



## Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act approved by Navajo Nation Council

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**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — The 24th Navajo Nation Council voted to approve the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act on Friday by a vote of 19 in favor, 4 opposed with Speaker Not Voting. The Act is a monumental shift in the Navajo Nation’s budgeting and procurement policies that lay the groundwork for allocating the more than \$600 million in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stimulus (CARES) Act funding received by the Nation last week. The resolution of the Council will now be presented to Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez for his signature to make the Act law.

“The action taken by the Navajo Nation Council to pass the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act will save countless lives,” said 24th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon. “In only one week, the Council has approved an entirely streamlined system for spending more than \$600 million for the benefit of the Navajo People. I can say with total confidence that this is the progress the Navajo People have been seeking.”

The Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act replaces the current Navajo Nation procurement process with a set of procedures that expedite payments from Navajo Nation accounts. The existing Navajo Nation procurement process has been identified as the main bottleneck in spending the entire \$600 million.

Notably, the approved Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act allows both Navajo Nation and non-Navajo Nation government entities to be involved in the allocation of coronavirus relief funding for the immediate and long-term needs of the Navajo People.

“This first step addresses the many concerns presented by the Navajo public when it comes to the ‘red-tape’ that Navajo people presented to the Council through the public commenting period,” said Speaker Damon. “As we know, hundred of Navajo citizens and organizations have submitted comments to the Navajo Nation Council through the official commenting process, and not one spoke against the passage of the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act. We call on President Nez to immediately sign the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act into law.”

Speaker Damon noted that during the branch leadership meeting between President Nez, Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne, and himself a week ago, President Nez expressed positive views of Legislation No. 0115-20. “This is the moment the Navajo People have been looking to — a true gesture of unity between Navajo leaders in effort to stop the coronavirus,” said Speaker Damon.

“The Navajo Nation CARES Act is about the Diné people,” said Speaker Damon, who sponsored Legislation No. 0115-20. He noted that the Navajo Nation Council prepared legislation weeks in advance of the federal funding. The finalized legislation was introduced into the legislative process only one day after the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller confirmed \$600 million was deposited into the Navajo Nation’s account. “The Navajo People understand that we cannot wait another day to begin using this money in our efforts,” said Speaker Damon.

Speaker Damon noted that the burden of deciding whether critical Council resolutions become law is a great task and urged President Nez to avoid further delay by signing the Council resolution.

The approved Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act, which has been considered already by the Law and Order, Budget and Finance, and Naabik'iyáti' Committees, has been refined through amendments made by council delegates during public committee meetings addressing the legislation. Additionally, hundreds of public comments were submitted during the public comment period that reinforce the Council's decision to pass the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act.

"As elected legislators, we are doing our duty. We are going through the process," said Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown during the discussion on the Navajo Nation CARES Act Fund legislation. In sharing his thoughts, Delegate Brown emphasized that council delegates represent the voice of families in local Navajo communities, like the family of a recently deceased relative that was lost to COVID-19. "I know all these families very well, and we all do. We represent our people, and it's heartbreaking," said Delegate Brown.

Speaker Damon continued, "The Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act the Navajo Nation Council approved is about the future health and wellbeing of our relatives and families across the Navajo Nation. As the Council expressed during the debate on this important bill, the immediate needs and opportunities before us can only be accomplished through working together."

The Office of the President and Vice President have ten days to act on the Navajo Nation CARES Fund Act resolution passed by the Navajo Nation Council. In accordance with Title 2 of the Navajo Nation Code, the President of the Navajo Nation may choose to enact the law or issue a veto on the resolution.

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