



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Nation Council urges Executive Branch to compromise, \$1.7 Billion in ARPA infrastructure funding ready to be allocated

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PHOTO: Vice Chair Carl Slater and Madam Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty work diligently during the Naabik'iyati Committee work session held two weeks ago with the Navajo Nation Executive Branch at Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort.

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The 24th Navajo Nation Council met in a special session yesterday to advance Legislation No. 0257-21 with an amendment creating a comprehensive spending plan to appropriate \$1.7 billion in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for the construction of new water and electric lines, broadband internet connections, and housing infrastructure projects for the Navajo people. The main motion failed to reach the sixteen votes required to pass the bill.

Last week during a Naabik'iyati Committee meeting, Madam Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty proposed an amendment to the legislation to divide \$910.6 million in ARPA funding equally for a total of \$414 million per delegate region. Vice Chairman Carl Slater modified the amendment to allocate between \$31 to \$41 million to each delegate region for infrastructure projects after UUFB and other reimbursements are allocated.

Delegates were prepared to draft expenditure plans approved by the Department of Justice to allocate an equal share to their communities. There was a consensus that all eligible projects would only advance through Council resolution and be approved by the President.

“The Navajo Nation Council is moving forward to find a middle ground that is equitable

and meets the immediate needs of the Navajo people. We are committed to the infrastructure projects already approved by the Navajo Nation Department of Justice and this process will take time as we meet federal deadlines. Our Council Delegates worked hard to hold the Nez-Lizer Administration accountable and will continue to do so as the governing body of the Navajo Nation. Expect new legislation soon that will provide clean drinking water, electricity, and high-speed internet access to our Navajo families because that is our top priority,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

Although a majority of the Navajo Nation Council is disappointed in the vote tally, they are prepared to draft new legislation that will allocate ARPA funding in another comprehensive spending plan that puts the power back to the Navajo people and their chapters.

“We tried our hardest to get the people’s voice in the ARPA funding allocation and we will keep working on their behalf. Window Rock cannot be a dictator to our communities and our people. The concerted effort to deny them their voice will not be successful,” said Vice Chair Carl Slater (Round Rock, Rock Point, Tséch’izí, Lukachukai, Tsaile-Wheatfields).

The Executive Branch proposed an imbalance project list in which ARPA-eligible water, broadband, and electric projects were not included by President Jonathan Nez. Legislation No. 0257-21 included an amendment that would equally distribute funds to 24 delegate regions.

“Our people live in sheds and campers with no plumbing or electricity. It is this Council’s mandate to develop, propose, and even demand real-world solutions that are substantive, meaningful, and sometimes drastic to immediately improve the quality-of-life of our Navajo families. The Nez-Lizer Administration’s approved project listing left much to be desired in the way of the real and immediate relief and improvement this Council seeks. Window Rock continues to fight to keep control of the decision-making process and upholding the status quo in incremental change. Meanwhile our people are left struggling with delayed home-site leases, court cases, social service cases, family assistance cases, and delayed project reviews - delays, delays, delays. We need more realistic proposals that put the people first,” said Madam Chair Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’alnáoozt’í’í, Sheep Springs, Beclabito, Gad’ii’áhi/Tó Ko’i).

Last year, the Navajo Nation received approximately \$2.1 billion in ARPA funds from the Biden Administration to respond to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Navajo Nation Council believes every community should benefit from the COVID-19 relief funding by APRA and not just a select few.

“Chapter houses have to open and the Nez-Lizer Administration must listen to the people on how we spend ARPA funds. The Navajo Nation Council must meet its sacred responsibility of holding the Executive Branch accountable and immediately allocate our ARPA money to our 110 chapters. Every community was affected differently and we lost many loved ones who we remember today. After a long 2 years, we can emerge from this pandemic stronger and work together to heal ourselves,” said Madam Chair Eugenia Charles-Newton (Shiprock).

Speaker Seth Damon is working with a coalition of Council Delegates and the Office of Legislative Counsel to introduce new legislation to allocate over \$1.7 billion in ARPA funding by the end of April.

“The earnest effort by the majority 15 members to distribute the funds in a fair manner is to be commended. We cannot waiver from our efforts to be fair and equitable as we have families without domestic water and electricity in every space of Dinétah. In failing to get the 16 or more votes, we are still playing with our Diné peoples ideas. Hope stays on the horizon rather than bringing it into our homes and hogans,” added Chairman Daniel Tso (Littlewater, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake, Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Ojo Encino, Counselor).

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