



Navajo Nation Council votes to cancel 2020 Spring Session

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — At the Apr. 17, 2020 special session of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, Legislation No. 0093-20 was approved that temporarily suspends the section of the Navajo Nation Code relating to regular sessions in order to cancel the forthcoming 2020 Spring Session.

Speaker of the 24th Navajo Nation Council Seth Damon said, “Based on the fact that the current COVID-19 outbreak continues to spread among our people, we want to ensure that Legislative Branch employees and their families are not put in harm’s way for our regular session. At least 30 legislative employees are needed to produce a Navajo Nation Council regular session, and that’s not feasible under current emergency conditions.”

The Council is required by the Code to hold quarterly regular sessions. The action came at the fourth special session of the Council’s second year, which all followed the 2020 Winter Session in January.

The Navajo Nation Commission on Emergency Management voted Mar. 11, 2020 to declare a state of emergency due to the outbreak of COVID-19. President Jonathan Nez concurred with that declaration the same day and further orders have extended the Navajo Nation government’s emergency response activities and restrictions on public activity since then.

The legislation noted that all three branches of the Navajo Nation government remain closed or partially closed to minimize office staff to essential personnel. The heads of all three branches have directed most employees to work from home during the pandemic.

Since the 2020 Winter Session in January, the full Navajo Nation Council has met four times under one-day special sessions. All but one special session were organized through a petition of a majority of the 24-member Council. The Mar. 16 session was conducted through a request from President Nez as the Navajo Nation’s response efforts were expanding in response to COVID-19 reports.

In order to cancel the regular session, the Council voted to suspend 2 N.N.C. §164(A), which requires a regular session to be held on the third Monday of April of every year. Since the matter concerns Title 2 of the Navajo Nation Code, the approved legislation will need the review and signature of at least two branches. Upon passage by the Navajo Nation Council, the legislation was submitted to President Nez in adherence to the prior established process.

The legislation was part of a consent schedule adopted by the Council that combined that item with Legislation No. 0086-20 and Legislation No. 0094-20. The consent schedule is a legislative tool that allows multiple legislative items that have the unanimous support of the Council to be approved under one vote.

Legislation No. 0086-20 authorizes the boards of regents of Diné College and Navajo Technical University to conduct meetings via telecommunication methods. In accordance with 10 N.N.C. §2008, the regents would need to continue to be physically present at meetings unless the legislation becomes law. The teleconferencing authorizations would expire after 60 days if President Nez signs that legislation into law.

Legislation No. 0094-20 is a similar authorization for Navajo Nation farm boards, land boards and district grazing committees. Council approved the authorization for the time the Navajo Nation remains in its current state of emergency. That legislation is also subject to the president's signature.

With the consent schedule, all three of the emergency legislation were approved unanimously by the Council under a vote of 21 in favor and 0 opposed with Speaker Damon not voting.

Each of the three Council resolutions will become effective when President Nez signs them into law, or if ten days lapse and no further action was taken. He may also choose to veto any of the three items.

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