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**TOM O'HALLERAN**  
1ST DISTRICT, ARIZONA

April 30, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

To date, Congress has passed four significant packages aimed at combatting and mitigating the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 packages. Unfortunately, many of the provisions that were created to help Americans, businesses, state and local governments, and health systems have not provided the same positive impact on rural Arizona as they have on other parts of the country. Should drastic legislative fixes be omitted from the next COVID-19 package, Congress will once again leave rural Arizona, and rural America, behind.

This crisis has only further revealed and exacerbated America's urban-rural divide. Students are being forced to distance learn without the high-speed broadband to do so. Long neglected public health infrastructure is starting to crumble as funding dries up and federal loan, grant, and other direct payments distributed by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are proving insufficient to meet their needs. As Congress crafts future COVID-19 response packages, I respectfully ask the needs of rural Arizona and all Americans are prioritized through the following:

***Health Care***

- Ensure payment parity under Medicare for providers in rural health clinics (RHCs) and federally qualified community health centers (FQHCs) that provide distant site telehealth visits to their patients.
- Ensure that RHCs and FQHCs can provide audio-only services. The *CARES Act* authorizes FQHCs to furnish telehealth services but excluded FQHCs and RHCs from eligibility for telephone evaluation and management services reimbursement.
- Create a greater specific allocation within the *Public Health and Social Services Emergency Fund* to ensure that these health facilities can keep their doors open and not furlough staff during this pandemic. The 10 percent allocation of the initial \$100 billion that Congress has authorized will prove insufficient to keep many rural health facilities open.

- In previous packages, Congress has guaranteed coverage for diagnostic testing for COVID-19. Congress must go one step further and guarantee that treatment for COVID-19 is covered so that those seeking care are able to without concerns about affordability.

### ***Small Business***

- The House has successfully added guardrails to the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) in the *Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act* after initial legislation from the Senate failed to account for smaller and underbanked businesses. Additional transparency and data from the Small Business Administration (SBA) is necessary to ensure that much needed federal dollars are reaching those businesses in need.
- \$60 billion in set asides for smaller financial institutions to loan out PPP loans in the *Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act* was well-intended to reach rural Americans. However, initial reports show that smaller, less-resourced businesses are still struggling to access the federal loan program. Congress must continue to provide specific allocations to small businesses located in smaller communities.
- The implementation of the PPP program has not worked as intended, creating significant confusion among small business owners. Congress must mandate that the SBA provide clear and concise guidance for small businesses to ensure that they are able access these loan programs. Specifically, businesses without a strong relationship to a financial institution have struggled to access PPP loans while their counterparts that do have existing relationships to larger financial institutions have been more successful.
- Ensure that all 501(c) organizations that are not currently eligible for PPP loans can receive these important federal dollars. These organizations provide community and business support roles in rural America and they are struggling without access to much needed support funds.
- Expand the amount of capital necessary to maintain the Emergency Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) and grant programs to guarantee that many struggling small businesses in rural and Tribal settings receive much needed capital quickly.

### ***Tribal***

- Reauthorize the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) for five years and increase annually available program funding from \$150 million to \$200 million. Diabetes, a disease prevalent among many tribal groups, can cause complications and make COVID-19 deadlier.
- Authorize full funding of \$2.67 billion for the IHS's Sanitation Facilities Construction program.
- Provide additional federal support and expedite processing for "638 Hospitals" on tribal lands. We are seeing the number of COVID-19 cases dramatically increase in several tribal nations and federal support is necessary to contain these outbreaks.
- Provide \$1 billion for Bureau of Reclamation projects, including tribal water settlement projects like the Community's Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project (P-MIP).
- Provide \$16.8 billion for Department of Energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

- Appropriate \$450 million for Bureau of Indian Affairs construction to improve roads and schools.
- Appropriate \$6.4 billion for EPA administered State and Tribal Assistance Grants, including Clean Water State Revolving Funds for wastewater collection and treatment.

### ***High Speed Broadband***

- Provide robust funding of at least \$40 billion for quality fixed and mobile broadband infrastructure to ensure unserved and underserved communities have access to broadband speeds at least 25/3 Mbps. Quality, high-speed broadband will unlock the ability for Americans throughout rural America and Indian Country to access telehealth services, participate in online learning, and compete economically in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy.
- Fully fund bipartisan broadband bills that have been signed into law: the *Broadband DATA Act* which will reform the FCC's coverage maps, and the *Secure and Trusted Communications Act* which will ensure rural telecommunications providers are able to rip and replace compromised network equipment made by manufacturers identified as national security threats, such as Huawei.
- Include the *ACCESS BROADBAND Act (S. 1046/H.R. 1328)* in the next package to ensure there is significant coordination between federal agencies, such as the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in distributing broadband infrastructure funds. This will ensure that taxpayer resources are maximized, and networks are not overbuilt on top of existing networks in areas already providing service at quality speeds.

### ***State, Local, and Tribal Government Funding:***

- Fix the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) formula that was used in the *CARES Act* to reach smaller governments. Under the *CARES Act*, only two of Arizona's 15 counties received direct federal assistance. These communities are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic and have been forced to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 testing kits, while seeing sales tax revenues decline.
- Provide specific guardrails to ensure that rural hospitals and health centers receive adequate access to federal dollars.
- Work to ensure that additional funds are made available for homeless shelters to house patients, purchase PPE for their staff and their residents, contract with hotels for additional space, and provide meals for their residents. The homeless are often unknown carriers of COVID-19 and without specific care for these individuals, the pandemic will only further sweep across rural Arizona.

For too long, rural America has been left behind as federal investment and resources have skipped over many overlooked communities. I see the discrepancies throughout Arizona's 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District and hear it from our local government officials, frontline medical providers, and small business owners. We must work together in a bipartisan manner to ensure that rural America is not left behind as we continue to work to address this pandemic. As always, please do not hesitate to contact me to further discuss these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom O'Halleran". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" being larger and more prominent than the last name "O'Halleran".

Tom O'Halleran  
Member of Congress