



24th Navajo Nation Council

Office of the Speaker

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Council Stands by Emergency Relief for Chapters

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – After much deliberation and direct communication with community officials and first responders, the 24th Navajo Nation Council appropriated \$3 million dollars in emergency relief for the Navajo Nation’s chapters. The Office of the Speaker does not agree with several statements made in President Jonathan Nez’s line item veto announcement of CF-04-19, the emergency relief funding legislation passed by Council on Feb. 26.

Without any consultation to the Council regarding the concerns outlined in his veto memorandum, the president claims that the expenditure from the Minimum Fund Balance (MFB) for the chapters’ emergency expenses will imperil the Nation’s financial integrity.

According to the Office of the Controller, the MFB of the Undesignated Unreserved Fund Balance is approximately \$16 million. At the Feb. 26 special council session, the controller testified that she believes the appropriation from the MFB would not adversely impact the Navajo Nation’s financial integrity, including the Nation’s credit rating as the president claims.

Neither the Division of Community Development, nor the Office of the Auditor General can provide a “real time” audited emergency line item amount for each chapter. Any assertion to the contrary is not supported by the testimony of the acting auditor general.

After direct communication with their chapters, numerous delegates attested to the depletion of chapter emergency funds and the need for further funding to protect chapters’ most vulnerable citizens.

“We, as a Council, voiced our chapters’ needs to the mother government. Additional funding is needed for food, wood, water and other basic necessities. I strongly disagree with the line item veto. I hope President Nez can provide an answer to the 110 chapters on his decision,” Delegate Otto Tso (Tó Nanees Dizi) said in a statement.

Delegate Mark Freeland (Becenti, Crownpoint, Huerfano, Lake Valley, Nageezi, Nahodishgish, Tse’ii’ahí, Whiterock) conveyed his dismay in the line-item veto.

“It’s unfortunate that President Nez vetoed the emergency legislation. Our community response teams, community health representatives, and local officials were the first responders in our communities and we, as Council, relied on their firsthand accounts to make our decision,” Delegate Freeland expressed in a written statement.

Moreover, chapters lack the authority and control to execute budget transfers to their emergency line items in a timely fashion. In parallel to the president's precautionary Emergency Declaration, the Council decided it would not be beholden to the federal government, rather Council would be proactive public servants.

At no point did the Office of the President and Vice President representatives relay the president's position on appropriating emergency relief funding at the Feb. 26 special session. Many of the considerations the president asserts in his release were discussed during the special session and the Council would have welcomed the executive branch's active engagement.

The Council respects the president's veto, though this situation could have been avoided if the president had conferred with the Nation's legislative branch on Feb. 26, rather than leading from behind by veto.

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