



## Naat'áanii Development Corp.-Molina partnership to remain long-term project of Navajo Nation Council

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** March 31, 2020

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Speaker Seth Damon of the 24th Navajo Nation Council issued the following statement in response to a press release issued by the Executive Branch of the Navajo Nation:

“It is regrettable that, during a time of danger surrounding COVID-19, the Office of the President and Vice President has chosen to spread misinformation and to cast the Navajo Nation Council in a bad light. The Council approved CMA-14-20 in full faith that, once it reached President Jonathan Nez’s desk, it would be acted upon with the full consideration that we, as delegates, have given this important issue.

“Our partners at the state of New Mexico Human Services Department have been willing, for years, to work with the Navajo Nation to establish an accountable, efficient and innovative health care management system for our people. The state applied for, and successfully gained, the authority from the federal government to arrange a means for the Navajo Nation and other tribal nations to create a fully-vetted system of care that fits the needs of the Navajo People.

“A key part of this arrangement is the system of accountability that comes down directly from federal oversight and regulation. The body of protections around health records, personal information and administrative accountability are built into today’s state and federal health care systems. The Navajo People should know that, throughout the past year of discussions, and even before the current administration, these have been the primary concerns of the Navajo Nation Council.

“In January, the Navajo Nation Council made the momentous step to expand Navajo self-determination. It unanimously approved, by a vote of 18 in favor, to authorize the Navajo Nation’s own Naat’áanii Development Corporation to be the entity for the first Indian Managed Care Entity (IMCE) in the entire country.

“We must thank the leadership of the Naat’áanii Development Corporation for their diligence in identifying this unique opportunity on behalf of the Navajo Nation. Board members, such as the esteemed Board President Dr. Manley Begay Jr. and member Johnson Dennison, as well as multiple Navajo professionals, have the expertise and vision to move quickly in our Nation’s time of critical need.

“CMA-14-20, which was decided by the Navajo Nation Council, was preceded by extensive discussions at which the President was invited to be an active participant. If the President had signed a letter created by the Office of the Speaker to be presented to Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham as early as January, the Nation would be far ahead in establishing the ICME than where we are at today.

“As the Navajo Nation Council, it is our main concern that the core fiduciary responsibilities are carried out on behalf of the long-term stability of the Navajo Nation. The vision of the future that the Council carries includes a better health care system that continues to build upon the work that began with converting Indian Health Service hospitals to tribally-owned Public Law 93-638 contract health care facilities. This was no easy task, and neither is the opportunity before us.

“Since the administrations of President Joe Shirley and Governor Bill Richardson, the idea of a managed care entity uniquely serving the Navajo people was discussed. We know this because our predecessors have returned to the table to share the core values such a system encompasses. Ideas like

establishing, for ourselves, a tribally-controlled, vertically integrated system of wellness for our people. For these ideas, I am proud to say the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee and our Resources and Development Committee have established a continuing record of consideration during this 24th Navajo Nation Council.

“These deliberations resulted in the unanimous approval by the Navajo Nation Council of Naat’áanii Development Corporation’s next step towards passive enrollment in benefits programs of Navajo people that ultimately expands their network of care and the services they receive. This was the best viable option in this moment to begin capturing federal funding from an entirely separate source intended to complement our existing 638 and IHS hospital system.

“Lastly, with regard to Chairman Daniel Tso and the attacks lodged against him by the President in the media, I say to the President: It is despicable that you would respond to any question from an elected official by questioning ‘where’ that leader ‘is’ in the midst of the greatest crisis our Nation has faced in the modern era. Chairman Tso is the eldest member of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, and when the President of the Navajo Nation chooses to single an elder out like a school-yard bully, the President dishonors himself and the Office of the President.

“Let the record state that the Honorable Daniel Tso, representing the chapters of Littlewater, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake, Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Ojo Encino and Counselor has served three terms on the Navajo Nation Council. Go to any map and you will see the area he represents is nearly 100 miles from end-to-end. It goes without saying that Chairman Tso, and each member of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, are in Navajo communities day-in-day-out.

“On behalf of the entire Navajo Nation, we thank Chairman Tso for using his voice to impress upon us, as our elder, a higher standard of decorum and true statesmanship.

“I must defend the responsibility of my colleagues on the 24th Navajo Nation Council to question the President openly and without fear of needless retribution, either in our current time of crisis or otherwise.”

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