



Navajo Nation Council approves \$650 million in immediate expenditures for coronavirus pandemic mitigation and relief

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council approved Friday, Jul. 31, a coronavirus (COVID-19) relief bill totaling \$650,980,101 in Navajo Nation CARES Funding for more than \$75 million in immediate support for the Navajo Nation Department of Health, \$130 million for water projects, \$44 million for power line projects, \$68 million for broadband internet projects and a remaining \$330 million for expenditures that mitigate the effects of the ongoing pandemic on the Navajo Nation.

“On behalf of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, I am honored to present this historic \$650 million expenditure package that provides for the most comprehensive immediate relief our Navajo People have ever received,” said Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh). “Months of constant effort by council delegates, division directors, program managers, local Chapter leaders and our expert partners has gone into this legislation. This was a collective effort that brought to the surface all the underlying, systemic challenges, like lack of running water and access to electricity, that are common throughout the Navajo Nation. This legislation begins to directly address those obstacles we face, as Navajo People, in protecting the health of our own homes and communities.”

“Our hope, as Navajo leaders, is for the healing of our relatives, our friends, and our People,” said Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tsé’áłnáozt’íí, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gádii’ahí/Tó Ko’i), sponsor of Legislation No. 0144-20. “This comprehensive package includes the most essential needs facing the Navajo People that have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. These past months have been some of the hardest we have faced as a Nation. But just like our ancestors, we will get through this moment together, and we will look back and see the strength it took to move forward.”

Legislation No. 0144-20 was unanimously approved Jul. 31 by the 24th Navajo Nation Council by a vote of 20 in favor and 0 opposed. After earlier amendments and approvals of the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC), the Resources and Development Committee (RDC), the Budget and Finance Committee (BFC) and the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee, Legislation No. 0144-20 gained nine amendments over a two-day special session of the Navajo Nation Council held Jul. 30-31.

Some of the approved amendments to Legislation No. 0144-20 include \$9,633,863 to support the Judicial Branch of the Navajo Nation, \$75,836,016 to support the Navajo Nation Department of Health, \$60,000,000 to support Navajo businesses and artisans through the Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development, \$69,295,910 to support Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) and Native Renewables residential solar electricity system installations and \$33,423,914 to support housing projects in each Navajo Nation chapter.

“With each successive amendment and with the discussions brought forward by President Nez and Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne, this legislation has become a stronger representation of the true needs of the Navajo People,” said Council Delegate Carl Roessel Slater (Round Rock, Tséch’izhí, Rock Point, Lukachugai, Tsaile-Wheatfields), co-sponsor of Legislation No. 0144-20. “With nearly three months of work sessions,

Naabik'iyáti' Committee meetings, and hundreds of public comments and input, this plan puts forward a strong position in providing immediate economic relief and strong public health protections for our Nation.”

The approved expenditures for water projects total \$130,005,095. These include:

- Navajo Nation Department of Water Resources: \$87,485,860;
- NTUA Wastewater Projects: \$18,635,000;
- Whitehorse Lake–Sand Springs Water Supply Pipeline: \$937,712;
- NTUA Cistern Systems: \$20,946,523;
- To'hajilee-Albuquerque Water Supply Line: \$2,000,000.

The approved expenditures for power line projects total \$44,220,832. These include:

- NTUA Power Line Projects: \$13,897,562;
- NTUA Electrical Grid Capacity Development Projects: \$24,747,269;
- Jemez Mountain Electric Cooperative Projects: \$163,723;
- Continental Divide Electric Cooperative Projects: \$1,062,278;
- Ramah-Pine Hill Campus Electric Projects: \$3,500,000;
- Sand Springs South Electric Project: \$850,000.

