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## PRESIDENT JONATHAN NEZ VICE PRESIDENT MYRON LIZER



# STATE OF THE NAVAJONATION ADDRESS

2020 SPRING NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL SESSION





#### CONTENT

- Welcome Message President Jonathan
  Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer
- 5 Navajo Nation COVID-19 Preparedness Team
- 6 Public Health State of Emergency Declared
- 7 Case Data and Public Information
- 8 \$4 Million Appropriation
- 8 \$1.3 Million for Chapters
- 9 Public Health Emergency Orders
- 10 Donations
- 12 Alternative Care Sites
- 13 Public Outreach
- 14 Operation First of the Month
- 15 Roadways and Tourism
- 15 Federal Stimulus Bills
- 17 Rhino Health, LLC Glove Factory
- 18 "Keeping American Connected Pledge"
- 19 FCC Grants Access to Expand Broadband
- 19 Alcohol Sales in Border Towns

Office of the President and Vice President News

P.O. Box 7440 WIndow Rock, AZ 86515 (928) 871-7000

#### Prepared by:

Communications Director

Jared Touchin

Sr. Public Information Officer

Crystalyne Curley

http://www.opvp.navajo-nsn.gov

#### WELCOME ADDRESS

President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer



Yá'át'ééh to the honorable members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, Speaker Seth Damon, Chief Justice JoAnn B. Jayne, as well as chapter, county, state, and federal leaders, and most importantly our Diné Citizens. On behalf of the Nez-Lizer Administration, we are pleased to present to you the State of the Navajo Nation Address for the 2020 Spring Council Session.

As President and Vice President of the Navajo Nation, we are very grateful for your support and prayers as we fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, this is unprecedented for our Navajo people and for many throughout the world, but as we have said all along, the strength and resilience of our ancestors remains within us to this day. Our ancestors experienced and overcame far worse atrocities, and we too will overcome this virus and become a stronger people. Through our united effort and shared resources, we are fully confident that we will once again be able to join together with open arms and once again practice the daily teachings and social gatherings that have been a part of our culture since time immemorial.

The Nez-Lizer Administration began taking proactive measures in January, nearly two months prior to the first confirmed case of COVID-19 on our homelands, to address and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. We issued our first public call for caution on January 26th to make our Navajo people aware of the growing spread in other states and we were able to keep the virus off our Nation until mid-March.

We established the Navajo Nation COVID-19 Preparedness Team in February, to monitor, plan, prepare and coordinate precautionary efforts to address the virus. Eventually, the Health Command Operations Center (HCOC) was established to further our response efforts. In the following report, we outline the measures we have taken and those that are in the process.

As of April 19, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases stands at 1,104 and 45 deaths. Be assured we are committed to the work and obligations we have to serve our Diné people, until COVID-19 is minimized on our sacred lands and a plan is in place to continually fight COVID-19.

Each day, we offer our thoughts and prayers for all of those who have lost their lives and their families, those who are currently fighting this disease, and for the protection and continued good health of our Navajo people. Words are not enough to express our appreciation to all of the health care workers, law enforcement officers, EMS personnel, the Health Command Operations Center officials, and many others who are on the frontlines fighting for our Navajo people. May God bless each of you and may God bless the Great Navajo Nation! Ahé'hee'

## Navajo Nation COVID-19 Preparedness Team

Well in advance of the first confirmed case of COVID-19, our administration began taking proactive measures to caution the public. On January 26th, nearly eight weeks before the first confirmed case on the Navajo Nation, the Office of the President and Vice President issued a public statement warning our Navajo people about COVID-19.

On February 27th we officially established the Navajo Nation COVID-19 Preparedness Team, to monitor, plan, prepare, and coordinate precautionary efforts to address COVID-19. The Navajo Nation COVID-19 Preparedness Team includes the Office of the President and Vice President, Navajo Department of Health, Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety, Navajo Nation Division of Social Services, Navajo Nation Department of Emergency Management, Department of Diné Education, Navajo Nation Division of Community Development, U.S. Indian Health Service, U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Education.

Prior to the first confirmed COVID-19 case on the Navajo Nation, on March 3rd we issued a travel advisory for all Navajo Nation Executive Branch employees along with our Navajo people and continued to caution members of the Navajo Nation in response to growing concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 virus.



