

THE NAVAJO NATION

JONATHAN NEZ | PRESIDENT MYRON LIZER | VICE PRESIDENT



April 14, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader of the House of Representatives
2468 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As Congress continues to address COVID-19 and turns to a potential infrastructure package, the Navajo Nation urges Congress to fund desperately needed drinking water and sanitation projects on the Navajo Reservation and throughout Indian Country. Doing so will save countless lives and create badly needed jobs across the nation.

In order to address COVID-19, the public must be able to take basic preventative measures such as hand washing. The lack of running water for more than 30 percent of the population on the Navajo Reservation makes the residents of the reservation more susceptible to the virus. Indeed, as of April 13, 2020, the Navajo Nation alone has had 813 people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and 28 confirmed deaths due to the virus.

Although the resources in the first three phases of the stimulus will provide some relief to Indian Country, tribal communities such as Navajo will continue to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and other illnesses until the Navajo Nation's basic water-related needs are met. Unfortunately, this crisis is not unique to Navajo. According to the Indian Health Service, approximately 30 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native homes have some form of water, sewer, and solid waste sanitation deficiencies.

To begin to address these needs, the Navajo Nation respectfully requests that Congress take two immediate actions. First, the Nation asks that Congress pass the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act NUWRSA (S. 1207 and H.R. 644). NUWRSA would resolve the Navajo Nation's federally reserved water rights claims within the State of Utah with a negotiated settlement. Under the NUWRSA, the Nation would receive approximately \$220 million in federal and state funding for desperately needed drinking water infrastructure on the Navajo Nation in Utah

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in consideration for the Nation waiving its water-related claims against the United States and the State. Both committees of jurisdiction in the Senate and House have already considered the legislation and ordered the bill be reported favorably. Therefore, Congress should immediately pass the settlement legislation.

The second action Congress should and must take is to fund the essential water supply, sewage, and solid waste disposal facilities for American Indian and Alaska Native homes and communities. Doing so would help address basic human needs on the Navajo Reservation and in Indian Country and mitigate against potential illnesses such as COVID-19.

In 2018, the Indian Health Service submitted a report to Congress outlining the level of sanitation deficiencies for each sanitation facilities project for each Indian tribe or community and the amount of funds to provide adequate sanitations systems for those systems. (The IHS Report is attached to this letter). The report found that nearly a third of all tribal homes lack access to adequate sanitation facilities and that the total cost to address sanitation facilities was \$2.67 billion. Therefore, we strongly urge you to provide funding for these projects in phase four of the stimulus legislation.

Without access to clean water and adequate sanitation facilities, the Navajo Nation and tribes throughout the country will continue to struggle and be more susceptible to illnesses like COVID-19. Accordingly, please include these two priorities in the phase four of the stimulus or any other such legislation.

The Navajo Nation thanks you for your attention to these urgent matters. Ahéhee', thank you.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Nez, *President*
THE NAVAJO NATION



Myron Lizer, *Vice President*
THE NAVAJO NATION

cc: The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
The Honorable Paul Gosar
The Honorable David Schweikert
The Honorable Ruben Gallego
The Honorable Tom O'Halleran
The Honorable Andy Biggs
The Honorable Debbie Lesko
The Honorable Ann Kirkpatrick
The Honorable Greg Stanton
The Honorable Rob Bishop
The Honorable Chris Stewart
The Honorable John Curtis
The Honorable Ben McAdams

The Honorable Ben Ray Luján
The Honorable Deb Haaland
The Honorable Xochitl Torres Small