

Vetoes 'PET PROJECTS,' 'frivolous SPENDING'

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer approved portions of two separate resolutions that address the use of federal CARES Act funding for the Navajo Nation on July 4.

The Nez-Lizer Administration approved the following funds through Resolution CJN-46-20:

• $20 million for special duty pay for frontline workers and other essential personnel whose duties are substantially dedicated to mitigating or responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

• $10 million for Personal Protective Equipment for frontline workers and other essential personnel whose duties are substantially dedicated to mitigating or responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

• $10 million to ensure that the facilities operated by the Navajo Nation are disinfected and

otherwise safe for returning employees and the public seeking governmental services.

Several portions of the resolutions were also removed based on thorough vetting and consideration of all spending measures included in the two resolutions.

“Signing portions of these resolutions into law is a big win for our first responders and the Navajo people. Our focus has always been to put forth a comprehensive plan that helps those who need it the most and that includes our frontline warriors, and also to plan and prepare for any potential new waves of COVID-19 and other pandemics. The Navajo people overwhelmingly supported the plan that our administration put forth in Legislation No. 0116-20. Legislation No. 0116-20 proposed funding for frontline workers and to prepare for the reopening of the government,” Nez said.

“We had a comprehensive plan proposed, but again, certain members of Council put politics over the needs of our frontline warriors and the Navajo people. Instead, we have Council members introducing multiple pieces of legislation that create a chaotic process and attempting to include pet projects and frivolous spending. Through Legislation No. 0116-20 the three branch chiefs will have the opportunity to work together to develop expenditure plans for the use of the remaining CARES Act funds,” Nez added.

In their written message to the Council, Nez and Lizer also urged the Council to respect the separation of powers among the three branches of government and not to overstep boundaries by attempting to issue directives to the Executive Branch through legislation.

“We air the concern that the Council does not honor the separation of powers by appropriating, planning, and executing the law it passed. We urge the Navajo Council to work with the Branch Chiefs in all future funding plans so we may put our funds to good use. We look to veteran Delegates and those with sound judgment to work with the Branch Chiefs to move quickly on future funding plans. Working together we can accomplish our goals,” the letter stated.

A $1 million set-aside for the Diné Hataałi Association was removed because it does not comply with the federal guidelines for the use of CARES Act funds.

The leaders also line-item vetoed $55 million for chapters, citing the large sums of funds required to be expended by the deadline imposed, which requires CARES Act funds to be spent by the end of August. They added that funding for chapters can be considered when the three branch chiefs develop more expenditure plans.

The Nez-Lizer Administration also approved the following funds, which were requested through Legislation No. 0116-20 developed by the Nez-Lizer Administration through Resolution CJN-47-20:

• $10 million for food, water, and basic necessities, care packages, and related items.

• $2 million for computer hardware and software for government offices to improve telework capabilities for employees to carry services for the Navajo people.

• $3.5 million for bathroom additions and upgrades for Navajo residents.

• $3 million for P.L. 93-638 health care facilities.

• $2.5 million for expenses to facilitate the procurement and/or improvement of the Navajo Nation’s financial system to process Navajo Nation CARES Fund expenditures.

The Nez-Lizer Administration proposes to expend the remaining CARES Act funding for:

• Expenditure of $300 million for water infrastructure and agriculture projects.

• Expenditure of $150 million for power line and solar infrastructure.

• Expenditure of $50 million for Broadband/telecommunication.

• Expenditure of $50 million for scholarships to assist Navajo students entering the healthcare and public safety fields.

• Expenditure of $60 million to help Navajo businesses, and promote economic development.

• Expenditure of $20 million to address housing needs on the Navajo Nation.

• Expend the remaining amount for additional chapter projects and direct aid for the Navajo people