



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-232, The Capitol

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader
H-204, The Capitol

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
S-208, The Capitol

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Minority Leader
S-238, The Capitol

Dear House and Senate Leadership:

As Congress works on additional legislation to support the response to COVID-19 and bolster the nation's economy during this public health emergency, I encourage you to advance solutions that will support the public health response and assist families and businesses in these difficult times. As federal lawmakers, we have a responsibility to help those who provide health care and impacted workers with additional support during the pandemic.

Congress and the Administration have taken important steps to remove barriers to treatment in rural areas. I urge you to include provisions to allow Physicians Assistants and Nurse Practitioners to expand their role in home health care to free up hospital bed space. Previous waivers to telehealth restrictions are appreciated, as are allowing smartphone use for consultations, and will further reduce strain on hospital facilities. I urge you to include language allowing this flexibility to apply to rural health centers (RHC) and community health centers (FQHC) in follow-on legislation.

These and other public health facilities play a critical part in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and they face uncertainty with their funding. The Teaching Health Center Graduate Medical Education (THCGME) Program, Community Health Centers, National Health Service Corps, Special Diabetes Program, and Special Diabetes Program for Indians are essential programs whose funding authorization is set to expire in May. I urge you to include long-term reauthorization of these programs in any future package.

The public health crisis has led to an unprecedented response to slow transmission and flatten the curve. With schools and businesses forced to close across the nation, hardworking Americans, their families, and small businesses across the country need relief now. I appreciate the initiatives through the Small Business Administration, and I believe Congress needs to ensure that SBA has the capacity to quickly carry them out.

The agriculture, energy extraction, and travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors need help. Montana ag producers face uncertainty heading into the planting season, and livestock producers see prices falling on top of already-poor market conditions. Energy prices are reaching lows not seen in decades. The travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors that cater to millions of visitors to Yellowstone, Glacier, and outdoor recreation in Montana are already experiencing massive cancellations. I urge you to consider further regulatory relief and to include aid to workers and business owners through existing programs that can provide relief now, rather than standing up new programs that can take weeks or months to implement.

These include allowing flexibility and increased funding through USDA loan programs, State Revolving Funds for water, allowing modification and enhanced funding through Community Development Finance Institutions. I have also heard requests for modifications to regulations regarding troubled asset balance sheets to allow community lenders to provide more flexibility on existing loans and resuming the State Small Business Credit Initiative.

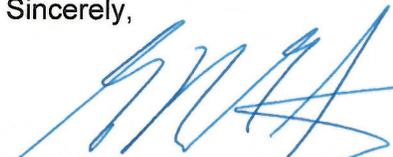
As you are aware broadband in rural and frontier communities increase connectivity, bridge the digital divide, and increase opportunity. More immediately, we see its urgency in increasing access to health care services through telehealth and providing educational resources to the millions of students whose K-12 schools and in-person university classes have been canceled. I urge you to prioritize broadband buildout in areas that lack access to high-speed internet in any future package.

Rural and frontier communities will face severe challenges in responding to this crisis when dealing with reduced revenues. Firefighters and Emergency Medical Services in these communities were struggling before the COVID-19 outbreak. I urge any economic relief provided to state and local governments to include funding specifically for frontier and rural communities. I would also urge you to consider including provisions to ensure the Payments in Lieu of Taxes formula recognizes the challenges these communities face.

I appreciate the efforts of the Administration to provide waivers or suspending enforcement of many existing requirements and hurdles that would hamper and delay our nation's response to this crisis. Congress needs to consider providing liability protection for actions taken under these waivers and suspensions of enforcement to provide certainty to health providers and businesses.

I am grateful for the bipartisan efforts of the House and Senate in responding to this outbreak and its severe economic impact on workers and small business owners. I urge you to remember the health care and economic needs of rural and frontier communities as well as the long-term impact Montana communities face as a result of this pandemic. Please ensure rural health care receives the support it needs, and help industries that are part of the foundation of our Montana economy – from agriculture to energy to travel, tourism, and hospitality – weather this storm and these unprecedented times. I look forward to working with you on future legislation as America rises to the challenge of COVID-19.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Member of Congress