



Underscore.news: Deadline to spend COVID-19 funds has Oregon Tribes on edge

Relief money provided by the CARES Act must be spent by Dec. 30. With Congress fighting over additional stimulus, Oregon Tribal governments are left wondering how they'll provide services next year.

By Brian Bull, Underscore.news; originally published Dec. 9, 2020

While many people are waiting anxiously for 2020 – a year rife with disasters and vitriol – to finally end, Oregon's Tribal governments are anxious about what will happen to COVID-19 relief funds when 2021 arrives.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of the Treasury has allocated \$200 million in direct payments to Oregon Tribal governments this year. That money came with conditions, one of the most pressing being that it must be spent by year's end.

With just weeks left before the Dec. 30 deadline, Tribes are facing a dilemma. Should they hold onto their COVID-19 relief money to fund services after the new year and hope Congress grants an extension? Or should they spend the money now, as the law requires, and risk not being able to fund services in 2021?

"Hopefully the date is going to be extended," says Stephanie Watkins, acting CEO and director of human services for the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians. The small Tribe received \$11 million from the federal CARES Act of 2020 this year.

"We're conservative in our spending right now too, just because we don't know what the future's going to hold," Watkins said. "We're definitely conservative in our reopening protocols and procedures, and we'll maintain that until it's determined that our communities are safe."

"Conservative" is a reoccurring word for Oregon's Tribes, as officials describe how they've approached a pandemic that has killed more than 286,000 Americans, including more than 1,000 in the state. Many Tribal offices have limited services, and casinos – a primary economic generator and employer – were shut down at the onset of the pandemic.

The \$2.2 trillion CARES Act that passed in March has funded testing and distance-learning programs that help limit the transmission of COVID-19. It's also

See COVID on page 8

History again! Haaland tapped to lead Interior Department in Biden's Cabinet

N.M. Democrat poised to become first American Indian to lead a Cabinet agency after being nominated by Joe Biden

By Aliyah Chavez, Indian Country Today; originally published Dec. 17, 2020

President-elect Joe Biden has chosen Rep. Deb Haaland to lead the U.S. Interior Department, according to the Washington Post. If confirmed by the Senate, the New Mexico Democrat would make history as the first American Indian to serve as a Cabinet secretary.

Haaland, who is from the Pueblos of Laguna and Jemez, became one of the first two Native women elected to Congress in 2018.

She was selected for the Interior post over former Deputy Interior Secretary Michael Connor, Taos Pueblo, and two U.S. senators from New Mexico: Tom Udall, who is retiring, and Martin Heinrich. Gov.

Michelle Lujan Grisham of New Mexico was offered the job but turned it down, according to The Hill.

The Interior Department, which employs 70,000 people, is tasked with protecting the nation's natural resources

and honoring the government's federal trust responsibilities. The agency manages America's vast public lands and coastal waters while overseeing prominent departments such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education.

Haaland's nomination has been backed by many Indigenous leaders, advocates and allies for weeks.

See Haaland on page 9



Courtesy photo by Aliyah Chavez, ICT
Rep. Deb Haaland

Community Meeting Schedule

The Community Meetings held annually by the Tribal Planning Department are scheduled for:

Jan. 13, 2021 – Eugene
Jan. 21, 2021 – Siletz
Feb. 11, 2021 – Salem
Feb. 25, 2021 – Portland

The Community Meetings this year will be via ZOOM and each will still focus on the scheduled area noted. Information to connect with each Zoom meeting and the meeting agenda will be posted online and also available at your area office.

Planning will present the outcome of the Tribal survey.

2019 Indian gaming revenue of \$34.6B sets industry record, shows 2.5% increase

WASHINGTON – Chairman E. Sequoyah Simermeyer and Vice Chair Kathryn Isom-Clause of the National Indian Gaming Commission announced the fiscal year 2019 (FY19) gross gaming revenue (GGR) for the Indian gaming industry on Dec. 8.

Revenue for FY19 totaled \$34.6 billion, an increase of 2.5% over 2018. In the 32 years since the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was enacted, 2019 marked the Indian gaming industry's highest revenue report.

During FY19, nearly every NIGC region experienced growth. The Oklahoma City region saw the largest increase of 7.7%.

"Healthy Tribal economies are important to promoting the Tribal self-sufficiency envisioned in the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. The growth reflected in the 2019 gaming revenue demonstrates the strength of Tribal economies in recent years. The Indian gaming industry is a

vital component to many Tribal economies across the country," said Simermeyer.

The reporting period for FY19 ended before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the temporary closure of every Tribal gaming operation. Although the full effect of the pandemic is yet to be realized, many Indian gaming operations remain closed or operate at reduced capacity.

Some Indian gaming operations have been closed since March 2020. The pandemic's impact on the Indian gaming industry will be reflected in the fiscal year 2020 GGR report.

"It is important to recognize the pandemic's impact on Tribes," said Simermeyer. "Tribes' dedication to a safe and sustainable Indian gaming industry is demonstrated in the preventative measures Tribes continue to take during the challenging economic times brought on by the pandemic. This same dedication has fostered a successful and responsibly regulated Indian gaming industry over several decades."

Isom-Clause added that, "While we welcome this positive report from FY2019, we know that the current reality is dramatically different. Future reports will reflect the effects of the pandemic on

the industry, as well as how it continues to adapt to changing circumstances. Despite these current hardships, Indian gaming,

See Gaming on page 9

