



Navajo Nation Council urges President Nez to sign Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act into law

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council urged President Jonathan Nez to sign the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act into law. The Council passed the Act at a special session held May 15, 2020 to begin the process of allocating more than \$600 million in federal coronavirus relief funding. President Nez may choose to sign the Act into law or issue a presidential veto.

“The Navajo Nation Council has taken into consideration hundreds of public comments in passing the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act,” said Speaker Seth Damon. “The Navajo People and our partners await the president’s action on Council’s resolution.”

The Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act allocates the entire amount of more than \$600 million towards coronavirus relief and response projects. Any governmental or non-governmental entity can then propose streamlined expenditure plans for immediate COVID-19 response needs.

“In the spirit of cooperation and collaboration, we encourage President Nez to sign the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act because it will greatly increase opportunities for our People and improve basic livelihoods. The Act opens the door to essential needs, such as basic infrastructure, waterline hookups and electrical lines,” said Council Delegate Mark Freeland. “This is very critical.”

Since passing the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act, the Council began holding daily work sessions with the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority, Navajo Area Indian Health Service, Department of Water Resources, Division of Economic Development and others. Each agency and program has presented proposals to the Council for the expenditure of the more than \$600 million in federal CARES Act funding.

“Every minute that passes without a signature has a tenfold impact on the uncertainty confronting our people and our nation. Our programs and people need this funding to make it through this crisis and to move forward in harmony,” said Council Delegate Carl Slater.

The Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act focuses on overhauling the Navajo Nation’s procurement process to eliminate administrative ‘red-tape.’ Without the changes, each project receiving federal CARES Act funding would be required to go through the ‘164’ internal budget and accountability process, which can exceed 20 approval and review steps. The Council approved new procurement rules for the CARES funds replacing existing prohibitive policies that would hinder expending the entire amount by Dec. 30.

“The Council also voted to ensure each partner, whether they’re non-profits, hospitals, businesses or even Navajo Nation programs, has the templates and administrative support to hit the ground running. While leadership has been working constantly with members of Congress to change the federal CARES Act, we must proceed under the current deadline of Dec. 30 to spend this money,” said Speaker Damon.

The Council resolution was delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President last week after amendments were incorporated into the finalized legislation. Once received, the president has 10 days to act on the resolution by either enacting the resolution into law or issuing a presidential veto.

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