

Navajo Nation approves CARES Act funds for numerous projects

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer approved over \$475 million in CARES Act funding for water line projects, power line projects, solar power projects, internet access to remote areas, business assistance, and more resources to help the Navajo people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Nez-Lizer Administration approved the following funds in Resolution CJY-67-20:

- \$130 million for the Navajo Department of Water Resources for water projects, including waterline and cistern projects, water hauling, windmill repairs, water well infrastructure, earthen dams, and irrigation projects, which ensures that the Navajo people have access to adequate and safe water to help stop the spread of COVID-19.

- \$44.2 million for powerline projects, including power line capital projects and electrical line extensions, to ensure that Navajo homes and facilities have access to electricity sufficient to comply with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 guidelines.

- \$53.2 million for telecommunication and broadband expansion projects for schools, higher educational institutions, and public facilities, to ensure Navajo students, educators, and employees have adequate broadband access and telecommunication capacity while complying with “Safe at Home” public health orders and can communicate with public safety, healthcare, and education.

- \$35.1 million for solar projects for Navajo homes within the boundaries of the Navajo Nation to ensure that they have access to electricity to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

- \$1,000 for hardship assistance to help Navajo individuals and families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- \$828,637 for parks and recreation, including vendors and others, who experienced negative economic impacts from the pandemic.

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- \$42.1 million for payroll support pay expenses eligible under the U.S. Treasury guidance.
- \$24.6 million for Navajo Gaming Enterprise, who employ over 1,100 Navajo citizens, to avoid lay-offs, loss of healthcare insurance, and to sustain business operations.
- \$9.6 million for the Judicial Branch to continue court services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- \$60 million for Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development to provide recovery and assistance for Navajo businesses and entrepreneurs, who were impacted by the public health emergency.
- \$75.8 million for Navajo Department of Health to continue to provide COVID-19 related health care services, such as vaccinations, testing, alternative care services, traditional and faith based services, and others, for the Navajo people.

“In the review of the funds provided in CJY-67-20, we considered the purposes of the projects, the timeframe to complete each project, the readiness of the projects, and all the requirements necessary to carry out successful projects,” Nez said. “Most importantly, the allocations have to comply with the federal CARES Act law and have to be expended by Dec. 30, as required by the U.S. Treasury.

“Through the teachings of K’é (kinship), Nitsáhákees (thinking), Nahat’á (planning), liná (life), and Sihasin (stability of restoration of balance and harmony through reflection), we can help each other to overcome any obstacle to restore Hozhó, balance, and harmony,” Nez said.

With the input from many experts in the field and discussions of how to refine the plan, several portions were reduced, such as the following:

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- The Broadband-Telecommunications Projects were decreased by \$15,000,000 for non-tribal owned Eligible Telecommunications Carriers.

- The Solar Projects were reduced by \$34,103,910 appropriated to the Native Renewables company. There will be a new proposal for the initiative.

- Striking \$23,973,000 for solid waste projects across the Navajo Nation.

- Striking \$48,803,592 for payroll expenditures for the period after July 1, this includes the 4th Quarter of the Fiscal Year 2020, and from Oct. 1 to Dec. 30, this consists of the 1st Quarter of the Fiscal Year 2021.

- Striking \$33,423,914 for housing and housing improvement projects.

- Striking \$20,008,798 to address additional Administration and compliance of CARES Act funds.

“The approval is a big win for the Nation. Our focus has to remain on those who need the funding the most, including our Navajo families, elders, and vulnerable individuals,” Nez said. “We commend the 24th Navajo Nation Council for their long hours of dedication, discussions, and hard work to move the legislation through the process.”

The total approved funding of \$476,666,192 represents approximately 72% approval of appropriated amounts. The remaining amount of \$175,313,214, along with the previous balance of \$1,150,000.37 of the CARES Fund, provides \$176,463,214.37 to create a second phase appropriation that will provide direct relief services to the Navajo people.

Nez and Lizer stated that the second phase appropriation proposed plan would focus on immediate financial relief for Navajo individuals, families, and communities impacted by the pandemic. The proposal will include college student relief, hardship assistance for students,

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emergency assistance for Navajo members, elders and vulnerable individuals, propane and natural gas services for elders, immediate internet connectivity for families, additional solar projects, housing initiatives, and many more.

“As we visited all 110 communities within the Navajo Nation, we heard the challenges and pleas of our Navajo people. The coronavirus has emotionally, physically, spiritually, and financially impacted many families. Therefore, we continue to develop plans that will directly help our people,” Lizer said.