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## **President Nez continues push for ARPA funding for water, electricity, housing, and other long-term improvements**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — On Monday, the Navajo Nation Council voted down Legislation No. 0257-21, which originally proposed a comprehensive plan developed by technical experts to allocate nearly \$1 billion in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to address water, electricity, broadband, housing, and other need-based infrastructure needs. Unfortunately, several Council members voted in favor of an amendment on March 25 that would have divided the \$1 billion “equally” among the 24 members to use at their discretion, according to the sponsor of the amendment.

In July of last year, the Council approved Resolution CJY-41-21 by a vote of 21 supporting and one opposing, establishing the framework for how ARPA expenditure plans are to be evaluated and determined eligible to move through the approval process. The Council held numerous work sessions to hear from chapters, former leaders, enterprises, and technical experts regarding the use of ARPA funds. The Office of the President and Vice President visited communities and met with chapter officials, agency councils, and Council members to receive their ARPA priorities. The Division of Community Development also created an online portal in April 2021 for chapters to submit projects that were then vetted by the Department of Justice to ensure compliance with federal guidelines. Over 550 projects were received and evaluated.

“Resolution CJY-41-21 has accountability measures in place that require the Department of Justice to review each proposal to determine whether or not they meet the federal guidelines from the U.S. Treasury. The Council agreed to these provisions last July, but unfortunately, on March 25, there was a mis-guided attempt to deviate from the agreed upon process and to take the procedure entirely out of the hands of the technical experts, the majority of whom are Navajo professionals, and placed it in the hands of the delegates. Thankfully, we had a group of delegates who understood that the proposed funding formula within the amendment was unfair to remote communities and those most in need of infrastructure development and that it would actually give certain delegates much greater funding than others,” said President Nez.

The original ARPA legislation was carefully developed by technical experts, the majority of whom are Navajo professionals, who worked closely with the Legislative Branch and chapters to propose funding for waterlines, electrical lines, housing, broadband, and bathroom additions for elders

and many families on a need-basis. It was believed that all concerns were expressed and consensus was reached by the stakeholders.

During Monday's special session, Council Delegate Mark Freeland stated that the amendment approved on March 25 would have reduced funding for the most rural communities that he represents by more than \$4 million and eliminated electrical powerline and house wiring projects for families living in the most remote communities, such as Nageezi, N.M., where many residents live without water and power.

Delegate Freeland also noted that all Council members were provided with a great amount of information that included project listings that he used to calculate the funding amounts that his district would receive, which ultimately demonstrated that the amendment would not distribute funds equally among the delegates, and would have left remote communities with much less funding. Amendment two would have given certain communities such as Shiprock, N.M. the greatest amount of funding and the lowest amount for several communities within Council Delegate Daniel Tso's district.

"Had the legislation been approved without the amendments, we'd be ready to begin construction on projects within days to get water, electricity, and other basic necessities to our people, but now we will likely miss at least a portion of the current construction season. Unfortunately, the proposal that was carefully developed by the technical experts, not me personally, over the course of several months was undone within a matter of a couple hours by a handful of council delegates who proposed a spending free for all," said President Nez.

On March 25, the Naabik'iyáti Committee met at Twin Arrows Navajo Casino Resort and repeatedly went off public record, ended the livestream of the public meeting, and held discussions behind closed doors to discuss the amendment to divide the \$1 billion in funding among the 24 delegates. Chapter and agency council leaders were also in attendance requesting the Council to approve the legislation without the amendments, and also had supporting resolutions in hand.

"We understand that delegates were put under extreme pressure, behind closed doors, to conform to the amendment. At no time did the Executive Branch concur with the amendment, which was misrepresented as an equal distribution and several Council members repeatedly referred to their proposal as a 'discretionary fund' during the discussions. The misguided amendment was not vetted in accordance with Resolution CJY-41-21, it proved to be an unequal distribution instead, and it would've hurt the most remote communities the most. We appreciate the nine delegates who opposed this ill-guided amendment, and the eight who had the opportunity to vote against it with the final vote on the legislation," President Nez stated.

He added, "Nearly one year has passed since the Navajo Nation received the first allocation of ARPA funds and the Navajo people are tired of waiting for the implementation of the funds. So far, we've worked together with the Council to approve Hardship Assistance for our people and now we must work together efficiently and show the Navajo people that we can finalize a comprehensive plan, not one that is dictated at the discretion of delegates, that will provide long-term infrastructure needs. Our technical experts are working on a revised plan that will be presented soon and we stand ready to work together to reach a compromise."

President Nez expressed his gratitude to the nine delegates who voted against the amendment to divide the \$1 billion equally including Paul Begay, Mark Freeland, Herman Daniels, Raymond Smith, Jr., Wilson Stewart, Jr., Edison Wauneka, Pernel Halona, Edmund Yazzie, and Jimmy Yellowhair.

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