

NAVAJO NATION

Payments continue for tribe's hardship assistance program but thousands on waiting list

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FARMINGTON — More checks have been issued this week from the Navajo Nation's hardship assistance program, but there have been thousands returned because of delivery issues.

A press release on March 9 from the Office of the Controller states that 18,000 checks were issued and mailed this week.

The office reports that approximately 3,000 checks have been returned since January. This is due to recipients not being recognized by the U.S. Postal Service, mainly those who use post office boxes, according to the release.

The release also states that the program's support center continues to operate by callback service and personnel are working to clear applications that have problems, such as Certificate of Indian Blood enrollment numbers or misspelled names.

Thousands of names on Navajo Nation waiting list

The controller's office disclosed there is a waiting list of more than 4,200 applicants.

These individuals missed the application deadline last year and any funding for the group is contingent on any unused amounts reverting to the program, the release states.

Additional funding could come from the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority since the tribal enterprise has not spent the entire amount granted to it by Navajo leaders under the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, according to the release.

Last summer, the Navajo Nation Council and tribal President Jonathan Nez approved NTUA to receive approximately \$147 million to build water, electric, broadband and solar projects

for families on the tribal land.

NTUA General Counsel Arash Moalemi told the Resources and Development Committee on March 3 that NTUA returned approximately \$34 million in January and they have about \$35 million in unspent funding.

Moalemi recognized that the council resolution signed by Nez directed that unused funding goes to the hardship assistance program, but NTUA proposes keeping the \$35 million to continue constructing water, electric, broadband and solar projects.

"It is up to the Navajo Nation leadership to determine how to utilize the remaining CARES Act funds," Moalemi said in a statement released by NTUA on March 10.

"We want to help families during this difficult time and help prevent against the spread of COVID-19 by building electric connections and water connections that will be around for generations to come," he said.

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