## Public Health State of Emergency Declared

On March 11th, nearly a week prior to the first confirmed COVID-19 case on the Navajo Nation, the Commission on Emergency Management issued a Public Health State of Emergency Declaration through resolution CEM-20-03-11, in response to growing concerns over COVID-19.

On the same day, we also issued travel restrictions for all Executive Branch employees, requiring all divisions, departments, and programs to restrict all off-Nation work-related travel until further notice. We directed employees who recently traveled to "hot spots," or areas known to have confirmed cases of the virus, to self-quarantine for approximately 14 days. All Executive Branch offices were required to either cancel or postpone conferences, summits, and events that draw large numbers of people from off the Navajo Nation.

As another proactive measure, we tasked the Division of Human Resources with finalizing an "alternative work schedule" and a "tele-work policy" for Navajo Nation employees. In addition, the Community Health Representatives program and the Health Education Program continued going door-to-door to educate and inform Navajo individuals with underlying conditions, including heart, lung, kidney disease, diabetes, and conditions that suppress the immune system. They also provide information and presentations at chapters, schools, and various worksites.

On March 13th, we issued an Executive Order enacting more proactive measures to prevent the potential spread of COV-ID-19 on the Navajo Nation by temporarily reducing the number of on-duty Executive Branch employees, which does not include public safety personnel, firefighters,

EMS personnel, Department of Emergency Management, Division of Finance, Division of Social Services, and others that provide essential direct services. This order was set for three weeks and has since been extended to the end of April and will likely be extended again. On this same day, we supported a resolution from the Navajo Nation Board of Education to temporarily close all schools on the Navajo Nation and public parks – the closure of schools has since been extended for the remainder of the academic year.





#### Case Data and Public Information

On March 17th, we received the devastating news that one member of the Navajo Nation tested positive for COVID-19. We immediately coordinated with health care officials and announced the case through news media outlets, social media, and public radio. We immediately scheduled a press conference that was aired live on social media on March 18th. From this day forward, we have been aggressive in cautioning our people through daily updates in the form of press releases, radio forums, live press conferences and online town halls, roadside billboards, brochures, and much more.

On a daily basis, the Navajo Department of Health's Epidemiology Center and Navajo Area Indian Health Service work together to gather data on the number of new positive cases of COVID-19, negative test results, deaths due to the virus, and overall number of tests administered by the tribally-operated and Indian Health Service health care facilities.

They initially reported the results by Indian Health Service unit areas, however, as the number of cases increased, they began reporting the numbers by counties. The Nation is not able to provide specific community data at this time in order to comply with HIPAA policies that protect health care information for individuals. We are working in coordination with our health care professionals to develop a dashboard that will allow for more accurate and specific data in regards to COVID-19 testing results.

#### \$4 Million Appropriation

On March 20th, we signed Resolution CMA-06-20, approving a \$4 million appropriation for the Navajo Department of Health to fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Navajo Nation and deliver much-needed resources and equipment to health care experts and emergency response personnel on the ground. The funding will provide medical supplies, food and water supplies, equipment, public outreach, and more.

We commend the 24th Navajo Nation Council for their support of the funding request initiated by the Executive Branch. Instead of waiting for federal assistance, we as leaders stood together and stepped up to help provide our own funds to help our communities and first responders. We continue to advocate for more funds from the federal level and more resources from various entities.



#### \$1.3 Million for Chapters

On March 27th, we approved resolution CMA-11-20, appropriating \$1.3 million for chapters to provide resources to address the COVID-19 pandemic on the Navajo Nation. The funds are provided to chapters with low balances to bring their current emergency fund balance to \$25,000 each.

The funds are strictly to be used to address the COVID-19 pandemic. While the resolution includes certain safeguards to prevent the misuse of the funds, it's incumbent on every chapter to use the funds appropriately for those most in need including the elderly, high-risk, and others who need help right away. We are in this together and we will eventually overcome this pandemic, but we also need to listen to the health care experts who are telling us to stay home as much as possible.



