

# CONGRESSMAN ED CASE

Hawai'i • District 1



## Aloha!

I first want to join all of our communities in welcoming back our Neighborhood Boards who are reconvening to continue their invaluable service as "a cornerstone of our democracy".

## COVID-19 Update

It's hard to believe that the first cases of COVID-19 in our country were reported only just a little more than four months ago. In our Hawai'i, we have dealt with the public health crisis of COVID-19 far better than most of our country, but at the expense of our economy, which is one of the hardest hit nationwide. Our challenge together is to maintain our public health gains while reopening our economy and helping the hundreds of thousands of our 'ohana who are struggling through this truly difficult time.

Throughout this crisis, my office and I have remained focused on our three missions: to make the right decisions for our country on the best way through; to make sure that our federal government helps our Hawai'i; and to assist all of those I serve with your individual questions and needs. I am grateful to our Neighborhood Boards for your continued partnership, especially as the only way we will get through this is for us to remain together.

Since the beginning of March, my work in Congress included the passage of four emergency assistance measures that the President subsequently signed into law. We refer to these four Acts as CARES measures that together include trillions of dollars in federal aid. These have come as funds for state and local governments, small businesses, additions to federal unemployment benefits, Economic Impact Payments (EIP) direct to individuals and families, health care providers and much more. In my U.S. House,

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we have passed a fifth bill - our HEROES Act - with trillions of additional federal aid that is now pending action in the U.S. Senate.

We are keeping track of all that assistance to Hawai'i to ensure we are receiving our fair share and to also make sure that our own unique needs are met. We are focusing on more than 70 specific programs, and we estimate that the amount of emergency assistance already received, or about to be received here, is closing in on \$7 billion, with more on the way.

My office's assistance to constituents on individual questions and needs has ranged across the map. The largest number of questions have been on federal aid to small businesses, as well as state unemployment benefits, both of which have seen real problems in administration and implementation. They have also included returning friends and family home who were trapped overseas as COVID-19 broke out, to tracking down Social Security, immigration, veterans and many other concerns.

My message throughout is that my Capitol Hill and Honolulu Offices are open (remotely) and my staff and I are on the job and working overtime to assist our state, our communities, and you through this terrible crisis. Information on COVID-19, ranging from the latest from our national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and our Hawaii Department of Health, along with federal assistance, and my own efforts, as well as how to contact me, is on my official web page at <https://case.house.gov/coronavirus/>. As to the developments regarding the virus itself, my web page features the latest updates by the CDC so that you can keep up with the latest on COVID-19 both in our country and around the world.

## Reopening Tourism

I also want to share with you my thoughts on how we can best reopen our state's top industry, generator of hundreds of thousands of jobs for our families and communities.

For going on three generations now tourism has been critical to Hawai'i's economy and to achieving the goals and dreams of millions of our own for ourselves and our 'ohana. This will continue as we all emerge from the crisis of COVID-19.

But we must recognize that the recovery of tourism for our Hawai'i and country will not occur overnight. It will be gradual and will take many months if not years to close in on the same levels as prior to COVID-19. The biggest challenge lies in restoring public confidence that visiting Hawai'i is safe.

Our visitors will need to feel that Hawai'i is safe to visit or else they will go elsewhere if they travel at all. And here at home we will need to feel that visitors getting off planes and ships and staying in our hotels and eating in our restaurants and joining us at our stores and beaches are not spreading another round of the virus among us. Otherwise we will not welcome them to our shores and will not extend to them the spirit of aloha that lies at the core of our tourism industry.

So, restoring public confidence in travel to Hawai'i must be one of our top priorities. The good news is that much of what is needed to do so is in our hands.

We first need a coordinated effort among our industry leaders, public health experts, local and state government officials, unions and communities to implement best practices safety standards for how our tourism businesses will operate in the post-pandemic world. That includes much of what we are already doing, such as regularly sanitizing commonly used surfaces and observing social distancing. We also need expanded testing and contact tracing, as well as marketing campaigns to communicate these safety standards and practices to travelers and tourists. Finally, and especially important, we need stronger workplace safety standards tailored specifically to protecting our frontline tourism workers who are the real engine of tourism.

