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Navajo Nation government allocates \$714 million in federal virus relief

BY THERESA DAVIS / JOURNAL STAFF WRITER
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The Navajo Nation government has now allocated all of the \$714 million received from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, following the creation of a \$49.4 million hardship assistance program for enrolled Navajo members.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez signed the Navajo Nation Council resolution creating the program last week.

In a letter to Council Speaker Seth Damon, Nez said the money should go to Navajos who were hospitalized for COVID-19, those in isolation or quarantine who cannot work, families who lost loved ones, or people who quit working to stay home and take care of their relatives.

“While we do not have enough funds to fully help all Navajos with emergency financial assistance, we trust those in true financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic will get the help they need,” Nez wrote.

Enrolled Navajo members over the age of 18 are eligible for payments up to \$1,500 and members under 18 are eligible for payments up to \$500.

The payments are intended to help Navajos purchase masks, pay utility bills and rent, and cover “education-related expenses and other financial burdens created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health emergency orders.”

The Navajo Nation Council is considering legislation this week to determine eligibility criteria and the application process for the program.

Council Delegate Eugenia Charles-Newton, who represents Shiprock, said the money will help Navajo residents purchase supplies to protect them from the coronavirus this winter.

“We will fight this monster that has taken so many of our Diné people and survive it together, helping each other along the way,” Charles-Newton said in a statement.

The federal aid money has also funded broadband, electricity and water projects on the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Tribal Utility Authority has connected 260 Navajo homes to electricity and installed 150 water cistern systems. The utility also set up more than 30 Wi-Fi hotspots across the reservation, and installed a tower to provide cellphone and internet service in Pinedale, New Mexico.

The Navajo Nation reported nine new COVID-19 cases on Tuesday night and no new deaths. There have been a total of 10,737 positive cases and 571 deaths from the disease. More than 7,300 people have recovered.

Masks are required on the reservation. The Navajo Nation will continue to have weekend-long curfews through the end of October.

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