## Public Health Emergency Orders

- 1. On March 18th, the Navajo Nation issued the first Public Health Emergency Order, limiting mass gatherings to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- 2. On March 19th, the Navajo Nation issued Public Health Emergency Order 2020-002, requiring the closure of the Chilchinbeto community to allow the quarantine of residents and for the isolation of COVID-19 positive cases.
- 3. On March 20, the Navajo Nation issued Public Health Emergency Order 2020-003, initiating a "Stay at Home Order" that requires all residents of the Navajo Nation to remain home and isolated and all non-essential businesses to close to prevent the further spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. The previous shelter-in-place order for the community of Chilchinbeto was expanded to the entire Navajo Nation.
- 4. On March 29th, the Navajo Nation issued a Public Health Emergency Order 2020-004, extending the existing "Stay at Home Order" and implementing a curfew for the entire Navajo Nation that requires everyone to stay home from 8:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., seven days a week. All individuals shall be at home during curfew hours except in the event of an emergency. This curfew does not apply to essential employees reporting to or from duty, with official identification and/or a letter of designation from their essential business employer on official letterhead which includes a contact for verification.
- 5. On April 5th, the Navajo Department of Health issued Public Health Emergency Order 2020-005, implementing a 57-hour weekend curfew that began at 8:00 p.m. (MDT) on Friday, April 10, to 5:00 a.m. (MDT) on Monday, April 13 to slow the spread of the Dikos Nstaaígíí-19 (COVID-19) on the Navajo Nation.
- 6. On April 16th, a new Public Health Emergency Order 2020-006, extending the 57-hour weekend curfew for two addi-

tional weekends in the month of April and closing essential businesses during weekend curfews due to community spread of COVID-19. The first weekend curfew began at 8:00 p.m. on Friday, April 17 and ended on Monday, April 20 at 5:00 a.m. (MDT). The second weekend curfew will begin at 8:00 p.m. on Friday, April 24 and ends on Monday, April 27 at 5:00 a.m. (MDT).

7. On April 17th, the Navajo Department of Health issued Public Health Emergency Order 2020-007, requiring all individuals on the Navajo Nation to wear protective masks in public to help prevent the further spread of COVID-19. The Public Health Emergency Order defines a mask as a covering designed to filter one's breathing through both the nose and mouth. A mask must snugly cover the face around the nose and mouth to prevent the wearer from breathing unfiltered air. May be a commercially-made face mask, or a homemade cloth face covering. The Public Health Emergency Order defines a mask as a covering designed to filter one's breathing through both the nose and mouth. A mask must snugly cover the face around the nose and mouth to prevent the wearer from breathing unfiltered air. May be a commercially-made face mask, or a homemade cloth face covering.



#### Donations

The Navajo Health Command Operations Center has established the "Navajo Nation COVID-19 Fund" to accept donated funds to help respond to and fight Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19, the COVID-19 pandemic. The Navajo Nation is accepting monetary and non-monetary donations to address immediate medical and community needs. Charitable contributions to the Fund are deductible by the donor for federal income, estate, and gift tax purposes, and written acknowledgment of donation will be provided upon request. The Navajo Nation qualifies under Section 7871(a) of the Internal Service Code for purposes of receiving public or charitable distributions.

We are very grateful for the support and donations we have received from individuals, businesses, and other agencies. We need strong partnerships to respond and combat the virus. The command center is tracking and documenting all contributions for accountability and reporting purposes. The Navajo Nation government is using its own resources and services to

respond to the pandemic, however, we need continued support to fight the virus.

The Navajo Health Command Operation Center in coordination with Navajo Nation Attorney General Doreen N. McPaul and Navajo Nation Controller Pearline Kirk, established the Navajo Nation COVID-19 Fund to respond to donation inquiries effectively. All donations are coordinated through the Navajo Nation Department of Justice, which facilitates monetary donations through the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller and non-monetary contributions through the health command center's Operations and Logistics Sections. All donations are documented to comply with Federal Emergency Management Agency reporting requirements and Navajo Nation laws on accepting donations.

The Navajo Nation's immediate medical needs include N95 masks, face shields, non-latex gloves (nitrile), medical-grade gloves, goggles/eye protection, surgical and isolation masks, isolation and level II surgical gowns, Tyvek coveralls, surgical caps, shoe covers, thermometers (no touch scan), portable pulse oximeters, ventilators, hand sanitizers, disinfecting wipes and sprays, alcohol-based wipes, and others.

The community needs include disposable masks, fabric masks, cleaning supplies, liquid hand soap, hand sanitizer, toiletries, thermometers, paper products, non-perishable food, bottled water, baby necessities (formula, diapers, wipes), livestock feed, hay, pet food, firewood, coal, and others.