We can expect that domestic travel will recover faster than international travel. This will guide our efforts to market a safe Hawai'i to those places with the highest likelihood of potential visitors soon. But that travel from wherever visitors come must be safe and cannot bring in passengers still infected with COVID-19. This is why I strongly advocate for Hawaii being able to screen out infected passengers before they get on planes, not after when they've already arrived and we are dependent instead on widely-ignored quarantine.

We can't do all that we must do to recover tourism alone, and need a coordinated response by our federal government for travel and tourism nationally. Before COVID-19, travel generated over \$2 trillion for our country's economy and provided almost 16 million jobs. By some estimates over half of that contribution may be gone soon. Only our federal government has the authority and resources to help preserve that contribution and set in place changes to travel and other rules that will be essential to recovery.

Finally, the crisis of COVID-19 and its devastating effect on Hawai'i tourism does beg us to ask the question whether we can bring tourism back even better and stronger and more resilient to future hardships. Public health experts warn that another wave of

COVID-19 may hit later this year. They also say that we may face a seasonal COVID-19 with recurring outbreaks, like the flu. Other infectious diseases, natural disasters and climate change are all challenges we must recognize. As we consider how to put Hawai'i tourism back together, what can or must we change not only to strengthen tourism and ready it for these possibilities, but also to continue our efforts to diversify our economy so that we can provide more of our own with jobs that are not so deeply affected. The earlier and deeper we get into that discussion, the better off we'll all be.

In Congress, our CARES emergency assistance has been focused on trying to assure that our businesses, especially our small businesses, that employ hundreds of thousands of our residents in travel and tourism, can survive and continue to pay salaries and benefits to our workers. Through the CARES Act, Congress created the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) fully since the start of the COVID-19 crisis on delivering emergency assistance funding to as many residents, families, businesses, governments and communities as possible as fast as possible. We have funded trillions of dollars of assistance through my Appropriations Committee and otherwise, and my office and I have been closely tracking that assistance so that it reaches Hawai'i. To date we are closing in on \$7 billion in some form of federal assistance throughout Hawai'i.

Much of my attention has been focused on trying to assure that our businesses, especially our small businesses, that employ hundreds of thousands of our residents in travel and tourism, can survive and continue to pay salaries and benefits to our workers. Through the CARES Act, Congress created the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) which over 20,000 of our businesses have been able to access for assistance of some \$2.5 billion. A key provision of PPP that benefited travel and tourism especially allowed businesses with multiple locations to apply for each location which broadened coverage.

Additionally, we in Congress provided for the economic impact direct payments which hundreds of thousands of Hawai'i residents are receiving to help through difficult financial times. We also added an extra federal payment for unemployment to get those who have lost their jobs closer to a replacement wage and extended that extra federal benefit up to another thirteen weeks.

All of this is bringing desperately needed assistance to many residents and their families, but it is not enough. I am hopeful that the House's HEROES Act will be enacted soon, and I am further working on a package of proposals that targets recovery in our travel and tourism industry specifically.

I welcome our community's input on how best we can recover and improve our economy - especially tourism.

## Ongoing Congressional Business

Although COVID-19 has dominated my focus for the last four months, my non-COVID-19 responsibilities and priorities have continued throughout this pandemic.

Foremost among them is my work on the House Appropriations Committee, which is responsible for the ongoing funding of our federal budget. We are continuing with regular hearings remotely which are ramping up as we ready the Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations package for House passage in the next few months.

I am also pursuing legislative and other initiatives in several other areas including some arising from my service on my other House committee, Natural Resources. Two specific proposals would advance consideration of creations of the first Natural Heritage Area and the first National Forest for the State of Hawaii, both to recognize our truly unique and endangered resources and ensure ongoing federal support for their protection and preservation.

More information on my initiatives and other efforts can be found on my website at [case.house.gov](http://case.house.gov). Again, I welcome your own input and questions on any matter.

I remain at your service and wish you and yours the very best as we all get through this together.

*Mahalo nui loa,*

*Ed Case*