

Opinion: Joe Neguse and others: We must provide direct economic relief to Boulder County

By Joe Neguse, Sam Weaver, Jamie Harkins and Clint Folsom

The COVID-19 pandemic has left us with unprecedented circumstances and significant impacts on our economy as we take substantial yet necessary steps as a county, state and country to combat the spread of this virus and protect our public health and safety. The decisions our community has had to make these past two months have not been easy, but we continue to do everything we can to safeguard Coloradans as we address this moment — together.

In order to fully equip our communities to fight this virus and maintain full employment for our first responders, fire fighters, police officers and essential personnel, small cities and counties like the ones we serve and represent need direct stabilization funds. While the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (the CARES Act) passed by Congress in March provided critical funds for state governments and cities with over 500,000 in population, as well as essential provisions such as direct cash assistance for American workers, historic expansion of unemployment benefits and grants for small businesses, no funds were included for smaller local governments.

Without targeted stabilization funding, we fear smaller localities like ours will be unable to continue providing critical services to our constituents at the rate we are currently.

The Coronavirus Community Relief Act, introduced by Rep. Joe Neguse, proposes bold economic relief for every city and county in America to ensure that our communities can fully recover from this pandemic and prosper after it is over. We urge swift passage of this bipartisan legislation to ensure our communities are able to receive the resources we need. The legislation would provide \$250 billion in local stabilization funds to equip smaller towns and counties that were left out of the CARES Act. Under the legislation, funds disbursed to local governments with a population under 500,000 could use them for costs including but not limited to lost revenue, reimbursement for expenses already incurred, and increases in costs reasonably believed to have been caused or as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Introduced in the U.S. House by Neguse earlier this month, the legislation already has the support of one-third of the entire U.S. House.

We must ensure that every community across the country, and those here Colorado, have the resources we need to protect residents, slow the spread of the virus, keep our critical employees on payroll and weather this economic crisis.

Like many cities and counties across the country, Boulder County is struggling economically as we expend additional resources to protect our residents and the public health, while also suffering major revenue losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the city of Boulder was recently forced to furlough 737 employees, and officials anticipate lost city revenues of at least \$28 million, or nearly 10% in annual revenue excluding utility fees, since the stay-at-home orders went into effect last month.

Just like our larger neighbors, small counties and cities such as Lafayette, Superior, Boulder and Boulder County continue to expend resources to protect residents, including rapidly activating emergency operations. This work is essential to keeping our constituents safe and mitigating the spread of the coronavirus as effectively as possible, and yet it is already heavily burdening the budgets of our local governments as we increasingly lose dollars in local sales tax revenues. Every day that new cases are found and resources are required to fight this virus and maintain strict social distancing our economic future remains uncertain.

Direct federal funding to stabilize and equip our communities is essential.

We urge Congress to swiftly pass the Coronavirus Community Relief Act and provide needed relief to every small town, city and county in America.

Rep. Joe Neguse represents Boulder County in the U.S. House of Representatives. Sam Weaver is the mayor of Boulder. Jamie Harkins is the mayor of Lafayette. Clint Folsom is the mayor of Superior.