Omer Bradley provided the President with the BIA's first written response. It stated that the BIA has no funds to fulfill its trust responsibility to the Navajo Nation.

Mr. Bradley suggested that the Nation "make the difficult decision to shut down their welfare assistance program."

On Wednesday, President Shirley informed the Navajo public in his weekly radio address that their expected payments will be delayed.

"If the Navajo BIA Regional Office has not notified the Nation's Contracting Officer by end of business today that it has identified sufficient additional funding to fund the Nation's December payments, the Nation will have no choice but to issue a national press release on December 15, 2005, stating that given the exhaustion of funding, the Nation cannot release the scheduled December payments and the beneficiaries will need to look to the Navajo BIA Regional Office for their payments," he wrote to Mr. DeAsis.

On Sept. 1, President Shirley formally notified BIA Regional Director Eloise Chicharello that the Navajo Nation projected the total cost for the welfare assistance portion of its Indian Self-Determination contract would exceed the amount allocated and funded by the BIA.

He said the "limitation of cost" notification was provided more than two months ago, followed by informal requests for a response, by that no response was received until the BIA verbally informed the Nation this week that it would provide no additional funds.

"The Nation has exhausted the amount allocated under Contract No. CTN00T78093 and is without funding to release the December welfare assistance payments scheduled for tomorrow, December 15, 2005," the President wrote. "The lack of response by the Navajo BIA Regional Office has prohibited the Nation from providing the welfare assistance recipients advance notification that the Nation is without funds to provide them their December payments."

In his letter Wednesday, Mr. Bradley said, "Congress has imposed a cap on the amount of welfare assistance that is to be distributed annually," Mr. Bradley wrote. The Nation's request "to utilize FY 2006 funds for the FY 2005 shortfall is not appropriate because the caseload as identified represents the calendar year 2005 caseload."

The Navajo BIA Regional Office is located in the Federal Building in Gallup, N.M. It's number is 505-863-8500. The regional director's number is 505-863-8314.

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