The Navajo Nation has been made aware of other entities and individuals who are also soliciting donations for tribal members. We urge everyone to work in coordination with the official "Navajo Nation COVID-19 Fund" to ensure that contributions are distributed to those families and communities most in need and for accountability purposes. The leaders also caution everyone to be aware of potential scams that attempt to take advantage of individuals.

The official webpage for donations to the Navajo Nation, which has further details on how to support the Nation's Dikos Ntsaaígíí-19 (COVID-19) efforts is: http://www.nndoh.org/donate.html. You can also contact the HCOC Donation Branch directly at (928) 871-6206 or by email to general@nndoj.org.



#### Federal Medical Stations

Over the last several weeks, we have teamed up with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New Mexico and Arizona National Guard, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency to assess several possible sites to serve as Alternative Care Sites (ACS) in the communities of Kayenta, Tuba City, Chinle, Shiprock, and Gallup to help patient overflow from local health care facilities due to the spread of COVID-19.

We, along with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA, and the National Guard to assess the sites to serve as Alternative Care Sites. To date, we have signed several agreements for several of the sites including Chinle, and Shiprock. It will take a couple of weeks for the federal personnel to setup the Alternative Care Sites. We continue to hold regular phones calls with federal agencies, state partners, and members of Congress to facilitate the distribution of more resources and funds.



#### Public Outreach

Prior to any confirmed COVID-19 cases on the Navajo Nation, the Executive Branch had Community Health Representatives and the Health Education Program officials going door-to-door to educate and inform Navajo individuals with underlying conditions, including heart, lung, kidney disease, diabetes, and conditions that suppress the immune system. They also provide information and presentations at chapters, schools, and various worksites. Of course, door-to-door outreach discontinued when the virus reached the Navajo Nation for the safety of our employees.

On a daily basis, our administration in coordination with the Health Command Operations Center continues to issue press releases, radio forums twice a week, online town halls twice a week, press conferences, brochures, frequent tele-conferences, roadside billboards, text message alerts, and much more to help distribute updates and keep our Navajo people informed as much as possible.









## Operation First of the Month

On April 1st our administration was out in full force at Bashas' Diné Market locations for "Operation First of the Month" to help Navajo elders and to help provide a safer shopping experience to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Navajo Nation worked with Bashas' to provide Navajo elders the chance to purchase essential items from 6:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on April 1st, when a large majority of elders received monthly benefits.

Under the coordination of Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development Executive Director JT Willie, the Nez-Lizer team helped wipe down shopping carts, facilitated traffic flow, carried purchased items to vehicles for elders, distributed safety messages and information about shopping safely, social distancing, and the importance of disinfecting products.

Operation First of the Month helped to keep our elders safe and close to home while they shopped for their essential needs, such as groceries, household items, and livestock supplies. Having our elders shop locally reduced travel to border towns and decreased their risk of COVID-19 exposure. We thank Bashas' for working together with us.

Informational booths were also hosted outside of the stores by the Navajo Department of Health, Navajo Nation Division of Social Services, and the Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development. Navajo Police Department, Navajo Nation Park Rangers, and the Navajo Division of Transportation also assisted with regulating the flow of traffic and crowds. Our administration is committed to implementing Operation First of the Month for as long as COVID-19 remains a risk to our elderly Navajo people.



## Roadways and Tourism

On April 3rd we signed into law resolution CMA-16-20, which reaffirms a previous Public Health Order issued on March 20 that outlines temporary restrictions for roadways for tourists and visitors to the Navajo Nation, but does not apply to essential commerce and business services including the delivery of essential items such as groceries, food products, medicine, hardware supplies, household consumer products. It also does not apply to medical providers, public safety, and first responders, who are the essential personnel fighting at the front lines.

With the growing numbers of positive cases of COVID-19 on the Navajo Nation, we took the initiative on March 20th to issue a Public Health Order that temporarily prohibits tourists and visitors from entering the Navajo Nation unless they are delivering essential items that help our people. Navajo Police have been warning tourists and educating them on these provisions. This resolution passed by the Navajo Nation Council reaffirms our position.



#### Federal Stimulus Bills

On March 27th, President Trump signed the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act, which is a \$2 trillion stimulus package providing economic relief to individuals, families, businesses, local and State governments, and Tribal governments and entities across the Nation. The bill establishes an \$8 billion tribal relief funds and provides \$2 billion in emergency supplemental funding for the Indian Health Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Indian Education, and HUD's Office of Native American Program, among other federal agencies and programs.

