

Legislative Update: Federal COVID-19 relief dollars



By Guest Columnist
Miss. Representative
Tom Miles

The first week in October, the legislature returned to reallocate federal COVID-19 relief dollars to ensure that they're spent efficiently before the end of the year (at which point unspent funds are returned to the federal government). Using the over \$1 billion in federal aid we've received to-date, we have passed \$300 million in grants for Mississippi's small businesses, made historic investments in education, distance learning, and wireless connectivity across the state, and provided assistance to veterans' homes, farmers, hospitals, and more.

Here's a list of the things we worked on in the final meetings of the session

dealing with finalizing the CARES Act funds:

- **COVID Vaccine** - SB3056 is known as the Uniformed Control Substance. This will allow for COVID vaccines to be prescribed to people when a vaccine is made available.

- **First Responders** - \$10 million to help with needed improvements to our Mississippi Wireless Network State Radio system for our first responders across the State.

- **Poultry Farmers** - \$10 million for farmers — including \$3 million specifically for poultry and \$500,000 for sweet potato farmers. Farmers will need to show they have suffered losses from the pandemic.

- **Veterans** - \$10 million for state veterans' homes, which have been hard-hit by coronavirus cases. The money will largely go toward personal protective equipment and additional nurses.

- **Hospitals** - \$10 million for hospitals to beef up their number of ICU beds, isolation rooms and negative pressure rooms, as they prepare for another surge of virus cases. The Department of Health will administer the program and determine which facilities receive funding.

- **Loss of Rent** - \$20 million for loss of rent to property owners. Under the bill, landlords can get up to \$30,000 to cover losses they received after they were unable to evict renters who stopped paying during the pandemic. An amendment to the bill says commercial landlords can receive no more than 25% out of the \$20 million total relief.

Money was also set aside to help with pandemic expenses reimbursement for businesses like photographers and others left out of the Back to Business plan, farmers, volunteer fire departments non profits & food pantries.

- **Education Funding** - SB3057 clears up where our schools can pre pay for hot spots ahead of time for our students that was passed earlier in the year.

And with that, the 2020 legislative session has finally come to an end—about five months later than anticipated. This was a historic session in so many ways, and it has been an incredible privilege to represent the people of Scott and Rankin Counties in Jackson!

We will be returning to the Capitol in just three months for the 2021 session, and it's sure to be another challenging year as we continue dealing with the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm already ready to get to back to work—there is much to be done!

As always, please don't hesitate to reach out if I can be of any service to you in person at my office, email at tmiles@house.ms.gov or call me at 601-469-7886.

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