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CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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ENERGY

April 21, 2020

The Honorable J. Kevin Stitt
Governor, State of Oklahoma
Oklahoma State Capitol
2300 N Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105

Dear Governor Stitt:

Thank you for your response to the COVID-19 pandemic including your efforts to expand access to testing and bring critical supplies into our state. As you know, this unprecedented time requires strong collaboration between, federal, state, and local leaders. Working together is critical to save lives and address the economic impact to Oklahoma families and businesses. I look forward to continuing this coordination and work to help Oklahomans weather this storm. However, I write today with concerns regarding significant delays and confusion over the distribution of unemployment benefits to the tens of thousands of Oklahomans who are struggling to make ends meet in a global pandemic.

Over the last two months, Congress has passed three bipartisan stimulus packages with federal funding to assist states in their coronavirus response. From public health to economic assistance, we have created new programs and strengthened existing ones to ensure that all of communities can weather this pandemic safely. While those programs are not perfect and have certainly faced challenges along the way, I am increasingly concerned with the distribution of unemployment compensation to Oklahomans who have lost their jobs as a result of COVID-19. I have received many calls and emails from constituents who have been denied benefits they are entitled to and who are not receiving assistance when they reach out to the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) for help.

Unemployment agencies across the country, including Oklahoma, have been overwhelmed with an exponential growth in the number of applicants seeking unemployment compensation. In order to help states address this challenge, Congress included \$1 billion in federal funding to help states administer unemployment insurance programs in the Family First Coronavirus Response Act that we passed on March 13, 2020. Oklahoma qualified for up to \$10,963,616 in grant funding to hire new staff and increase access and transparency to our unemployment insurance program. The bill also provided no interest federal loans to cover the costs of state unemployment benefits.

Additionally, on March 27, 2020, Congress passed the CARES Act, a historic stimulus package with overwhelming bipartisan support. That package included an estimated \$260 billion in

enhanced and expanded unemployment insurance for millions of workers across the country who have been furloughed or lost their job due to this crisis. The CARES Act also created three new unemployment programs. The first, Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, adds an additional \$600 benefit per week to unemployment benefits. The second, Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, funds an additional 13 weeks of state unemployment insurance benefits. The third, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, expanded eligibility for unemployment insurance. This provides unemployment benefits for self-employed workers, independent contractors, freelancers, gig workers, workers seeking part time work, and workers who do not have a long-enough work history to qualify for state unemployment insurance benefits. All of these programs are fully federally funded, putting no additional burden on states.

Oklahomans who have been out of work for weeks due to the COVID-19 pandemic are in dire need of assistance and as a member of Congress representing our great state, I want to offer my help to expedite that process in any way that I can. While Congress has passed historic unemployment relief programs, it is clear that unemployed Oklahomans in need of support are not receiving the benefits they are due under the CARES Act. I hope that we can work together to ensure that all Oklahomans get the help they need to make it through this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kendra S. Horn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kendra S. Horn
Member of Congress