The approved expenditures for broadband telecommunications projects total \$68,224,989. These include:

- NTUA Wireless Projects: \$32,848,207;
- Navajo Nation Department of Information Technology Projects: \$3,400,000;
- Navajo Technical University (NTU) Broadband Development Team: \$470,000;
- NTU Campus Support Projects: \$7,634,533;
- Native Broadcast Enterprise Support: \$393,670;
- Diné College Campus Support: \$8,478,579;
- Non-tribal owned telecommunication carriers support: \$15,000,000.

Other approved expenditures include:

- Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency Solid Waste Support Funding: \$23,973,000;
- Navajo Nation Payroll Reimbursement and Extended Support Funding: \$90,928,047;
- Hardships Assistance: \$1,000;
- Navajo Nation Gaming Enterprise Expenditure Plan: \$24,600,000;
- Navajo Nation Parks and Recreation: \$828,637;
- Navajo Nation Office of the Controller Quality Assurance Funding: \$20,008,798.

All expenditures authorized by the Navajo Nation Council through Legislation No. 0144-20 total \$650,980,101.

The project expenditures were authorized from the Navajo Nation CARES Fund, which is comprised of \$714,189,631 that was received by the Navajo Nation from the federal CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund. The Navajo Nation CARES Fund was previously established through Resolution No. CMY-44-20, as line-item vetoed by the Navajo Nation President.

The Navajo Nation Council authorized prior expenditures totaling \$62,059,530 through Resolution Nos. CJN-46-20 and CJN-47-20, as line-item vetoed by the Navajo Nation President. Those expenditures are comprised of:

- \$21 million for hazard/special duty pay for front-line responders and essential personnel;
- \$10 million for personal protective equipment (PPE);
- \$10 million for disinfection of public offices;

- \$10 million for care packages of food, water and basic necessities;
- \$2 million to enable tele-work capability for government employees;
- \$3.5 million for bathroom additions and upgrades;
- \$3 million in assistance for Public Law 93-638 healthcare facilities on the Navajo Nation;
- \$2,559,530.10 to improve procurement processing of Navajo Nation CARES Fund expenditures.

In total, the Navajo Nation Council has authorized \$713,039,631 in Navajo Nation CARES Fund expenditures. An unallocated amount of \$1,150,000 remains.

“Every council delegate reached beyond their individual regions and came together to understand each other and the Navajo Nation’s own experts and partners,” said Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta), co-sponsor of Legislation No. 0144-20. “With our traditional teachings in mind, we face the coronavirus and learn the importance of our old way of life. *Diné bina’nítin*, our Navajo teachings, tell us about the reverence and respect for all living things that we are beginning to rediscover and follow again. This vote is the voice of the Navajo People, and it will go a very long way in combating the coronavirus and anything that might threaten us in the future.”

Overall, the Navajo Nation Council deliberated for more than 28 hours on the Council floor on Legislation No. 0144-20. The sessions were held telephonically with Speaker Damon presiding from the Navajo Nation Council Chamber in Window Rock. Prior to the legislation, the Naabik’iyáti’ Committee and council delegates conducted more than a dozen public work sessions and follow-up meetings spanning hundreds of hours.

The discussions resulted in the classification of many long-term projects that require more time beyond the federal deadline to expend CARES Act funds. Any extension from Congress would result in those projects gaining priority for future Navajo Nation CARES Fund authorized expenditures.

In accordance with the federal CARES Act and U.S. Treasury guidelines, the Navajo Nation Council considered each expenditure a necessary cost in addressing the coronavirus pandemic.

From the beginning of the pandemic, deliberations of the 24th Navajo Nation Council have been streamed publicly online and through social media. Archived videos can be found on the Navajo Nation Council’s Vimeo, Youtube and Facebook websites.

Upon the final certification of Legislation No. 0144-20 by Speaker Damon, the resolution will be delivered to the Office of the President and Vice President for signature and enactment, regular veto, or line-item veto. The resolution automatically becomes Navajo Nation law after ten days of receiving it and if no action was taken.

Pending the final certification of the resolution, authorized amounts listed are subject to minor corrections through the administrative quality control process carried out by the Office of Legislative Services.

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