



Navajo Nation Council Resolution CJY-67-20 broadband and telecommunications expenditures signed into law for \$53,224,989

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — In response to the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the 24th Navajo Nation Council approved more than \$68 million in immediate expenditures for broadband projects on the Navajo Nation. Portions of that approved funding were line-item vetoed by Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez on Sunday, resulting in a total \$53,224,989 in approved expenditures.

“The 24th Navajo Nation Council understood, from the beginning, that the cost of a widespread broadband expenditure plan was necessary to protect and preserve the health and wellbeing of the Navajo People,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh). “We aim to reduce the distance the average Navajo person travels in order to connect to the nearest wifi network or even to catch a reliable cell-signal. These are important to ensuring the Navajo People have access to remote telehealth services, distance-learning opportunities, remote working, and so many more critical components of maintaining safety during this pandemic.”

The resolution, which was introduced as Legislation No. 0144-20 by Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse’alnaozt’i’i, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To’Koi), included the broadband-telecommunications projects to ensure that Navajo communities and households have wireless connectivity to support public access to vital public safety, telehealth, education and commerce services. The Navajo Nation Department of Information Technology is charged with administering all funds authorized by the broadband-telecommunications expenditure plan, including funds to be paid to non-governmental entities.

The approved expenditures for broadband-telecommunications projects total \$53,224,989. These include:

- \$32,848,207 for NTUA Wireless projects, including communication towers, fiber connections to schools, towers and hospitals, coverage buildouts, wifi hotspots and other upgrades;
- \$3.4 million for Navajo Nation Department of Information Technology projects, including upgrades to the Navajo Nation network, and more;
- \$470,000 for the Navajo Technical University (NTU) Broadband Development Team to identify deficiencies and opportunities for broadband on the Navajo Nation;
- \$7,634,533 for NTU campus support initiatives to support the costs of opening up for Navajo students and building out connectivity to improve e-learning access, and more;
- \$393,670 for the Native Broadcast Enterprise to improve its radio broadcast capacity and coverage for emergency broadcasts, and more; and
- \$8,478,579 to support Diné College in its development of a distance learning environment for Navajo students.

“In the Navajo way, we see this broadband expenditure plan as a new weapon against the coronavirus,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain). “With this approved funding, we can finally hope that when a Navajo person living on the Navajo Nation dials for emergency services, that they will have that access in a reliable manner for the

first time. That is one of the main reasons we have pushed hard to make sure this funding addresses those public health and safety needs during this pandemic.”

Delegate Begay stressed the importance of providing internet access for those who must remain in the Navajo Nation for school and online higher education courses.

“On behalf of students and those lacking internet access, I want to thank Mr. Christopher Becenti with the Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission for guiding the development of these proposals. Improving access is the first step in making sure our students continue to make progress in their studies,” said Delegate Begay.

“This allocation of CARES Funding for broadband and telecommunications projects to support our Navajo students is one of the most important immediate actions approved by the Navajo Nation Council,” said Council Delegate Mark Freeland (Becenti, Lake Valley, Nahodishgish, Standing Rock, Whiterock, Huerfano, Nageezi, Crownpoint). “We have such a unique opportunity to advance access to quality education on the Navajo Nation while, at the same time, protecting the Navajo People from further spread of the coronavirus.”

\$15 million for non-tribally owned telecommunication carriers who maintain networks on the Navajo Nation and serve Navajo customers was line-item vetoed by President Nez.

President Nez returned Resolution No. CJY-67-20 with partial line-item vetoes on the last day of the 10-day action period following certification by the Speaker of the Navajo Nation. In total \$475,666,192 was approved and signed into law through CJY-67-20. The resolution is publicly accessible on the Navajo Nation Council’s legislative tracking system, Diné Bibeeshaz’áanii Binaaltsoos (DiBB): <http://dibb.nnols.org>.

“Thank you to the 24th Navajo Nation Council for moving the legislation through the process with all the hard work put in by Delegates and Legislative Staff,” said President Nez in a letter to Speaker Damon.

Executive Branch programs will now be responsible for administering Navajo Nation CARES Funded projects for both Navajo Nation departments and for projects involving non-governmental organizations.

CJY-67-20 was sponsored by Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty and co-sponsored by Council Delegates Nathaniel Brown and Carl Roessel Slater in addition to Speaker Seth Damon.

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