



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

June 18, 2021

**President Nez requests special session to consider reopening
roads for visitors to allow parks to reopen at 50% capacity**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer are requesting the 24th Navajo Nation Council to hold a special session to consider rescinding Resolution CMA-16-20, which was approved by the Council in March 2020 and closed all Navajo Nation roads to visitors and tourists. Rescinding the resolution will allow the Navajo Department of Health to proceed with issuing a new public health emergency order to reopen Navajo Nation parks at 50-percent capacity, in accordance with gating measures from the Department of Health.

The request for the special session was issued in a letter addressed to Speaker Seth Damon on Friday, in which President Nez and Vice President Lizer outlined their reasons for vetoing Resolution CJN-33-21, which was approved by the Council on June 3 to allow parks to reopen at 100-percent capacity despite growing concerns regarding overcrowding at many national parks across the country and mounting concerns over the growing spread of the Delta variant.

“The health and safety of our Navajo people has been the number one priority throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the data and recommendations of our public health experts, we feel that opening parks to everyone at 50-percent capacity is feasible. That will allow us to monitor the impacts of reopening parks at limited capacity and consider gradually increasing that capacity level from there. We have to be very careful because we still have variants in our communities. If we allow visitors into our Nation at 100-percent, we don’t know where they are coming from and if they are fully vaccinated, but our mask mandate will help to keep people safe. By reopening through a new public health order, it allows our public health experts to continue the mask mandate for all Navajo Nation residents and visitors. It will be incumbent upon the park owners and operators to ensure that all park visitors, tourists, and employees adhere to all public health orders that are in effect and provide testing and other precautionary measures for workers,” said President Nez.

This week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention designated the COVID-19 Delta strain, also known as B.1.617.2, as a ‘variant of concern’ due to its growing spread around the world and in the United States. Researchers suggest that the Delta variant, which was first identified in the country of India, is even more transmissible and may cause more severe illness than other

variants. Currently, the Navajo Nation has no confirmed cases of the Delta variant, but it has been identified in many areas including the city of Tucson, Ariz.

President Nez also noted that in some cases, people who caught the virus are dealing with the long-term physical and mental health effects and are often referred to as “long haulers” due to the lengthy recovery time and lingering health conditions. Vaccination rates are high on the Navajo Nation, but children 11 years and under are not yet vaccinated because the Federal Drug Administration has yet to authorize a vaccine for younger children. He added that meeting a 70-percent herd immunity level will allow the Navajo Nation to reopen more.

In response to concerns from Navajo business owners who are requesting parks to reopen to draw in tourists, President Nez said that the 50-percent capacity level is a reasonable compromise that will be revisited based on the current “Yellow Status” gating criteria and measures from the Navajo Department of Health. They also stated that they would support business relief assistance under the American Rescue Plan Act as another option to help Navajo business owners to recover from the economic impacts caused by the pandemic.

“We understand the struggles and challenges that Navajo business owners are facing because of the pandemic. With this approach and if we receive the support of the Council to rescind CMA-16-20, then we take measured steps to reopen parks to our people and visitors. This could happen in the next few days if our request for a special session is moved forward. We know the Council members have the best intentions for our people and businesses and we ask for their support of this proposal,” said Vice President Lizer.

On Friday, the Navajo Department of Health issued Public Health Emergency Order No. 2021-012 lifting the Navajo Nation’s stay-at-home order and replacing it with a safer-at-home order. It also allows social gatherings of 25 or fewer people, in-person trainings and meetings of 25 or fewer people, traditional ceremonies of 25 or fewer people, outdoor recreational events of 25 or fewer people, churches and other houses of worship at limited capacity, and drive-thru gatherings up to 100 vehicles. Face masks are required for all gatherings, whether fully vaccinated or not.

###

For the latest news from the Office of the President and Vice President, please visit <http://www.opvp.navajo-nsn.gov/> or find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.