



The Navajo Nation
Office of the President and Vice President

CONTACTS:

Jared Touchin, Communications Director
(928) 274-4275

Crystalyne Curley, Sr. Public Information Officer
(928) 274-2758

nnopvp.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 22, 2020

Navajo Nation files lawsuit against United States for fair share of federal COVID-19 funding

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Wednesday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer announced that the Navajo Nation has joined 10 other tribes in a lawsuit against the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, regarding federal COVID-19 funding.

Congress allocated \$8 billion to help tribal governments fight the COVID-19 pandemic under the Coronavirus Relief Fund. However, the Secretary of the Treasury intends to fund over 230 Alaska Native Corporations using the funds. Alaska Native Corporations are for-profit corporations organized under state law and are owned by shareholders, including non-Indian shareholders. The 12 regional Alaska Native Corporations alone have over 138,000 shareholders, employ more than 43,000 people worldwide, and generated more than \$10.5 billion in revenues in 2018.

“Allocating funds from the Coronavirus Relief Fund to the Alaska Native Corporations will severely impact the Navajo Nation’s ability to fight COVID-19, and will impact every other tribe as well. While the Secretary has not yet announced a formula to disburse the funds, including the Alaska Native Corporations in the calculation will reduce the funds available for tribal governments. The impact on the Navajo Nation will be significant because of the Nation’s size, population, and the already disparate impact of COVID-19 on the Nation,” said President Nez.

The Navajo Nation previously opposed CARES Act funding for Alaska Native Corporations and demanded answers from the Department of Interior and the Department of Treasury regarding their decision to include them.

“We, along with other federally-recognized tribes, aggressively advocated for tribal funding to be included in the CARES Act and now we must continue fighting to keep what was allocated for us. Alaska Native Corporations are for-profit entities that have billions of dollars in revenue, and can access other funding sources in the CARES Act. The Congressional intent of these funds were to relieve tribal governments. We need provide relief for our tribal communities, not shareholders,” President Nez stated on April 16.

“Our Nation is slowly seeing the benefits of the three COVID-19 bills passed by Congress, but it is not arriving fast enough. We need more rapid testing, health care personnel, PPE’s, ventilators,

and other essential services to adequately address the expected increase of COVID-19 cases on the Navajo Nation. Funds need to be prioritized for federally-recognized tribes, not corporations. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is now warning us of a possible second wave of COVID-19 that may hit the country in the winter season – we need funds and resources to prepare for the long-term,” stated Vice President Lizer.

“The Navajo Nation has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic with over 1,200 positive cases and almost 50 deaths. Our Nation’s government is in dire need of support for the critical medical and community needs of our people. We are literally fighting for dollars to save lives,” said Navajo Nation Attorney General Doreen N. McPaul.

The Navajo Nation is represented by Navajo Nation Assistant Attorney General Paul Spruhan and the Litigation Unit at the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, along with the Rothstein Donatelli law firm as co-counsel.

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