In the form of an advanced rebate, taxpayers began receiving a 2020 tax credit of \$1,200 for adults and \$500 for children under the age of 17. This amount is reduced for taxpayers with an adjusted gross income of more than \$75,000 a year and

phases out completely for those with incomes of \$99,000 or more. It also includes unemployment benefits and assistance for businesses. While we understand the need for financial assistance, this disbursement of funds has unfortunately led to a high number of people going into public to purchase items, furthering the risks of spreading COVID-19. We continue to urge our Navajo people to be prudent in their spending and to save as much as possible for the future.

In anticipation of the funding package, our administration created the Navajo Economic Stimulus Team to proactively engage federal agencies slated to receive stimulus funding for distribution to Indian Country. We also directed all Division Directors to strategize and coordinate on Navajo economic recovery needs, and to actively work with federal agencies on the funding process.

Below is a brief summary of the CARES Act benefits and funds specifically set-aside for tribes:

#### Healthcare:

- \$1.032 billion for the Indian Health Service (IHS) Services Account
- Includes up to \$65 million for electronic health record stabilization and support
- Allows up to \$125 million to be transferred to IHS Facilities Account
- At least \$450 million shall be distributed to Direct Service Tribes and Self-Governance Tribes

#### Public Health:

- Minimum of \$125 million in set-aside funding for Tribes and Tribal organizations under Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Funding is for surveillance, epidemiology, laboratory capacity, infection control, mitigation, communications, and other preparedness and response activities
- Minimum of \$15 million in set-aside funding for Tribes and Tribal organizations under Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Funding is for mental and behavioral health services in response to COVID-19
- Minimum \$15 million in set-aside funding for Tribes and Tribal organizations under Health
- Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
- Funding is for health surveillance and other needs under the HRSA Rural Health program

#### Housing:

- \$300 million under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA)
- \$200 million is for Native American Housing Block Grants
- \$100 million is for Indian Community Development Block Grant

#### Nutrition

- \$100 million for the Food Distribution Program for Indians Reservations
- \$50 million is for facility improvements and equipment upgrades
- \$50 million is for additional food purchases

#### **Additional Provisions**

- \$8 billion for tribal enterprises
- The SDPI is extended until November 30, 2020.

On April 17th the Navajo Nation Washington Office submitted required data to the U.S. Department of the Treasury as mandated by the federal government for tribes to become eligible for funds from the \$150 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund, which was established under the CARES Act. We continue to work together with our federal partners and congressional delegation to secure more funds and resources.

#### Rhino Health, LLC Glove Factory

The Navajo Nation's investment in the development of the Rhino Health, LLC nitrile glove manufacturing facility in Church Rock, N.M. is paying off during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the company continues to produce much-needed gloves for health care workers and first responders who are on the frontlines fighting COVID-19. This is sovereignty at the highest level. We are practicing the teaching of our elders known as T'áá hwó'ajít'éego, or self-reliance and self-determination. We are empowering ourselves to help our Navajo people and now we're taking it a step further by helping people across the country.

The funds that our Nation invested in Rhino Health, LLC, are now helping to keep our health care workers, nurses, and other first responders safe as they fight the COVID-19 coronavirus. We have many Navajo men and women working in the glove factory who are making a big difference in the lives of many whether they realize it or not.

We are very proud to see Navajo-made products making a huge difference for the better during this pandemic. In every challenging time, you always have people and entities step up and shine. Rhino Health, LLC, as well as Navajo enterprises, small businesses, and others are stepping up and helping to fight and beat the pandemic. These are the stories of hope and inspiration that need to be told in times like this



