

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 3, 2020

The Honorable Steven Mnuchin
Secretary of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington D.C., 20220

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington D.C., 20240

Dear Secretaries Mnuchin and Bernhardt:

As Members of the House of Representatives who represent the 22 federally recognized Tribes in Arizona, we write to you about the need to ensure a timely and fair distribution of the \$8 billion Coronavirus Tribal Relief Fund established by the recently enacted Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (“CARES Act”). While the CARES Act was being developed, we consistently heard from tribal nations about the need for federal relief to assist them in funding their essential government services and to help offset costs for continuing to pay employees who were impacted by closures of tribal governments and enterprises. We therefore urge you to immediately consult with Tribal Nations, including those in Arizona, in order to facilitate the release of this aid throughout Indian Country as soon as possible.

Our country is waging a war with this new virus, and we need to ensure no community is left behind without the resources they need in that fight. We must also protect our workers and keep them paid so they can purchase the food and supplies they need to get their families through this crisis safely. This is true of all our communities, including Tribal Nations, who are uniquely vulnerable to this health and economic crisis.

Tribes in Arizona are on the front lines of this pandemic. The Navajo Nation is located in Apache, Navajo, and Coconino Counties, where testing indicates that there more COVID-19 cases than the rest of the state on a per capita basis. In Navajo County, there are more than four-times as many cases than the state average, while Coconino County has nearly three-times the state average. Significant resources are necessary to ensure that Native Communities have the resources to recover from a disproportionate impact.

In addition to a disproportionate impact, many Tribes are rural and have remote communities, making access to hospitals difficult and expensive. For example, the Havasupai Tribe resides at the bottom of the Grand Canyon and it is costly to transport individuals to the nearest hospital. Accordingly, the COVID-19 relief fund regulations must contemplate these unique health care costs and the associated lost revenues.

The tribal nations within Arizona are diverse with unique health and economic needs. While some primarily rely on the federal government to fund their government programs, others have been able to supplement federal funding with revenues generated from tribally owned enterprises. Unlike state and local units of governments, tribal governments lack a tax base and must rely on the federal government and business revenues—rather than taxes—to fund essential services for citizens. In addition, tribal governments and their enterprises are often some of the largest employers in their regions and make up a significant component of the local economy. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a uniquely catastrophic economic impact on tribal nations in that they have had to close their enterprises, which means the very revenues they rely on for services to their citizens evaporated overnight. Additionally, as some of largest employers in their regions, the closure of tribal governments and enterprises has a dramatic impact on local workers and economies.

It is these hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that must be addressed by the \$8 billion tribal relief fund. These consequences are being felt right now, and the priority of your Departments should be to alleviate these immediate impacts and the impacts expected in the near future. The CARES Act indicates that these funds are specifically targeted towards expenditures incurred between March 1, 2020 and December 30, 2020, but we believe it is important to focus on the present and near future impacts to help get our tribal nations through this crisis. We also think it is important that you ensure every tribal nation receives a baseline amount of relief.

Again, we urge you to take immediate steps to consult with Arizona Tribes on the distribution of the \$8 billion Coronavirus Tribal Relief Fund to ensure the timely distribution of this money in a way that upholds our federal trust responsibilities to Tribes and ensures tribal nations have the resources they need to fight this pandemic.

Sincerely,



Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



David Schweikert
Member of Congress



Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



Debbie Lesko
Member of Congress

CC: Tara Sweeney, Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs, Department of Interior