



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 11, 2020

**Speaker Damon, Chairman Tso request Surgeon
General maintain presence of medical officers on Navajo Nation**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — On Thursday, Mar. 5, Speaker Seth Damon and Health, Education, and Human Services Committee Chair Daniel E. Tso submitted a letter to Vice Admiral Jerome Adams, the surgeon general of the United States, requesting commissioned officers stationed in Navajo Nation health care facilities be maintained in their current roles.

Commissioned officers in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps are currently utilized by both Navajo Area Indian Health Service facilities and the Navajo Nation's own PL-93-638 contracted health care facilities as professional dentists, engineers, health service officers, nurses, medical officers, pharmacists, and more.

"The commissioned officers providing essential services to the Navajo public are integral to the Navajo Nation's overall strategy of maintaining stability and retaining officers that are culturally-aware. Such professionals are extremely difficult to recruit, train, and retain in times of great need," they stated in the letter.

As the country faces a growing number of COVID-19 (coronavirus) cases, the Navajo Nation Council is receiving updates directly from the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Additionally, the Navajo Nation Department of Health and the Navajo Area Indian Health Service are providing updates to the Navajo Nation's COVID-19 policy response group.

Acknowledging the unique skills commissioned officers possess, Speaker Damon and Chairman Tso said: "...we wish to express our sincere appreciation to those that serve in this most critical function. We would like that service to continue through the spread of COVID-19 so that the Navajo Nation's at-risk populations receive the best care possible."

The surgeon general oversees the PHS Commissioned Corps and recommends the deployment of uniformed medical officers. The Navajo Nation healthcare system utilizes commissioned officers in several critical areas. "We know the knowledge and skill each commissioned officer carries is an extremely valuable asset in times of public health threats, such as COVID-19. We hope you will consider these requests on behalf of the Navajo people and in light of the progress our health care system has made, and hopes to maintain during this critical moment," the letter stated.

Speaker Damon and Chairman Tso are monitoring the response to COVID-19 on the Navajo Nation and within the region. On Thursday, Mar. 12, the Navajo Nation Department of Health and the COVID-19 Preparedness Team are scheduled to give updates before the Navajo Nation Council's Naabik'iyáti' Committee on preparation and response efforts. More information can be found on the NNDOH website at www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19.

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24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

HONORABLE SETH DAMON

Speaker, 24th Navajo Nation Council

March 5, 2020

Vice Admiral Jerome M. Adams
Office of the Surgeon General
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave. SW
Humphrey Bldg. Suite 701H
Washington, DC 20201

SUBJECT: Commissioned Officers stationed on the Navajo Nation, vicinity

Dear Vice Admiral Adams:

On behalf of the people of the Navajo Nation, we write to respectfully request your special consideration under the unique trust relationship between the U.S. Government and the Navajo Nation as the country faces the threat of COVID-19. Specifically, we write to request that commissioned officers currently stationed in health care facilities within, and surrounding, the Navajo Nation not be deployed away from their current roles.

Firstly, we wish to express our sincere appreciation to those that serve in this most critical function. We would like that service to continue through the spread of COVID-19 so that the Navajo Nation's at-risk populations receive the best care possible.

The Navajo Nation's public health facilities, both those operated under the Indian Health Service and those operated through Public Law 93-638 contracts, continue to face staffing needs far beyond their current capacity. The commissioned officers providing essential services to the Navajo public are integral to the Navajo Nation's overall strategy of maintaining stability and retaining medical officers that are culturally-aware. Such professionals are extremely difficult to recruit, train, and retain in times of great need.

To that end, we propose and support a requirement that commissioned officer travel be first reviewed by the director of the Navajo Area Office of the Indian Health Service. In this way, the Navajo people can be assured that the quality of service they currently receive does not degrade to former levels. It is also our recommendation that all commissioned officers stationed in and around the Navajo Nation be placed in the third tier of the Corps' response structure.

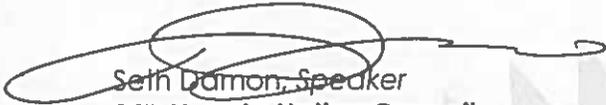
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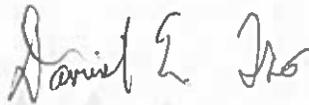
consider these requests on behalf of the Navajo people and in light of the progress our health care system has made, and hopes to maintain during this critical moment.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Legislative Chief of Staff Lashawna Tso, Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker at (928) 871-7160, if you should have any questions or comment regarding this request. We humbly look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Seth Damon, Speaker
24th Navajo Nation Council



Daniel Tso, Chairperson
Health, Education & Human Services Committee



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