



Speaker Damon issues open letter to Navajo Nation spiritual leaders

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 17, 2020

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Speaker Seth Damon of the 24th Navajo Nation Council issued an open letter to the Navajo Nation’s spiritual leaders on Wednesday asking for their help in sharing the nation’s messages of COVID-19 prevention. The letter was addressed to Navajo chanters and medicine men, traditional Native American Church practitioners, and ministers and pastors of Christian faiths.

“It is my distinct honor to extend, on behalf of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, my most sincere appreciation to you, our spiritual leaders,” said Speaker Damon in the opening of the letter. “You continue to uplift Navajo families and communities during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic,” he continued.

Speaker Damon issued the letter after council delegates reported ongoing gatherings taking place during the state of emergency on the Navajo Nation. Those reports were received by members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council this past week from multiple areas across the entire Navajo Nation that included spiritual and ceremonial gatherings of more than five people.

“The Navajo Nation Council recognizes first and foremost the importance of maintaining the freedoms that allow us to practice our respective faiths,” said Speaker Damon. “In times of uncertainty, we seek the songs, prayers, faith and guidance that help us navigate difficult times. Our faiths and beliefs are the foundation that make our society stronger and more resilient.”

The Navajo Nation Department of Health Office of Environmental Health has issued escalating public health orders relating to the COVID-19 outbreak. As of Friday, Apr. 17, a total of 1,127 Navajo residents of the nation and nearby border towns were confirmed positive for the coronavirus.

Speaker Damon continued, “We ask for your help in sharing a common message of self-care, protection and personal accountability during this global pandemic. It is especially important that your voices are heard by our People if we are to overcome the spread of COVID-19.”

The open letter appeals to the common health safety challenge all people are currently facing. Speaker Damon expressed the importance of the current moment, and the value of what is known about the coronavirus.

Though Navajo Fundamental Law is based on oral histories and stories of the Navajo people. Today, the Navajo Nation is comprised of many faiths and belief systems that continue to be embraced by the Navajo public.

“The 24th Navajo Nation Council respectfully requests that all groups, regardless of faith, do not congregate or assemble during the COVID-19 outbreak,” Speaker Damon said. “Please heed the words of our medical leaders, whose guidance is meant to protect the health of our communities. We appeal directly to our spiritual leaders based on the knowledge that so many have unwillingly given their lives for us to carry forward for our own health and security. These are the lessons we must now share, together.”

Speaker Damon shared 7 guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and others that the nation’s spiritual leaders can emphasize with their respective congregations, ceremonial patients,

relatives and other participants and followers.

The guidelines include: Practice frequent hand washing; avoid close contact; wear a cloth face covering around others; cover coughs and sneezes; clean and disinfect homes and surroundings; practice social distancing of at least 6 feet. The letter also appealed to all Navajo people to support each other by calling relatives and undertaking the obligation to care for one another.

In closing, Speaker Damon said, “We ask this with the utmost respect for your leadership and guiding hands under the teachings and kinship that start in the home. During this critical moment, we must all take steps to protect ourselves, protect our families and protect each other.”

The letter was circulated among Navajo leaders before it was issued and it received the final approval by members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council. It is intended to be shared freely as part of the Navajo Nation’s efforts to build constructive conversations regarding prevention of COVID-19 infections.

For more information on the Navajo Nation’s COVID-19 response efforts, please visit <https://ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19>. The Navajo Nation Health Command Operations Center, which is coordinating the nation’s COVID-19 response, can be contacted by calling the HCOC Hotline at (928) 871-7014 or emailing coronavirus.info@nndoh.org.

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Attachment: “An Open Letter to the Spiritual Leaders of the Navajo People,” April 15, 2020 (2 pp)



24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

HONORABLE SETH DAMON

Speaker, 24th Navajo Nation Council

April 15, 2020

An Open Letter to the Spiritual Leaders of the Navajo People

To our dear Hataáítii, Nahataha, dóó Diyin God Yahalnéhé,

It is my distinct honor to extend, on behalf of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, my most sincere appreciation to you, our spiritual leaders. You each continue to uplift Navajo families and communities during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Our hearts are with you and with those affected during this period of uncertainty.

We ask for your help in sharing a common message of self-care, protection and personal accountability during this global pandemic. It is especially important that your voices are heard by our People if we are to overcome the spread of COVID-19.

The Navajo Nation Council recognizes first and foremost the importance of maintaining the freedoms that allow us to practice our respective faiths. In times of uncertainty, we seek the songs, prayers, faith and guidance that help us navigate difficult times. Our faiths and beliefs are the foundation that make our society stronger and more resilient.

We reach out to you—Nihihataáítii' (our chanters), Nahatahá (our Native American Church practitioners) dóó Diyin God Yahalnéhé (our Christian ministers), our spiritual and religious leaders and healers—to aid us in emphasizing the importance of adhering to Navajo Nation Emergency public health orders. With the ongoing responsibilities that our nation must carry out, we ask your help at this time to carry these messages to your congregations, ceremonial patients, relatives and other participants and followers.

As the world is changing today, we are modifying new and innovative ways to stay connected with one another.

The 24th Navajo Nation Council respectfully requests that all groups, regardless of faith, do not congregate or assemble during the COVID-19 outbreak. Please heed the words of our medical leaders, whose guidance is meant to protect the health of our communities. We appeal directly to our spiritual leaders based on the knowledge that so many have unwillingly given their lives for us to carry forward for our own health and security. These are the lessons we must now share, together.

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By working together, we can help educate our communities about the public health orders issued by the Navajo Nation and the safety guidelines published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. In doing so, we can be assured that a safe and open environment is possible again.

Please help us relay these key messages:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and clean water for at least 20 seconds;
- Avoid close contact;
- Cover mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others;
- Cover coughs and sneezes to avoid potentially contaminated spray;
- Clean and disinfect your home and surroundings;
- Practice social distancing of at least six feet.
- Support one another by calling our relatives, we have an obligation to take care of one another.

Source: CDC, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/index.html>

We implore you to consider supporting the efforts of our Navajo Nation leadership and their need for additional support in these coming months.

We ask this with the utmost respect for your leadership and guiding hands under the teachings and kinship that start in the home. During this critical moment, we must all take steps to protect ourselves, protect our families and protect each other.

Sincerely,



Seth Damon, Speaker

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