

County Supervisors send correspondence to Senate, House leadership seeking a guaranteed piece of next coronavirus stimulus

May 5, 2020



Del Norte County Supervisors voted today in a special session to send a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer urging them to make sure smaller communities get a piece of the pie in the next COVID-19 stimulus bill.

District 1 Supervisor Roger Gitlin was the lone holdout, wanting the county to explore other interventions rather than a bailout.

The letters first thanked Pelosi and Schumer for their advocacy of funding state and local governments of all sizes during the pandemic, then urges them to continue that advocacy in the next round of stimulus. The letter also points to Del Norte County's support of HR 6467 – the Coronavirus Community Relief Act. The CMRA proposes \$250 billion in direct funding to all local governments on a per capita basis, allowing them to use those dollars to offset a loss in revenue due to the pandemic.

“It is critically important that in any future negotiations,” the county’s letter reads, “you please support ensuring that all local governments get some funding, including smaller counties like ours, and that minimum thresholds or funding formulas like (Community Development Block Grant), which leave us to rely on the state for a potential allocation are not used.”

District 3 Supervisor Chris Howard initially proposed drafting and sending a letter to Pelosi and Schumer. He said the California State Association of Counties, Rural Counties Representatives of California and the League of California cities have been lobbying for the issue in both the House and Senate.

“A lot of COVID relief packages come directly to businesses, which are in dire need of funding, but counties are also suffering. It is our intent to push both the Senate and the House to move forward with direct funding to counties where the state wouldn’t have administrative oversight,” Howard said. “Our hope is to lobby for about \$1.1 billion that would come into the state to help backfill the county coffers at this point.”

County Administrative Officer Jay Sarina explained that Del Norte County has been working with its federal lobbyist to advocate for direct stimulus dollars to come directly to governments whose population is less than 500,000.

“Del Norte County, along with larger governments, is experiencing a loss of revenue, which is going to reflect in the budget,” Sarina said, adding there is a bipartisan effort to craft legislation that will assist local governments trying to balance their budgets.

Rather than sending a letter to Schumer, Gitlin argued for sending one to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. Gitlin felt HR 6467 was “an empty bill with no specifics” and a decision to send letters to U.S. lawmakers in its support was premature.

“Though I certainly do not want to see our county enter into the area of layoffs and cut back of services, I’m troubled by this motion in how it impacts our county and our state and the rest of the country,” Gitlin said. “Borrowed capital is and should be our last resort. There are interventions, which we as a county can certainly engage in before we move to the bail out process and that’s apparently what this is.”

The supervisors also unanimously approved a letter to Secretary Wade Crowfoot, of the Natural Resources Agency of California. The letter advocated for allowing Del Norte residents vehicular access to State Parks units in Del Norte County.

The letter also continued the supervisors’ advocacy of the removal of permanent gates erected after California State Parks closed all 280 units to vehicles, boats and off-highway vehicles on March 29.

A third letter campaign was removed the agenda, which District 5 Supervisor Bob Berkowitz had initially proposed contacting small rural counties to lend their support in urging California Governor Gavin Newsom to reopen the state economy safely. However, Berkowitz asked the agenda item removed, preferring to await the governor’s plans for easing his stay at home restrictions Friday.

To read the letter to Pelosi and Schumer, go to <https://bit.ly/3dlKUia>.

To read the letter to Crowfoot, go to <https://bit.ly/2YER9K6>.