



Navajo Nation to receive \$600 million in Coronavirus Relief Funding

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 5, 2020

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The United States Department of the Treasury notified the Office of the Speaker Tuesday that \$600 million has been authorized for the Navajo Nation from the first distribution of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act relief funding to tribal nations. The federal funding was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump on Mar. 27.

“On behalf of the Navajo Nation, I thank President Trump, our Congressional membership, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt and our federal partners for securing this critical coronavirus relief funding for the Navajo People,” said 24th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon. “After non-stop consultation between the Navajo Nation and Council Delegates, the federal government has provided a lifeline for our People that will be put to immediate use in our efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19.”

Congress set a deadline of 30 days for the Treasury Department to release the relief funding to tribal nations. The Treasury Department began government-to-government consultations with tribal governments in April, through which the Navajo Nation submitted its proposed formula for determining the amounts for distribution to each tribe. After a determination was made by the federal government to include Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs), which are for-profit non-tribal government entities, in CARES Act tribal relief funding, several tribes joined in a lawsuit to challenge the determination.

Until today, the distribution of tribal relief funding was postponed by the Treasury Department until it could determine, with the Department of the Interior, how to move forward.

“Today’s announcement is a significant step forward for the Navajo people. We have an unprecedented level of federal COVID-19 relief support, and now the Navajo Nation Council will act to make sure emergency resources get where they need to go — to Navajo communities,” said Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown, member of the Budget and Finance Committee. “This is particularly important for our traditional healers and spiritual practitioners of all faiths. We must ensure that we continue to observe the core values and practices of our Navajo culture.”

The \$600 million in funding came after the Treasury Department and the Department of the Interior issued notice that 60 percent of the CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund allocation of \$8 billion for tribal nations would be distributed starting today.

“We are pleased to begin making \$4.8 billion in critical funds available to tribal governments in all states,” said Secretary Mnuchin. “Our approach is based on the fair balancing of tribal needs.”

The remaining 40 percent of tribal relief funding under the CARES Act will be distributed according to tribal employee counts and expenses already incurred by tribal nations in responding to COVID-19. Distributions to ANCs will be withheld pending the outcome of the lawsuit.

“Thanks to President Trump and Secretary Mnuchin for working with Congress to pass the CARES Act as historic financial support will now begin to be disbursed to Native Americans battling the COVID-19 health crisis,” said Secretary Bernhardt. “I appreciate the Secretary of the Treasury’s determination in providing a clear pathway to get these resources promptly delivered.”

The Navajo Nation Council is finalizing legislation to formally accept the \$600 million on CARES Act funding, as required by the Navajo Nation Code. Under the legislative process, that legislation will be considered by the Budget and Finance Committee, the Naabik'iyáti' Committee and the full Navajo Nation Council among with any public input. The CARES Act funding requires tribal nations to expend the \$600 million by Dec. 30, 2020.

Alongside the acceptance, the Council will also consider the first version of a fund management and expenditure plan that will streamline management of COVID-19 response activities. Council delegates have discussed previously the needs of Navajo communities and how best to support coronavirus responses at Navajo Nation health care facilities.

The Navajo Nation Council previously approved \$4 million in Navajo Nation emergency funding for the Navajo Department of Health. That funding, as reported by the Navajo Nation Health Command Operations Center on Thursday, has supported health care facilities in expanding their capacity, procuring personal protective equipment (PPEs) and other COVID-19-related relief activities.

“We thank our Senators and Congressmen for being the critical voices at the federal level,” said Speaker Damon. “We also thank President Trump for working to elevate the pressing needs of the Navajo Nation and all tribal nations.”

Members of the general public may provide public comment and testimony relating to the \$600 million COVID-19 tribal relief funding. Comments will be accepted in written form by submitting an email to comments@navajo-nsn.gov. Comments may also be mailed to: Executive Director, Office of Legislative Services, P.O. Box 3390, Window Rock, AZ 86515.

Comments may be made in the form of chapter resolutions, letters, position papers, etc. Please include your name, position title, address for written comments. For digital comments, a valid email address is required. Anonymous comments will not be included in the legislation packet.

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