



The Navajo Nation
Office of the President and Vice President

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**Passage of the Navajo Nation CARES Act
legislation is a victory for the Navajo People**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer commend the Navajo Nation Council’s passage of Legislation 0116-20, which creates a path forward for the three branches of government to work together to begin using the \$600 million in CARES Act funds to help the Navajo people and frontline warriors in the fight against COVID-19. The measure was approved on June 19, yet the final resolution has not been delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President as of Thursday – nearly one week later.

“We strongly advocated for the passage of the legislation, which was strongly supported by the Navajo people. Legislation No. 0116-20 received over 2,800 supporting signatures on an online petition and over 100 written supporting comments from the Navajo people, but the resolution has not reached our office for consideration. It’s time to stop playing political games and send the resolution to the Office of the President and Vice President,” said President Nez.

Despite the President’s call for no amendments to Legislation No. 0116-20, the 24th Navajo Nation Council moved ahead to approve six amendments, which altered the intent of the legislation. Some of these amendments changed the original CARES Act expenditure proposal, as the original legislation sought immediate use of \$50 million to assist in reopening the Navajo Nation by purchasing test kits to test all employees prior to having them return to work, purchasing personal protection equipment, cleaning/disinfecting compromised government buildings, and hazard pay for employees working during the pandemic such as CHR’s, senior citizen center staff, first responders, and others. These dollars were removed or altered from the original legislation through Council’s amendments.

Another amendment removed the creation of a three-branch CARES Act “work group,” which would’ve worked together to ensure the vetting of infrastructure projects based on project readiness or construction readiness and expedite the expenditure of funds for these projects. President Nez said that although the “work group” was removed from the legislation, the Executive Branch will move forward with creating a team to package up the expenditure plan.

“It’s clear that the intent of some delegates was to gut the original legislation to make it unworkable so certain delegates could introduce separate bills that propose spending sprees in a piecemeal approach. Since Legislation No. 0116-20 was passed, Legislation No. 0132-20 was introduced and quickly approved and that resolution was quickly sent to the Office of the

President and Vice President. We strongly caution the Council not to treat the \$714 million in CARES Act funding as unrestricted spending for pet projects,” stated President Nez.

It’s important to note that CARES Act money must be used with the strictest application possible since these funds come from a federal source, and do not originate from the Tribe’s General Fund. Proper transparent use of these federal dollars is paramount to the Nez-Lizer Administration. It is also important to have the approvals for the use of the funds to be expeditious.

“I question the actions of the Council to remove language from the bill that would have provided a method to expedite the use of funds, especially when we are faced with a pending deadline in December to use the funds. Instead, they reincorporated the bureaucratic review process and additional requirements related to bidding, which will slow the process of completing projects,” stated Vice President Lizer.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer said there are issues that have to be worked out including the plan for the second round of CARES Act funding totaling approximately \$113 million. Overall, the Navajo Nation received just over \$714 million through the CARES Act.

The Nez-Lizer Administration proposes to expend the CARES Act funding for:

- Expenditure of \$300 Million for water infrastructure and agriculture projects
 - o Adequate plumbing of Navajo homes are necessary to provide clean water for hygiene and household use to combat COVID-19
 - o Agricultural project are needed to promote self-sufficiency and economic development
- Expenditure of \$150 Million for powerline and solar infrastructure
 - o An adequate source of power and energy of Navajo homes are needed to electrify water infrastructure, refrigeration, telephone, telehealth, etc.
- Expenditure of \$50 Million for Broadband/Telecommunication
 - o Adequate telecommunication and broadband systems for Navajo communities are needed to communicate effectively
- Expenditure of \$50 Million for scholarships to assist Navajo students entering the health care and public safety fields
- Expenditure of \$60 Million to help Navajo businesses, and promote economic development
- Expenditure of \$20 Million to address housing needs on the Navajo Nation
- Expend the remaining amount for additional chapter projects and direct aid for the Navajo people

President Nez stated that approximately 3,000 people voiced their support for the expenditure plan put forth by the Nez-Lizer Administration because it is the most comprehensive plan that will benefit all Navajo Nation residents and first responders.

President Nez expressed his gratitude to the Navajo people who took the initiative to voice their support stating, “Your voices have been heard. The voices of our Navajo people is a powerful way to get our leaders to act. Despite some questionable amendments approved by the Council, we are now in a position to move forward in working with Speaker Seth Damon, Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne, and others to utilize the CARES Act funds to help our frontline workers, our Navajo people, and to continue being proactive in preparations for any potential new waves of the coronavirus. We are very thankful to Council Delegates Edmund Yazzie, Edison Wauneka, Herman M Daniels,

Jamie Henio, Kee Allen Begay Jr., Paul Begay, Pernell Halona, and Rickie Nez for the sponsorship of the legislation and for listening to the voices of the Navajo people.”

”It’s critical that the Navajo people hold all of their elected leaders accountable including chapter officials, members of the Navajo Nation Council, and the Office of the President and Vice President. We call upon the Navajo Nation Council members to work in good faith on the remainder of the funding. Our Navajo people are adamant in their desire for us to work together,” stated Vice President Lizer.

The Nez-Lizer Administration thanks the 24th Navajo Nation Council and the Navajo people for supporting Legislation No. 0116-20. President Nez and Vice President Lizer look forward to working with the Nation’s leaders on the remaining CARES Act funds.

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