## "Keeping American Connected Pledge"

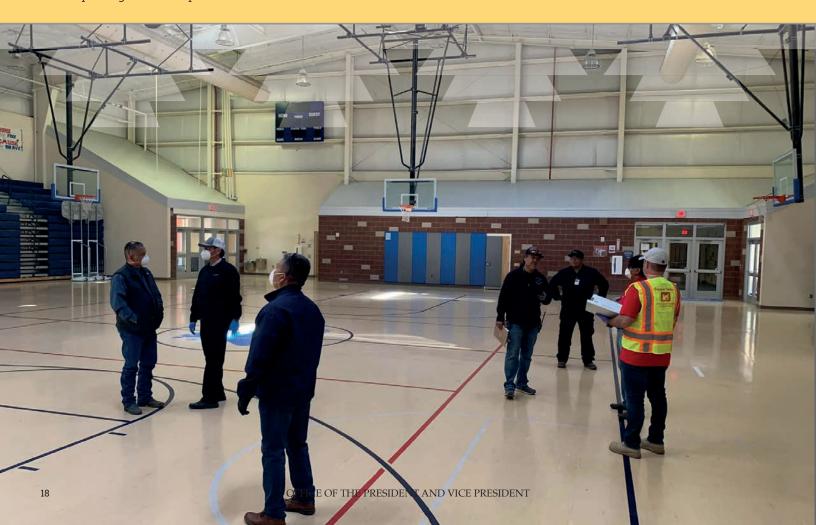
On April 10th, Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission Executive Director Christopher Becenti announced that the Navajo Nation's telecommunication service providers, including AT&T/Cricket, CellularOne, Choice/NTUA Wireless, Frontier, Naked Mobile, Sacred Wind, T-Mobile, and Verizon Wireless signed the "Keeping Americans Connected Pledge" to ensure more Navajo students, small businesses, and residents have internet access during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the Navajo Nation Telecommunications Regulatory Commission has been working closely with Choice/NTUA Wireless and Sacred Wind to set-up WiFi hot spots connections for Navajo students. Choice/NTUA Wireless installed three free WiFi hot spots at the Chinle and Dilkon NTUA District Offices and NTUA headquarters in Fort Defiance for students to use from their vehicles from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 a.m. from Monday to Friday.

As the Dikos Nstaaígíí-19 outbreak spreads and causes a series of disruption to the economic, educational, medical, and civic life of our Nation, it is important that our Navajo citizens stay connected. Broadband and telephone connections will help people stay connected with their loved ones, health care providers, work, and ensure our children and students can continue to engage in learning.

The "Keeping Americans Connected Pledge" is a 60-day pledge for service providers to:

- Not cutting service to residents or small businesses that can't pay bills due to the ongoing pandemic.
- Waiving late fees incurred due to coronavirus-related hardships.
- · Opening WiFi hotspot access to those who need them.



#### FCC Grants Access to Expand Broadband

Recently, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) granted temporary access and use of an unassigned spectrum to provide more broadband service on the Navajo Nation, to help with the COVID-19 response efforts. With the temporary closure of schools, work places, and some businesses, there is a growing need for more broadband support for those working from home and for all of the essential and frontline workers who continue to serve our people. We are truly thankful for the support of FCC Chairman Ajit Pai and other officials for making this possible.



#### Alcohol Sales in Border Towns

Unfortunately, we continue to receive reports from concerned Navajo families regarding intoxicated loved ones and community members who continue to have access to alcohol sales at other business establishments such as gas stations, convenience stores, and grocery stores. Many of our Navajo citizens travel to towns bordering the Navajo Nation and sadly some for the purchase of alcohol.

We commend the Gallup City Council's recent vote to temporarily stop alcohol sales at convenience stores in the city of Gallup, N.M. to help fight the spread of COVID-19. City councilors cited the need to protect transients and homeless people, who are at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 through the sharing of alcohol among several people from the same bottle.

On April 13th, our administration sent a letter to New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham, requesting her assistance in putting a temporary hold on alcohol sales at gas stations, convenience stores, and grocery stores to reduce the risk of spreading the virus among Navajo people in the city of Gallup.

On April 6, we also issued a separate letter to Gov. Lujan Grisham with concerns over liquor stores. We are very appreciative of the Governor's Office for taking quick action to close liquor stores in the state of New Mexico, which included Sagebrush Liquors located near the Navajo Nation in McKinley County.

Our office has received many phones calls and e-mail messages from concerned Navajo citizens regarding intoxicated family members and friends who are not practicing COVID-19 prevention measures and many of whom are being careless and potentially putting others at risk of contracting the coronavirus disease. The number one priority is the health of all people and we thank the Gallup City Council for taking a step in the right direction. We hope they also consider banning alcohol sales at grocery stores as well.



## STAY HOME STAY SAFE SAVE LIVES

FOR THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT, PLEASE VISIT HTTP://WWW.OPVP.NAVAJO-NSN.GOV/OR FIND US ON FACEBOOK, TWITTER, AND INSTAGRAM.





