



Navajo Nation Council overrides continuing budget resolution veto

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The 24th Navajo Nation Council approved an override of a previously vetoed continuing resolution (CR) that provides automatic funding for Navajo Nation programs for the new fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. The CR authorizes Navajo Nation program funding levels for a limited period if no comprehensive budget is enacted by Sept. 30.

The Council and its five standing committees have been conducting legislative oversight budget hearings since Aug. 24 as part of a drastically condensed comprehensive budget process. The fiscal year comprehensive budget authorizes the regular Navajo Nation program allocations and is a process separate from allocating Navajo Nation CARES Funds.

The current budget process is comprised of 28 recommending legislation containing program budgets approved by standing committees that are now being considered by the Budget and Finance Committee.

However, concerns by council delegates over changes to program budgets, such as the reduction of agency veterans organization funding, may present challenges to approving the proposed budgets at the remaining committee levels.

“Ensuring the Navajo Nation is funded when October 1st arrives is our goal,” said 24th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon. “The Navajo Nation Council’s budget priorities continue to be based on an over-all response to the coronavirus pandemic. However, it may take more time to ensure direct services to the Navajo People don’t suffer under rapidly shifting budgets.”

The comprehensive budget includes programs funded by the Navajo Nation’s general fund revenues, as projected for the coming fiscal year by the Office of the Controller. The projected revenues must match expenditures under the Navajo Nation Appropriations Act, which requires a balanced budget.

President Jonathan Nez previously expressed his desire to implement a two-year budget. The Council has been waiting for details on this proposal since last year. Under a two-year budget, Navajo leaders have said programs will benefit from having more time to focus on meeting goals before the next budget season begins.

Council’s approval of the CR will extend the previously approved fiscal year 2020 program funding levels for a period of six months.

Council delegates noted that programs have made minor changes to program budgets to mostly reflect a reduction in travel expenses and increases to supplies. A continuing resolution would replenish program funding levels while still allowing costs for cleaning supplies and office technology needs to be paid from CARES Funds approved by the Navajo Nation Council and enacted by the President.

Delegates also noted the absence of any accounting of CARES Fund-reimbursable expenses and costs incurred by programs in any fiscal year 2021 activities. Generally, council delegates have expressed a desire to see the Navajo Nation’s comprehensive budget reflect an overall focus on reducing the spread of the coronavirus as a budget priority for the coming year.

The Navajo Nation Council unanimously approved the continuing resolution veto override, Legislation No. 0198-20, on Sept. 4 by a vote of 23 in favor and 0 opposed.

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MEDIA CONTACTS: communications@navajo-nsn.gov (928) 287-2085
Byron C. Shorty, INT Communications Director
Timothy Benally, Public Information Officer