Emergency Commission approves using over $500M in federal funds for COVID-19 response and recovery

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BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Emergency Commission voted today to utilize more than half a billion dollars in federal funding for North Dakota's COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, with the majority of the money directed to support economic recovery.

North Dakota received $1.25 billion from the Coronavirus Relief Fund as part of the $2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

The six-member Emergency Commission voted unanimously today to utilize $524.2 million, or 42 percent, of the state's Coronavirus Relief Fund money.

Gov. Doug Burgum, who chairs the Emergency Commission, noted the majority of the $524.2 million will be dedicated to economic support. He thanked North Dakota citizens for exercising individual responsibility and practicing social distancing to slow the spread of COVID-19 and reduce health care impacts and costs.

State agencies, in collaboration with local public health units, also have been effective in their COVID-19 testing, contact tracing and isolation/quarantine efforts, Burgum said.

"We're in a very fortunate position today to be able to deploy these federal relief funds in a way that can help so many of our citizens and help our economy get rolling again," Burgum said, expressing gratitude to the legislative leaders and other lawmakers who have been involved in the process, along with effective agency leaders.

The Emergency Commission approved Coronavirus Relief Fund requests from 10 agencies: the Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Department of Human Services, North Dakota Veterans Home, Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, North Dakota Information Technology, Department of Trust Lands, Job

Service North Dakota, the state Industrial Commission's Oil and Gas Division, and the Bank of North Dakota (BND).

The requests fall into four main categories:

- $89.7 million for public health and safety, including lab supplies, personal protective equipment, staff overtime, temporary testing and contact tracing positions, an emergency rent bridge program and child care emergency operations grants.
- $253.7 million for economic support for business, including $200 million for two BND low-interest loan programs designed to help businesses recover.
- $112.5 million for economic support for individuals, including $110 million to keep the state's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund solvent.
- $68.3 million for telework, cybersecurity and transition to digital services.

Commission members also authorized the Department of Health to receive more than $5 million in federal funds from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support the State Lab as it works to contain and mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Burgum highlighted that North Dakota ranks second in the nation in per-capita testing, with 6,185 tests per 100,000 people, behind only Rhode Island. North Dakota also has the fourth-lowest positive test rate at 3.2 percent.

The Emergency Commission consists of Burgum as chairman, Secretary of State Al Jaeger, House Majority Leader Chet Pollert of Carrington, Senate Majority Leader Rich Wardner of Dickinson, House Appropriations Chairman Jeff Delzer of Underwood and Senate Appropriations Chairman Ray Holmberg of Grand Forks.

Additional requests for Coronavirus Relief Fund dollars, including further support for small businesses, will likely be considered at the Commission's June meeting, Burgum said.

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