

Will Navajo People receive a second hardship assistance check?

Written by Staff Reports

Thursday, 30 December 2021 09:12



WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty of the 24th Navajo Nation Council introduced Emergency Legislation No. 0263-21 to allocate \$207 million of Navajo Nation Fiscal Recovery Funds to provide a second hardship assistance check for the Navajo people. This will be considered by the Navajo Nation Council during a special session before Christmas.

The bill also approves the Hardship Assistance Expenditure Plan that will have legislative oversight by the Budget and Finance Committee and administrative oversight by the Nez-Lizer Administration.

According to the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, individuals do not have to reapply for the second allocation of hardship assistance payments. Any future check disbursements will follow the financial process previously approved by the Office of the Controller. Individuals who have yet to apply for assistance can do so through the OOC online portal.

"It has been 283 days since President Joe Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act," Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé'ałnáoozt'ií, Sheep Springs, Beclabito, Gad'ii'ahí/Tó Kǫ'í).said. "The Navajo people need immediate assistance now during this pandemic and the Navajo government must meet their requests."

"The federal government provided us Fiscal Recovery Funds to directly help Navajo households

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with their utility bills and those experiencing job loss and reduced work hours," she continued. "This money must be used to assist our communities recover[ing] from the long-term effects of COVID-19.

"A second allocation of hardship assistance payments directly to our families will allow them to purchase critical winter supplies like gasoline, firewood, and food," Crotty said

In November, the United States Treasury Department allocated over \$2 billion to the Navajo Nation under the Fiscal Recovery Funds provisions of the American Rescue Act Plan to respond to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our people have been through a lot the last two years and they need our immediate help," Council Delegate Eugene Tso (Chinle) said. "These hardship assistance payments are long overdue and the Navajo Nation Council must take action to help our grandmas and grandpas, and our most vulnerable families.

"This is no longer a debate because our communities are suffering," Tso said. "The next urgent matter is we allocate the remaining CARES Act funds for our elders over 60 years of age.

"As Navajo leaders it is our responsibility to assist our people, especially now as colder winter months impact the Navajo Nation," Tso continued. "We support this emergency legislation to send out a second hardship check that will help Navajo families during this pandemic."

In August, the Navajo Nation Council approved Resolution CYJ-41-21, establishing the Navajo Nation Fiscal Recovery Fund Office as the official headquarters to oversee and approve all ARPA projects during the pandemic.

"We are working closely with President Jonathan Nez and the Executive Branch to responsibly allocate billions of dollars to be invested into projects for the Navajo people, Speaker Seth Damon said. "This also means a second round of direct hardship checks to assist our families so they can pay for the light bill and purchase food, propane, firewood, and hay for livestock.

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“The Council commends Honorable Amber Kanazbah Crotty for her advocacy and leadership by introducing this emergency legislation to address the urgent needs of the Navajo people,” Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh), said.

The Northern Agency Council unanimously approved Resolution NNAC-128-2021 supporting Legislation No. 0263-21 Dec. 18 and recommended increasing the allocation of \$207 million to \$621 million to change the amount each Navajo individual receives in hardship assistance.

“The Navajo Housing Authority and the Division of Social Services have additional funds to provide immediate rental assistance for our college students, single parents, and elders, Crotty said. “Navajo leaders continue to hear directly from people who are displaced, suffering, and vulnerable.

“Our intention for this emergency legislation is to provide direct winter relief to families to pay for water and electric bills, groceries, and more,” she pointed out. “We continue to pray for our children who have lost their parents to this virus and the devastating impact COVID-19 has had on our medicine men and women.

“The Council appreciates our community health representatives, senior center staff, and all public health officials who are on the frontlines fighting this pandemic,” Crotty added.

If approved by the Navajo Nation Council, Damon has 10 days after a session to certify legislation. Following this process, Nez has 10 days to approve or veto.