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News Release

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Navajo Nation Advances Anticipated Federal Funds to ONNSFA; Awarding for Winter/Spring 2019 Term Resumes

The Navajo Nation on Friday advanced \$2.5 million from its own funds to the Office of the Navajo Nation Scholarship & Financial Assistance so that awarding of financial assistance and scholarships would continue for the 2019 Winter/Spring term.

The ONNSFA received notice on Dec. 21 from the Bureau of Indian Affairs that the Annual Funding Agreement (AFA) covering Jan 1, 2019, to Dec 31, 2019 for Higher Education was approved and awarded continuing resolution funds of \$2,514,193. However, due to the federal shutdown, the contract is at a standstill until the federal government re-opens.

Rose Graham, director of the scholarship office, explained that prior to the advance from the Navajo Nation, federal funds for scholarships, which are mainly used for undergraduate need-based awards, had been depleted.

In a Jan. 11, 2019 memorandum to the Navajo Nation Controller, Dwight Witherspoon, Chief of Staff of the Navajo Nation Office of the President & Vice President, which was concurred by President Russell Begaye, wrote, "Due to the emergent situation created by the federal shutdown and the large number of dependent students still awaiting financial assistance, the Controller is directed to float \$2,514,193.00 to the Navajo Nation Scholarship Program for the Spring/Winter term until the BIA-NRO [Bureau of Indian Affairs – Navajo Regional Office] funds can be drawn down."

Ms. Graham said the Controller's office responded quickly and established a new account with the advanced funds, which allowed the ONNSFA to resume making awards for the current academic term.

As of Jan. 11, a total of 9,127 students submitted applications for the 2019 Spring/Winter term and about \$5.7 million from several funding sources was already awarded to a total of 1,854 applicants for the 2019 Spring/Winter term.

“We are grateful that President Begaye and officials within the Office of the President and Vice President, the Office of Management & Budget and the Office of the Controller recognized the urgency of the situation and acted immediately,” Ms. Graham said. “We have been receiving hundreds of calls and emails from students concerned about their pending awards.”

Ms. Graham said efforts are now being made to arrange for use of Navajo Nation funds budgeted for the 2019-2020 academic year as the federal government works through its budget process. The advanced funds will be replenished when the Navajo Nation receives appropriated funds drawn down from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

“We are acutely aware that scholarships and financial aid are key to ensuring that Navajo students stay in school and complete their degree programs,” Ms. Graham said.

Ms. Graham said while awarding has resumed, it may take a few more weeks for scholarships and financial aid to reach students at their schools. “We appreciate students’ patience and understanding at this time. We encourage students to continue checking their award status online at www.onnsfa.org.”

The partial federal government shutdown has gone on for 24 days, since December 22, 2018.

The following federal agencies do not have enacted FY 2019 appropriations and are affected by the shutdown: Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of the Interior, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of the Treasury and The State Department. The federal government shutdown is affecting the allocations of funding for tribal P.L. 93-638 self-determination contracts and self-governance compacts.