



## Office of the Speaker addresses bonus pay claim in December 2020 Navajo Times article

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**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — In response to a Navajo Times news article published Dec. 23, 2020, titled “Council blames directors for special duty pay failure” regarding special duty pay claimed to have been issued to Office of the Speaker staff, Speaker Seth Damon confirmed Tuesday the article misled the Navajo public into believing bonuses were issued to employees or that Council delegates received bonus payments from the Navajo Nation.

“The Speaker’s Office is responding to the misleading Navajo Times article out of respect for all Navajo Nation essential workers. The Council believes all essential workers, including support staff that are vital to the functioning of the government, should be compensated fairly for risking their health and well-being in coming to work. To be clear, the memorandum reported on by the Navajo Times was a request to the Controller’s Office for special duty pay for Legislative Branch employees who continued to work during the pandemic. That request was not accepted by the Office of the Controller before special duty pay funds were reverted. The Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker, as directed by the Controller’s Office and the Payroll Department for all programs, prepared all proper documentation to justify special duty pay for our employees from the account established by the Office of the Controller with CARES Funds,” said Speaker Seth Damon, the Legislative Branch chief in charge of branch programs.

Speaker Damon affirmed that Legislative Branch employees, including the political appointees employed by the Office of the Speaker, put in as many as 1,350 extra hours, beyond their regular tour of duty, since the start of the government closures on Mar. 19, 2020. The work of essential employees helped keep government functions operational.

Speaker Damon further added: “No employee of the Office of the Speaker received more than \$5,000 of the special duty pay owed to them. Our programs worked to cover the special duty pay by reallocating program general funds, not CARES Act funds, to provide essential staff at least some amount of compensation. When the Controller’s Office set new deadlines for special duty pay, the Office of the Speaker did what it could to get the rest of what employees were owed paid from the account set up for that purpose.”

The \$5,000 amounts paid to Legislative Branch employees are actually some of the lowest special duty pay amounts paid out to Navajo Nation employees, said Speaker Damon. “The Navajo Nation Legislative Branch is stating, unequivocally, that it is being transparent with these numbers. We challenge the Navajo Times reporter of the misleading article to try harder to obtain the true amounts of special duty pay that have been paid out to all branches of the Navajo Nation government, including the Judicial Branch, Executive Branch and the Controller’s Office.”

The Navajo Nation’s policy regarding special duty pay was implemented by the Division of Human Resources and the Department of Personnel Management for the Executive and Legislative Branches. Those functions are carried out internally in the case of the Judicial Branch.

The policy establishes that regular Navajo Nation employees are eligible for special duty pay at 1.5 times their regular wage in the course of a pay cycle and that political appointees in both the Legislative and Executive Branches are eligible instead for lump sum payments, rather than biweekly through their regular payroll checks.

That lump sum payment was subject to funds availability, for which the Office of the Speaker did not budget at the beginning of the 2020 fiscal year starting October 2019.

“The Office of the Speaker and the Navajo Nation Council will continue to fight for wages and earnings that are owed to Navajo Nation employees across the Nation. The reporter of the erroneous article never reached out to the Office of the Speaker for clarification or interview, nor did they, apparently, perform any due diligence to substantiate further action on the memorandum,” said Speaker Damon.

Additionally, the Office of the Speaker confirms no salary bonuses have been claimed or paid to any member of the Navajo Nation Council. All financial transactions regarding Navajo Nation funds are required to be processed by the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller, situated within the Executive Branch, through the Navajo Nation’s Financial Management Information System (FMIS). Any member of the public may utilize the Navajo Nation Privacy and Access to Information Act to request that information be verified by the Controller’s Office.

“For our essential workers during this Covid-19 pandemic, we are grateful for your service and dedication. We hope this adds clarity to the situation that many Navajo Nation programs are facing, not just the Office of the Speaker,” said Speaker Damon.

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