

Six senators aim to help tribal frontline workers

Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 17 April 2020 05:05



Senator Tom Udall, D-N.M., joined five senators in an April 7 address to introduce the COVID-19 “Heroes Fund” proposal to give Tribal frontline workers equal access to the proposed \$25,000 premium for essential workers and implement the \$15,000 Essential Worker Recruitment Incentive to attract and secure the frontline workforce needed to fight the public health crisis.

“Essential frontline workers in New Mexico, Indian Country, and across America are risking their own health to protect ours, to care for our loved ones, and to keep our communities safe and running. We owe these heroes – the health care workers, first responders, law enforcement, grocery clerks, delivery workers, and many others - more than just words of gratitude: we must make sure they are paid what they deserve,” Udall said.

“Importantly, this proposal will give Tribal frontline workers equal access to these benefits, and includes the necessary flexibility to meet the unique needs of Native communities,” Udall continued. “Because this crisis is hitting Indian Country especially hard: frontline workers in Native communities are stretched thin, and, due to severe federal underfunding, Indian Country has long struggled to recruit and retain workers in fields like health care and law enforcement. So this proposal is absolutely necessary for Indian Country and for all communities - to support the frontline workers who are doing incredible, life-saving work, and to secure the workforce that we need to keep our nation healthy and strong.”

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Across New Mexico, Indian Country, and America, essential frontline workers - doctors, nurses, grocery store workers, transit workers, public safety personnel, and many more - continue to put themselves at risk on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Udall and the Senate Democrats' proposal would compensate these workers for their great personal sacrifices and tireless dedication while increasing the recruitment of additional workers for the front lines that will be needed in the months ahead.

As Congress looks at a potential fourth COVID-19 bill, the following proposal is meant for consideration by Members of Congress, key stakeholders, and the American people. The senate Democrats' proposal consists of two major components:

1. A \$25,000 pandemic premium pay increase for essential frontline workers, equivalent to a raise of an additional \$13 per hour from the start of the public health emergency until December 31.

2. A \$15,000 recruitment incentive for health and home care workers and first responders to attract and secure the workforce needed to fight the public health crisis.

The proposal uses a flat-dollar amount per hour premium model in order to ensure it is clear, simple, and lifts up particularly those workers making lower wages.

It would give each essential frontline worker \$13/hour premium pay on top of regular wages for all hours worked in essential industries through the end of 2020.

It would cap the total maximum premium pay at \$25,000 for each essential frontline worker earning less than \$200,000 per year and \$5,000 for each essential worker earning \$200,000 or more per year.

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