



Naabik'iyáti' Committee readies CARES Fund expenditures for water, powerline, broadband telecommunication and solar projects

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 28, 2020

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Naabik'iyáti' Committee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council considered Legislation No. 0144-20 that would approve and adopt the Navajo Nation CARES Fund expenditure plans for water projects, powerline projects, and broadband-telecommunication projects. Council delegates began consideration of the expenditure plans during a 4-day series of meetings that began on Jul. 16.

As of June 30, the Navajo Nation has received over \$714 million from the federal CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund. The Navajo Nation CARES Fund was established through Navajo Nation Resolution No. CMY-44-20 in which funds shall only be used for expenditures incurred resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and accumulated expenses from Mar. 1 through Dec. 30.

“During the four days we spent discussing this legislation, my colleagues and I have worked diligently around the clock to strengthen the language and have made additions that are critical to addressing the immediate public health needs of our Nation. As we prepare this legislation for Council consideration, I urge my colleagues and President Nez to push this through with the utmost urgency so we can finally get relief aid to our Navajo communities. They have waited too long,” said Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley Tse'alnaozt'i'i, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gadiiahi/To'Koi), sponsor of Legislation No. 0144-20.

Delegate Crotty said over 100 days has passed since the first round of CARES Act funding was received by the Navajo Nation. There is still an immediate need to fund projects that will sustain a response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that has exacerbated challenging living conditions for Navajo communities.

Water, powerline, and broadband-telecommunication projects are basic needs that Navajo families need right now, stressed Delegate Crotty. Some of the water projects include water wells, cistern systems, support to water haulers, livestock windmills, earthen dam rehabilitation, irrigation/upgrades and some infrastructure upgrades.

Delegate Crotty stressed that the Navajo Nation needs to immediately increase broadband access to wireless internet connectivity to support public safety, health care facilities and schools. Communication is important in navigating the pandemic and will provide Navajo families access to information and online learning for K-12 and college students.

During the Council Delegate Carl Roessel Slater (Lukachukai, Rock Point, Round Rock, Tsaile/Wheatfields, Tsé Ch'izhi) proposed an amendment to include over \$69 million for the development and installation of solar projects to provide electricity to underserved communities lacking access to powerline infrastructure. He added that the goal is to provide power for over 1,500 homes.

“We recognize that connecting to the grid can be cumbersome to many portions of the Navajo Nation, particularly in Eastern Agency due to the different land statuses. Additionally, obtaining rights-of-ways for even simple projects in areas where powerlines may be nearby can still be cumbersome due to existing regulations posed by the federal government. This is a way around it,” said Delegate Slater.

Delegate Slater added that access to solar electricity provides Navajo families simple basic needs such as storing and preserving food, heating up water, and being able to have basic home appliances. With electricity, families can make fewer supply runs into town and will help to lower the risk of being exposed to COVID-19.

According to the proposal attached to the amendment, it states that Native Renewables' Hozho Homes would be able to deploy quickly and affordably to begin installing solar units and wiring. It would also provide an 18 cubic-foot refrigerator to installed homes before the end of this year.

During the course of the four-day discussion, additional amendments included proposed funding for solid waste projects, solar projects, parks and recreation economic assistance, hardship assistance, health care facilities projects and Dineh Chamber of Commerce economic projects.

The Naabik'iyáti' Committee will vote on passing Legislation No. 0144-20 to Navajo Nation Council on Tuesday, Jul. 28 at 9:00 a.m. (MDT). The meeting will be streamed online on Facebook, YouTube, and Vimeo.

If approved, the legislation will be added to Special Navajo Nation Council Session for consideration after the Naabik'iyáti' session concludes.

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