



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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Nez-Lizer commit to identifying internal funds to address COVID-19 coronavirus after Council votes down emergency funding

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer are stepping up to identify funds within the Executive Branch to protect the health and well-being of the Navajo people against the potential spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, after the 24th Navajo Nation Council failed to approve a \$3 million funding request to provide crucial financial resources health and emergency experts to help fight the spread of the virus.

“It’s disappointing that certain members of the Council are not willing to be proactive and put politics aside, but the Office of the President and Vice President is prepared to step up and identify internal funds within the Executive Branch to ensure immediate needs are met. We will also work together with enterprises and other entities to put together care packages that we can give to our elders, disabled, and others who need assistance. We will continue to move forward and be proactive despite Council’s disappointing vote,” said President Nez.

The Office of the President and Vice President took the initiative to work together with Council Delegate Charlaine Tso and Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr. to develop and introduce the emergency bill that requested \$3 million for the Department of Emergency Management to address all aspects of emergency services including preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery. On Friday, President Nez used the authority granted to the president in Title II of the Navajo Nation Code to call for the special session of the Council to consider the bill.

During Monday’s discussion, several Council members sought amendments to the legislation to redirect the \$3 million to the Nation’s 110 chapters rather than the health professionals and emergency management experts. If the funds were directed to the chapters, the funds would be used at the discretion of chapter officials and not for specialized health and emergency professionals who are specially trained to fight infectious diseases. Recent reports have also shown that chapters have well over \$2 million in unspent emergency funds, and the overall unspent chapter funds are far greater.

“While we respect the role of the chapters, the funds need to be directed to provide resources for the experts and professionals. If the Council approved the legislation, the funds could’ve been

used to purchase additional COVID-19 test kits, respirators, masks, and other necessary equipment,” added President Nez.

Over the last several weeks, President Nez and Vice President Lizer have taken several significant proactive steps to protect the Navajo Nation, including issuing a declaration of a Public Health State of Emergency for the Navajo Nation on March 11, temporarily reducing the number of on-duty non-essential Executive Branch employees for the next three weeks, closing all tribal parks to the public, and calling on schools to temporarily close to prevent the potential spread of the virus.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer also continue to advocate to members of Congress and the White House to ensure that the Navajo Nation secures additional funds from the \$8.3 billion appropriation approved by Congress and President Trump on March 6 to prepare, plan, coordinate, and address the COVID-19 virus. Additionally, the Nez-Lizer Administration is advocating for direct funding from the CDC and FEMA.

The Navajo Nation COVID-19 Preparedness Team, which was established by President Nez and Vice President Lizer on Feb. 28, has provided written and oral reports to the Council’s Naabik’íyáti’ Committee on several occasions to keep the members of Council informed.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer said they greatly appreciate the support from Council Delegate Charlaine Tso, Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr., and several other members of Council who spoke in support of the original intent of the \$3 million funding request for the Department of Emergency Management.

“We thank Congress and the White House for moving quickly to appropriate funds. Thank you to the members of the Council who spoke in support of our health and emergency professionals. Our stance has always been to work together for the benefit of the Navajo people and in this situation, the health of our people is the top priority. We will push forward, continue advocating for other funds and resources, and ensure the delivery of equipment and resources to the elderly, disabled, and those in need,” said Vice President Lizer.

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