



## Council commends President Nez for signing Chapter quorum legislation, urges action on Chapter emergency funding

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**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council voiced their support of President Jonathan Nez’s signing of emergency legislation approved by Council last Friday that temporarily reduces chapter meeting quorum requirements. The Council passed the legislation to discourage large crowds and to enable elected chapter officials to act on official business relating to COVID-19 response efforts. At the same time, council delegates urged President Nez to sign another approved emergency legislation into law that replenishes chapter government emergency funding line-items to \$25,000.

“The Navajo Nation Council recognizes our local chapter leaders as essential partners in ending the spread of COVID-19,” said Speaker Seth Damon.

Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CMA-09-20 utilized the Navajo Nation Council’s authority to pre-empt chapter authority along with the Nation’s Emergency Declaration to approve a sixty-day authorization for chapters to conduct official business with three registered chapter members. The approval is limited to chapter business directly related to COVID-19, the Navajo Nation Emergency Declaration and the associated budget authorization and approvals. President Nez signed the resolution into law Mar. 26 and notified Speaker Damon the same day.

“I thank President Nez for signing this legislation into law,” said Council Delegate Vince James, who sponsored CMA-09-20. “What this does for chapter governments is it allows them to use the Emergency Declaration to declare a chapter emergency, then make the necessary amendments to their chapter emergency budgets that will help them better respond to COVID-19.”

Nearly all current chapter emergency budget line-items have approved budgets attached to them that allocate funds to weather-related emergencies. CMA-09-20 allows those allocations to be revised and then resubmitted to the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development for review and approval. The review by the central government provides a level of accountability as chapters move to respond to COVID-19.

In a letter attached to the resolution, President Nez said, “In implementing the preventative measures announced by many agencies, including our own Department of Health and Health Command Operations Center, regarding social distancing and meetings of no more than 10 people, we must think of our local government operation and the important work they do for their community.” President Nez continued to thank Speaker Damon and the 24th Navajo Nation Council.

A separate measure, Legislation No. 0063-30, was approved by Council on Friday. That legislation focused on proactively replenishing the emergency fund line-items of the Navajo Nation’s 110 local chapter governments. The measure would further allow local leaders to proceed with preparation activities in confidence that funds would be ready before any crisis reaches the community.

A total of \$1,370,364.00 in supplemental funding was approved in that legislation from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund Balance by the central government. The funding will come from the excess balance and will bring each chapter’s emergency fund balance to \$25,000. Council passed the chapter funding legislation with the necessary 16 votes in favor.

Over the past few weeks, council delegates have been actively meeting with their representative chapter leaders through teleconferencing, text messaging, small meetings and through email to keep their communities updated. Delegates reported to the Office of the Speaker that their community leaders and partnering organizations have already begun working together to ensure food, water, solid waste and important information is coordinated properly.

In the Western Navajo Agency, Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr. said Wednesday that Coconino County Supervisor Jim Parks worked with local leaders to coordinate the delivery of blockades that discouraged tourist traffic to Grand Falls in Leupp Chapter.

Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton assisted with wood hauling projects for needy families over the past week as overnight lows reached freezing temperatures. Delegate Charlene Tso also took part in delivering wood donations to elders and families to ensure they did not need to leave their homes during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Throughout their individual interactions with local leaders and community members, council delegates are exercising the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines to reduce the risk of exposure. Most delegates must continue their coordination activities in-person because many Navajo chapter communities lack internet or phone access. To help relieve strained Navajo Nation programs and to give chapter governments necessary resources to provide for community members essential needs, the Council voted to approve Legislation No. 0063-20.

According to the Navajo Nation Code, President Nez has ten days to act on the legislation. If the supplemental funding is approved, chapters will be allowed to expend funds only on goods and services not available through the Navajo Nation government, federal agencies or state agencies. Chapters would be required to keep receipts and justifications for each expenditure as an accountability measure. Purchases that don't meet these criteria will be disallowed.

"With guidance from the central government, preventive training, 'no-contact' measures and the resources allocated to chapters through this emergency declaration, the Nation's chances at pushing back COVID-19 will be greatly improved," said Speaker Damon.

Local chapter emergency funding line-items are subject to the same financial policies as the central government. To improve accountability, the legislation included a provision that all purchases must have receipts and justifications for each must be reported. The replenished amounts must be used by chapters in a manner that relates directly to COVID-19 public health response efforts.

The Navajo Nation Council noted Congress' third COVID-19 funding package of \$2 trillion includes \$8 billion in tribal relief funding. "As leaders, this is a clear signal that governments must do everything they can to reverse the spread of COVID-19," said Speaker Damon.

As of Thursday, the Navajo Nation was under a "Stay at Home Order." COVID-19 is a highly infectious respiratory illness that presents symptoms of fever, cough and shortness of breath. The Navajo Nation reported 71 confirmed cases of COVID-19 from local, state and federal health care agencies. More information is at the Navajo Department of Health website at <http://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/>. The Navajo Health Command Operations Center may also be contacted at phone number (928) 871-7014.

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