



Jonathan Nez  
President

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## News Release

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### **Navajo Nation Council Approves Emergency Legislation Appropriating \$2.5 Million for Spring 2021 Scholarships**

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Navajo Nation Council on Monday approved legislation 0316-20 appropriating \$2.5 million from the Unreserved, Undesignated Fund for scholarships and financial aid by a vote of 22 in favor and 0 opposed. The legislation now goes to President Jonathan Nez for his consideration.

The measure, sponsored by Delegate Eugene Tso (Chinle) and co-sponsored by Speaker Seth Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh), was taken after the Bureau of Indian Affairs notified the Navajo Nation that it declined to enter into an agreement to fund the Navajo Nation's Higher Education Program for 2021 despite the five-year P.L. 93-638 contract already in place.

The Higher Education Grant Program, which provides federal funding for scholarships to tribes, is administered by the Department of Interior. Through a P.L. 93-638 contract between the Dept. of Interior and the Navajo Nation, the BIA forwards funds to the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Aid (ONNSFA) to provide financial aid and scholarships to Navajo college students.

Rose Graham, ONNSFA director, thanked Delegate Tso and Speaker Damon for their advocacy on behalf of Navajo students seeking a college education. "The Navajo Nation Council's action will assist the scholarship office in providing awards to students for the Spring 2021 term. We are grateful for the full support of the Navajo Nation Council. They understand the issues students and families face during these challenging times." Ms. Graham expressed appreciation to Delegate Daniel Tso (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake) for alerting the Health, Education and Human Services Committee of the BIA's declination letter.

She also pointed out that Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr. (Birdsprings, Leupp, Tolani Lake) brought up a good point about how it is "business as usual" that funds are advanced to the Higher Education Grant program in anticipation of federal appropriations each year.

"It is true that federal funds do not arrive in time for Spring term awards, so we have to ask the Navajo Nation for an advance. The solution is to have Congress authorize Forward Funding for the Higher Education Grant," Ms. Graham said. "Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools and Tribal Colleges are Forward Funded while Higher Education and Johnson O'Malley funds are not. Forward funding would be available in July, not January. We have been advocating for Forward Funding for many years. We are working very hard to get it approved during the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress."