



## Navajo Nation Council's continuing budget resolution preserves employee positions as comprehensive budget is fixed

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**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Resolution No. CS-77-20, approved Sept. 25 by the 24th Navajo Nation Council, approved adequate funding for three months of government operations to allow Executive Branch programs to fix comprehensive budget proposals after the Council identified numerous concerns through the oversight budget hearing process.

“Under the continuing resolution, the Navajo Nation Council approved adequate funding to preserve all employees currently employed through the Navajo Nation,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalj, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh). “The Council approved the continuing resolution with the intent of eliminating the need for any layoffs. We ask that the president enforce the continuing resolution so that the livelihoods of Navajo Nation employees are uninterrupted.”

The continuing resolution approved by the 24th Navajo Nation Council states: “The Navajo Nation Council hereby resolves that all Navajo Nation Government divisions, departments, offices, programs and Navajo Nation Chapters, with the exception of those special budget situations named in paragraph C of this section, shall receive 1/4th of their Navajo Nation FY 2020 general fund, indirect cost fund, proprietary fund, special revenue, and fiduciary fund allocations, as of September 30, 2020, ...”

The continuing resolution signed into law by the president specifically states that branch chiefs must work with the Office of the Controller (OOC) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to rectify special budget situations.

“The Legislative Branch began working with the Department of Personnel Management (DPM) to ensure jobs were funded through operational transfers,” said Speaker Damon. “No Legislative Branch employee will be laid off, and we encourage similar administrative actions to be taken by the Executive Branch chief to avert similar layoffs under those programs.”

The alternative, said Speaker Damon, would be to approve a comprehensive budget put forward by the Executive Branch that included layoffs, specifically within the Division of Natural Resources. Throughout the process of approving the continuing resolution, no information was presented by the OMB nor the DPM to the Council relating to layoffs, if approved.

Ongoing issues were identified by the Council with the 2021 fiscal year comprehensive budget proposed by the Navajo Nation Veterans Administration which overhauled the distribution of trust funds to Chapter Veterans Organizations. Additionally, the proposed budget reduced distributions that fund veterans services to all but one agency, which would have received a significant increase in funding.

The comprehensive budget proposal did not properly address positions associated with programs funded through fiduciary accounts. Those positions are typically funded directly through revenues generated throughout the operating year, such as positions associated with the annual Navajo Nation Fair.

Moreover, the Council's Budget and Finance Committee (BFC) identified chronic issues with vacant Navajo Nation program positions. BFC did not have further information on the total dollar amount of those vacant positions during the comprehensive budget sessions from the DPM.

The comprehensive budget proposed by President Nez lacked any support for expanded public safety services. As such, concerns from council delegates arose with the Division of Public Safety (DPS) resulting in added provisions to ensure DPS complies with P.L.-638 contracts involving Newlands and Tóhajiilee sub-offices' staffing, the deployment of Enhanced 911 service throughout the Navajo Nation, the establishment of a Missing Persons Unit, the establishment of a medical examiner position, re-establishing the Drug and Gang Task Force and more.

Navajo Nation Council oversight committees also identified a lack of necessary support from the Executive Branch for the Division of Social Services (DSS) in addressing the increase in domestic violence within and around the Navajo Nation. Issues were also identified with the duplication of services being provided by Work Force Development and the Department of Self-Reliance.

The Council also received comments from program personnel expressing concern over the continuing reliance on plans of operation last approved in the 1980s and 1990s. No changes to plans of operations for the 2021 fiscal year were proposed by President Nez and reviewed comprehensively by the Council prior to the onset of the pandemic.

The only program plan of operation update put forward by the Office of the President and Vice President was for the Office of Miss Navajo, which was tabled by the Naabik'iyáti' Committee to focus on budget matters.

“The president assured the Navajo Nation Council that Executive Branch programs would be ready for a comprehensive budget,” said Speaker Damon. “They were not, so the continuing resolution previously approved by the Council was updated and approved and then signed into law. The Council asserts that no lay-offs need to occur, and we encourage the president to move quickly, in accordance with the law that was passed.”

Navajo Nation employees receiving any form of a pink slip related to the implementation of the continuing resolution are encouraged to speak with their supervisors to ensure their employment is uninterrupted.

The budget continuing resolution, CS-77-20, was approved by the Navajo Nation Council on Sept. 25 by a vote of 19 in favor and 1 opposed. It was signed into law Sept. 28 by President Jonathan Nez.

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