



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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Public comments guide Nez-Lizer in approvals and vetoes of resolutions

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Saturday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer took action on eight resolutions after carefully reviewing and evaluating public comments submitted by Navajo citizens, which helped to guide their decision-making. This week, President Nez and Vice President Lizer initiated a public comment period for the eight resolutions – the majority of which were approved by the 24th Navajo Nation Council without an opportunity for the public to submit comments and without any debate from the Council members.

“We thank everyone who submitted their written comments. Each comment was carefully reviewed and helped to guide us in the process. Our comment period allowed the Navajo people the opportunity to express their support, disapproval, or other concerns before we make a decision on the resolutions that were rushed through the legislative process, without affording any public input, and approved without debate,” said President Nez.

CAP-31-20 and CAP-32-20

President Nez and Vice President Lizer approved Resolutions CAP-31-20 and CAP-32-20, requesting the Governors of New Mexico and Utah to close stores selling alcoholic beverages during the COVID-19 pandemic. In early April, President Nez and Vice President Lizer sent letters to the two Governors requesting support for the temporarily stopping alcohol sales to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They thank the Navajo Nation Council for voicing their support as well.

CAP-25-20

President Nez and Vice President Lizer line-item vetoed a request for \$121,000 for the Office of the Speaker, which would have waived provisions in the Appropriations Act, for the purchase of cellphone “hot spot” equipment for members of the Council, purchasing of teleconferencing phones/equipment, media outreach, and Personal Protective Equipment for legislative programs.

One comment submitted by a member of the Navajo Nation stated, “I do not support this resolution. They can seek funding already budgeted within their program.” President Nez and Vice President Lizer acknowledge that COVID-19 has affected each branch of government. However, as previously stated, all leaders of the Navajo Nation must continually be mindful of appropriated funds and ensure we use the funds in a prudent manner. They also mentioned that the Legislative Branch also received \$1.5 million in carryover funds that can be used and request for reimbursements from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

“The Navajo Department of Health is available to provide protective gear to the Legislative Branch, the Navajo Department of Justice is available to help with connecting Delegates and staff to meetings, and the Health Command Operations Center’s public information staff is available to assist with media outreach. This will ensure all our expenditures are recorded and submitted for reimbursement to the Federal Emergency Management Agency,” President Nez and Vice President Lizer stated.

CAP-22-20

In their line-item veto message for Resolution CAP-22-20 which sought the approval of \$250,000 for burial assistance, President Nez and Vice President Lizer stated that the Navajo Nation currently has \$750,000 in direct funding and grants available for burial assistance and that the \$250,000 should be saved for other needs that may come up down the road. Before this legislation was introduced, President Nez directed a portion of funds from a previous \$4 million appropriation and funds from the Office of the President and Vice President to be used for burial assistance.

“We care very much for every family who lost a loved one, who cannot properly grieve for their loss, and who cannot gather to share stories of the life now missing from the family. We pray for the spouses, the children, mothers and fathers, relatives, and close friends who are grieving. We have already set aside three times the amount of funds requested through this legislation. At this time, we have enough funding resources to help our people,” said President Nez.

CAP-24-20

In their veto of Resolution CAP-24-20, which sought to establish the Navajo Nation COVID-19 response donation fund to house financial donations to assist in the fight against COVID-19 on the Navajo Nation – this has already been established through the Navajo Health Command Operations Center. The legislation also sought to use donated funds from the general public to replenish tribal funds that were already appropriated to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

One public comment regarding the replenishment of tribal funds, submitted by Big Mountain resident Percy Deal stated, “It has all the appearance of dishonesty and manipulation of donated funds. Donators in their thoughtful gracious heart wanted to provide additional resources to the Nation to fight this pandemic virus not replace or replenish tribal funds. We need all the resources tribal, federal and donation to fight this disease. Council should be expressing their gratitude of appreciation to these donators. I urge you to veto this legislation.”

Regarding donations from the general public, President Nez and Vice President Lizer stated, “Much of that support is given with the express purpose of using the funds for masks and gloves for our frontline workers, health providers, and law enforcement. We cannot and should not divert these dollars to replenish our General Fund; this is not the purpose of the charitable donations. We must respect the giving and respect the condition of its purpose otherwise we will run contrary to standard rules and regulations on charitable giving.”

CAP-28-20

In their veto message for Resolution CAP-28-20, which sought the temporary authorization and approving attendance at Farm Board, Land Board, and District Grazing Committee meetings

through telecommunication methods, President Nez and Vice President Lizer noted that the legislation was designated as an “emergency legislation” and approved by the Council without any debate and without any opportunity for the Navajo people to submit comments. They also expressed concerns that using teleconferencing would severely limit or prohibit public participation and transparency when it comes to the actions of the committees.

“Our People have unresolved issues and allowing a telephonic meeting for these boards and committees is a disservice to our people. Without a debate, our people have no information on the need for approving telephone or video conferencing meetings and this method of meeting may shut out our people from discussions that affect their daily lives,” wrote President Nez.

CAP-26-20

President Nez and Vice President Lizer also vetoed Resolution CAP-26-20, which sought to allow Diné College and Navajo Technical University to conduct meetings through telecommunication methods and a waiver of provisions requiring a physical presence at Board of Regents meetings.

“While the intent of the resolution is admirable, we do not find a clear reason for the emergency nature of waiving the provision of physical presence for a meeting of the Board of Regents. Perhaps if there was a debate on the legislation, we would see the importance and reasoning behind the request.”

They added, “Each entity has capable leadership and staff to make plans during this time. Additionally, Navajo Technical University is currently authorized to meet in a special meeting to address exigent circumstances. These issues may have come up in a debate along with other issues of transparency in Board decisions and discussions on plans to re-open schools for our students. We cannot support CAP-26-20, but there are available options for Diné College and Navajo Technical University under the Public Health Emergency Orders as they relate to essential business. We encourage a review of the Orders,” wrote President Nez and Vice President Lizer.

CAP-30-20

In their veto message for Resolution CAP-30-20, which sought to require businesses on the Navajo Nation to require wearing of masks or face covering while in the place of business to prevent COVID-19, President Nez and Vice President Lizer thanked the Council for supporting measures to protect the Navajo people, however, the legislation passed by the Council cited incorrect statutes within Navajo Nation laws. In addition, Public Health Emergency Order 2020-007 issued on April 17, already requires all individuals on the Navajo Nation to wear protective masks in public to help prevent the further spread of COVID-19.

President Nez and Vice President Lizer encourage all Navajo citizens to voice their support for the veto actions taken for the interest of the Navajo Nation. Please send an e-mail message to 24thNNC@navajo-nsn.gov requesting the Navajo Nation Council to uphold the veto actions.

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