24th Navajo Nation Council
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation Council Appropriates Chapter Relief Funding After Emergency Management Updates

Council Delegates listen to Speaker Damon present options for chapter emergency relief funding.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The 24th Navajo Nation Council approved $3 million in emergency relief funding for Navajo chapters after receiving reports Tuesday from the Office of the President and Vice President, Dept. of Emergency Management (DEM), and the Division of Transportation (NDOT).

During a special session, Council delegates reported to the incident management team leadership how their communities were impacted by the storm, sharing stories of Navajo citizens hauling firewood and coal to at-risk community members.

Delegate Rickie Nez (Nenahnezad, Newcomb, San Juan, T'iis Tsoh Sikaad, Tse'Daa'Kaan, Upper Fruitland) recounted a story of a grandmother burning old pieces of her sheep corral after running out of firewood.

Delegates focused on road condition updates for Garret Silversmith, the NDOT director, in addition to thanking the division for their nonstop work over the last few days.

"NDOT is not getting into the rural parts of the reservation," Delegate Jamie Henio (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee) stated. Delegate Henio provided further testimony on how important it is

for NDOT to tackle rural dirt routes that will become impassable due to deep mud if snow remains on the road surfaces.

Delegate Vince R. James (Jeddito, Cornfields, Ganado, Kin Dah Łichíí, Steamboat) praised NDOT for working through the administrative leave granted by President Jonathan Nez and throughout the weekend. Several delegates thanked NDOT for their round-the-clock work mobilizing the division's 42 pieces of snow removal equipment throughout the Nation.

Douglas Watchman, designated emergency operations center manager, described how different parts of the Navajo Nation were hit with varying levels of snowfall. He explained the necessity of a community-based emergency response.

"When ordering resources, we need to think about the geography. We talk about our people being resilient and taking ownership…taking that whole community approach and helping one another in a good, positive way," Watchman testified.

After significant deliberation, the Council voted to allocate funding in two parts. Fifty percent of the $3 million appropriation will be distributed equally among the 110 chapters. The remaining 50 percent will be appropriated proportional to the number of registered voters in each chapter.

For example, Tsaile/Wheatfields Chapter will receive $13,636.37 according to the equal 110-chapter distribution and $16,389.68 according to their 1,096 registered voters, which represents 7.94548 percent of registered Navajo Nation voters. In total, the chapter, which received up to 3 feet of snow according to Delegate Nelson BeGaye (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch'izhí), will receive $30,026.05.

Delegate BeGaye offered an amendment to ensure chapters receive their emergency funds within seven days of the legislation's enactment into law. It passed 20-0.

CF-04-19, the emergency relief funding legislation, was signed by Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) on Wednesday, February 27, and is pending President Nez's review and signature for enactment into law.

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