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Package *from A9*

has been highly localized," the senators wrote in their letter. "Local journalism has been providing communities answers to critical questions, including information on where to get locally tested, hospital capacity, road closures, essential business hours of operation, and shelter-in-place orders. During this unprecedented public health crisis, people need to have access to their trusted local news outlets for this reliable and sometimes life-saving information."

A third major area of concern has surfaced for both Wyden and Merkley, which is the need for financial assistance for Native American tribal entities across the state to receive disbursement of allocated funds as soon as possible while maintaining respect for the sovereignty and independence of the tribes.

The Oregon Senators joined other members of the house and senate in coauthoring a letter to President Trump, urging the swift initiation of those elements of the CARE package associated with Native Peoples.

"The U.S. government has specific trust and treaty responsibilities to American Indians and Alaska Natives, responsibilities that all federal agencies share equally. Implementation of the CARES Act will require many federal agencies within DOI, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Treasury, the Small Business Administration, and others to work directly with Indian Country on implementation of complicated new authorities and deployment of critical funding," the lawmakers wrote. "It is therefore incumbent upon these agencies to respect the inherent sovereignty of Indian Tribes and show deference

to Tribal views, particularly as they relate to the use and distribution of CARES Act resources and the Tribal Coronavirus Relief Fund that will make an enormous difference in the everyday lives of their members and communities," the lawmakers concluded. "This can only be accomplished by engaging in meaningful, robust, and — given the nature of this pandemic crisis — rapid government-to-government consultation."

Oregon's senators are not the only federal legislators working to fine tune the CARES bill. Congressman Peter DeFazio represents Oregon's 4th District and is Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. DeFazio has been very proactive in addressing what he considers to be inadequacies in the CARES package and held a virtual town hall last week to update constituents on the coronavirus situation and what he sees as deficiencies in the bill.

"I was on a call today with Dr. Fauci and Dr. Birx, (Coronavirus task force members), and we are flattening the curve. Social distancing is working, and it is the only tool we have, other than PPE's, which are in incredibly short supply, as they are being reserved for medical personnel, and even they don't have enough. So please continue to follow the suggestions that have been put in place by the Governor," DeFazio said.

DeFazio then recapped the three different coronavirus bills that have been passed by congress, highlighting the modifications he recommended that were included in the final version of the CARES package.

Those changes included extending employment benefits to the self-employed, limiting payouts to those making more than \$100,00 and preventing government officials from profiting from the pandemic.

DeFazio also touched on the problems experienced by those applying for unemployment and indicating that while administration of the program falls under state authority, Oregon's federal partners are working to improve the service constituents seeking unemployment are receiving.

Most significantly DeFazio reported that employment department staffing has increased recently from 106 to 350 and will grow to an eventual total of 450 employees who will be processing new claims.

DeFazio has also weighed in on Gov. Brown's decision to not reopen Oregon's public schools for the remainder of this school year, supporting Brown but reiterating a concern he has discussed in the past.

"Oregon's schools will close for the rest of the school year, but many students aren't able to e-learn because they lack internet access. I'm pushing for increased funding for broadband infrastructure in the next Covid, recovery package so students across Oregon can get the tools they need to distance learn. All students deserve access to an education, no matter their ZIP code," DeFazio said.

The evaluation and analysis of the omnibus CARES package will be an ongoing task for Oregon's congressional delegation and the instances cited here will undoubtedly be only the beginning of a process that will hopefully benefit not only Oregonians, but all Americans.

Senator Wyden has a comprehensive webpage at wyden.senate.gov, devoted to providing information and assistance to Oregonians seeking support during the COVID-19 emergency and Representative DeFazio has posted updates at defazio.house.gov.

Our Hearts Are With You



As we confront the unprecedented challenges of a devastating virus, we celebrate the incredible, brave hearts of our caregivers and physicians who are serving our community with compassion.

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