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News From Congressman Ben Cline



## **Sixth District Perspectives** *with Congressman Ben Cline*

Driving home from Washington to Botetourt for Christmas last week gave me a chance to reflect on the challenges all Americans have faced this year. Our way of life was fundamentally altered by COVID-19, and each of us were asked to make sacrifices for our fellow Americans. I have been so incredibly proud of how Americans have responded, and I pray that with the approval of these vaccines we may soon begin to put the coronavirus behind us. While we may have celebrated Christmas last week, the spirit of giving and helping neighbors in need has been embodied every day throughout these past 10 months. I have no doubt that our country and our people will come out of this pandemic stronger and more united than ever before.

### **COVID-19 Update:**

With the FDA approval of the Pfizer and Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine, Virginia is slated to receive 370,650 doses throughout the Commonwealth in December alone. The Governor has issued Vaccination Prioritization Guidance, which is broken down into three phases. Phases I will prioritize health care workers and residents of long-term care facilities, Phase II will allocate doses to critical infrastructure staff, adults with high-risk medical conditions, and adults ages 65 and older, and in Phase III inoculation will be available to the general public. For the latest updates regarding vaccine distribution, visit the Virginia Department of Health's website [here](#).

It was also announced last week that the Salem VA Medical Center was chosen to be a recipient of the Moderna vaccine, and distribution began throughout the Commonwealth. I am thankful to the Department of Veterans Affairs for their efforts to get the COVID-19 vaccine to our veterans in as expeditious a manner as possible. To read more about the administration of the vaccine at the Salem VA, click [here](#).



### **COVID Relief Bill:**

The coronavirus has been both a health disaster and an economic disaster for Virginia. In addition to the tragic loss of thousands of lives, the economic impact of Governor Northam's shutdowns have been devastating for millions of Virginians. Businesses have gone bankrupt or are on the brink, thousands are unemployed or at risk of losing their jobs, and the shutdowns have produced spikes in depression and suicides, alcohol and drug addiction, and incidents of domestic violence.

These shutdowns amount to a "taking" by government of the ability of Virginia workers and businesses to earn a living. It's similar to the taking of private property by government under the power of Eminent Domain. But when government normally uses this power to take property, the Constitution requires that the government must provide "just compensation" to the owner. For the workers and businesses who are the victims of Governor Northam's "taking," however, there has been no such compensation. That is why coronavirus relief from Congress is so important for Virginia, and why I voted for passage of the COVID relief bill - to help Virginians impacted by the shutdowns and provide critical assistance to those in need.

The COVID relief bill includes an extension of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and adds deductibility for PPP expenses, provides \$600 Emergency Assistance checks for Americans earning less than \$75,000 per year, temporarily provides unemployed individuals an additional \$300 per week for 10 weeks, includes \$8 billion for vaccine distribution and \$20 billion for the purchase of vaccines to make the vaccine available at no charge for anyone who needs it, \$20 billion to assist states with testing, and \$82 billion in funding for schools and universities to assist with reopening for in-person learning. While the bill provides no money to bailout mismanaged state governments like California and New York, I was frustrated that it was attached by Speaker Pelosi to an appropriations bill that included billions in wasteful and unnecessary spending.

I agreed with President Trump that the appropriations bill attached to the COVID relief bill wasted taxpayer dollars on foreign aid and did not provide enough help for the American people. I supported his effort to modify the bill to increase Emergency Assistance payments to \$2,000 and pay for it by cutting wasteful spending in the appropriations bill. Unfortunately, Democrats blocked our efforts on Christmas Eve to make these important changes. When Democrats would not cut the pork, I joined my colleagues in voting against the increased emergency payments. In the end, this entire process exemplifies just how broken Washington is. We must return to the regular appropriations process, work to eliminate wasteful spending, and restore the integrity of the legislative process to best serve the American people.

## COVID-19 RELIEF

TARGETED AID TO FAMILIES, SMALL BUSINESSES, & WORKERS



*Direct payments to the American people*



*Extends the successful Paycheck Protection Program*



*Provides funding for vaccines and vaccine distribution*



*Supports students and schools for in-person learning*

### **Telephone Town Hall:**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, I had promised to hold in-person town halls throughout the Sixth District. In fact, since being elected, I have hosted 25 town halls – with at least one being held in each locality throughout the District. I was on track to hold a second one in each locality, but unfortunately, that plan was hindered due to state-mandated restrictions on public gatherings. I hope to continue those sorts of in-person forums in the future, but for now, virtual events remain the best option to connect directly with constituents on a larger scale and ensure that their voices are heard in Washington. Last week, I enjoyed hosting my seventh telephone town hall and was joined by Representative Phil Roe, M.D., Chairman of the Congressional Doctors Caucus and Dr. Laura Kornegay, Health Director for Central Shenandoah Health District. We discussed a number of topics related to the coronavirus and a great deal of information was shared. To listen to a full recording of the event, please click [here](#). As we continue to navigate this pandemic, I will continue to make myself available as your representative.



### **Academy Nominations:**

One of the greatest honors I have serving as the Representative for Virginia's Sixth District is the privilege of nominating individuals to one of four United States Service Academies. Applicants to the U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy, and U.S. Merchant Marine Academy require a recommendation from a Member of Congress or another nominating authority. An academy appointment has an estimated value of over \$400,000 and admission is competitive. Each academy selects nominees based on moral character, scholastic achievement, physical fitness, leadership, and college admission test scores. Last week my office began the second round of the nomination process as I interviewed a number of the interested applicants. Those that I had the pleasure of meeting are truly some of the best and brightest of their generation. The passion for service and love of country that these students exuded was truly inspiring, and with this pool of applicants, I know that the Sixth District will inevitably be represented well at our Nation's Service Academies.





### **Rockbridge Christmas Baskets:**

The Rockbridge Christmas Baskets Program has been a blessing to Valley residents since 1948. Originally founded as the Santa Claus Truck, this tremendous, all-volunteer organization assembles and delivers thousands of food and toy care packages to struggling families each year. This year the group donated a record 68,000 pounds of food and 1,300 toys to families throughout Lexington, Rockbridge, and Buena Vista. Having worked side-by-side with this group many times over the years, it is truly inspiring to see folks from all walks of life coming together to help their neighbors in need. It was my pleasure to recognize the Rockbridge Christmas Baskets Program on the House Floor and highlight their efforts.



### **Merry Christmas:**

It has undoubtedly been a trying year for all Americans. The past 10 months have tested our collective spirits, especially during the holidays as we would typically be surrounded by all of our friends and family. As we celebrate the holidays in modified fashion this year, take solace in the true meaning of Christmas. From my family to yours, I wish you a very merry Christmas and a joyous and healthy New Year.

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." ~John 3:16*





Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Congressman. If my office can ever be of assistance, please contact my Washington office at (202) 225-5431.

For the latest updates from Washington and across the Sixth District, please follow my [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages.

*Ben Cline*

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