Get Nebraska Growing – Nebraska plan for use of federal coronavirus funds

On March 27, 2020, Governor Ricketts announced plans to use the remaining $1.084 billion in funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) to help support Nebraska’s economic recovery. Nebraska received $1.25 billion in funding, but metro areas with a population of 500,000 or more were eligible for direct aid. In Nebraska, Douglas County (not Omaha) was the only entity to qualify at $166 million.

Of the remaining $1.084 billion, the governor announced $392 million for small business and livestock recovery, $85 million for food security, housing, and behavioral health care, and $180 million in reimbursements to state and local governments for coronavirus-related expenses, while setting aside $427 million from the fund to cover unemployment insurance and other expenses. Setting aside dollars is an attempt to ensure dollars are available in the event Congress passes legislation allowing states to use CRF funds to replace lost revenue.¹

Livestock: Included in this funding, is $100 million for livestock operations with 1-10 employees, including sole proprietors. These will be $12,000 grants to all qualified applicants. Nebraska Farm Bureau (NEFB) will circulate application dates and guidelines as soon as they are published.

Broadband: Additionally, the governor announced $40 million in broadband grants for communities with populations from 1,000-5,000. Communities are eligible if they have less than 2 percent fiber to the home (FTTH) deployment currently, with a forecasted growth in FTTH of less than 5 percent by the end of 2020, as estimated by the Department of Economic Development (DED). According to DED, companies seeking a remote workforce are looking primarily at communities with FTTH for purposes of reliability and security. Communities with a population below 1,000 may be considered if additional funds remain.

Another $230 million will be made available for $12,000 grants to 18,505 small businesses with 5-49 employees, $16 million for workforce retaining, $5 million in administrative support for these initiatives, and $1 million for senior managers to complete a comprehensive training program offered by Gallup.

¹NEFB continues to encourage congressional adoption of H.R. 6652, Nebraska Rep. Bacon’s bill, which would allow additional flexibility for state and local governments to access CRF funds to offset lost revenue due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Adoption of this language could help reduce some pressure on the state’s budget and free up funds for property tax relief, which continues to be our top priority.