



Congress approves omnibus funding bill extending Coronavirus Relief Funds and approving Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Monday, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council expressed support and appreciation for Congress' approval of the federal omnibus funding bill which included a one-year extension to the deadline for the Coronavirus Relief Fund and the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act. If signed into law by President Trump, the settlement will provide funding for water projects in the Utah portion of the Navajo Nation under a joint effort among local Navajo communities, the State of Utah and the federal government.

“Navajo Nation leadership joins the many local, state and tribal governments across the country in supporting the much-needed CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund deadline extension. This provides certainty as the Navajo Nation Council navigates response policy and legislation during the ongoing wave of recent Covid-19 infections,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh). “We thank Congress for getting this done on behalf of tribal nations and our local Navajo communities and we look forward to its enactment by President Trump.”

The Navajo Nation Council allocated more than \$714 million in CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds received by the Navajo Nation for coronavirus response efforts. The omnibus funding bill included Covid-19 relief provisions that extended the previous December 30 deadline to Dec. 31, 2021. Previously, the Council established support for an extension due to initial delays by the federal government in disbursing the relief funding to tribal governments.

The funding bill also included the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act that provides resources for further developing water resources in the Utah portion of the Navajo Nation.

The most recent water rights settlement began with the Navajo Nation Council's approval of Resolution No. CJA-7-16, which approved the proposed Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Agreement. The resolution also provided the legal authority for the President of the Navajo Nation to sign the agreement or one substantially similar to the approved language.

“The Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement will make our future in San Juan County so much brighter. We know water is life and it's important for any type of growth, economic development and any type of agriculture. This opens up the possibilities for factories on Navajo that employ more of our own people, we can build more houses so our young professionals can come home and work locally. They can be around family where our people can continue to learn their language and our way of life to keep our cultural ties strong for future generations. The possibilities with this water settlement are endless,” said Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chííłchínbii'tó).

The settlement was approved by the US Senate in June under a bipartisan effort among Senators Mitt Romney, Martha McSally, Tom Udall and Kyrsten Sinema. The House version of the bill was sponsored by Representative Rob Bishop with cosponsorship from Representatives Chris Stewart, John R. Curtis, Ben McAdams, Ben Ray Lujan and Tom O'Halleran.

“The Navajo Nation Council extends its gratitude to Congressional leadership for taking the positions and statements of Navajo leaders and local communities into consideration through this significant action today. This is more than a milestone, the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement is a watershed moment in the Navajo Nation’s multi-generational efforts to gain access to clean water for our Navajo Utah communities. We thank, as well, Governor Gary Herbert and Lieutenant Governor Spencer Cox, governor-elect, for their firm support of this effort. And finally, the Navajo Nation Council recognizes the local Navajo Utah leaders, some that are no longer with us, that have carried the voices of our Navajo People to the halls of Washington and made this settlement possible. We are a stronger Nation because of their dedication,” said Speaker Damon.

The omnibus funding bill goes next to President Trump, who is expected to sign the bill into law before current government funding expires.

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