The logo features the text "NC Rural Coalition Fighting COVID-19" in orange on a dark blue background. To the right, there is a graphic of overlapping triangles in shades of orange and grey, forming a triangular shape that points towards the right.

NC Rural Coalition Fighting COVID-19

NC Rural Coalition Fighting COVID-19 April 14, 2021 via Zoom Meeting Notes

Facilitator: Todd Brantley, VP of Public Affairs, NC Rural Center

Speakers: Dan Gerlach, Owner, Dan Gerlach LLC

Topic: American Rescue Plan and how it affects NC

Todd Brantley welcomed the speakers and guests and reviewed the mission of the Coalition. Leaders from the NC Rural Center, Hometown Strong, North Carolina AHEC, Governor's Office of Public Engagement, and the Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation (FHLI), are partnering with the NC DHHS Office of Rural Health (ORH) to extend the ORH's reach in disseminating vital resources and messaging to rural communities. In addition, the Coalition provides feedback from its partners to NCDHHS regarding what is effective vs. not, and addresses concerns and questions from rural constituents.

Dan Gerlach presented a slide show outlining important facets of the American Rescue Plan. He indicated that 68% of the \$1.9T is in Finance, which includes \$1,400 per person Economic Impact Payment, extended unemployment benefits and tax exemption, the Child Tax Credit, among others, State and local fiscal aid and health care. Another 16% (\$304 B) is in health, education and labor, and 5% (\$88.8B) is in banking, housing and urban affairs.

NC will receive \$8.9B in state and local aid with some restrictions. Money will be allocated to the state, counties, cities and towns and infrastructure. The Governor has released his general fund budget proposal and will release a supplement to use the American Rescue Plan funds.

Dan outlined other fund allocations such as rent and utility assistance, education and childcare funding.

Health Care allocations include a Medicaid expansion incentive and new categories of eligible populations. Funds will also be distributed for restaurant revitalization, economic injury and increased broadband for schools and libraries.


Todd asked if these funds will reach everyone equitably and whether this new act will address the missteps of previous fund distributions.

Dan responded that the American Rescue Plan has set-asides to serve people who were hurt the most in regard to health and economy.

Another guest asked whether NC will expand Medicaid with more money coming into the state.

Dan replied that Medicaid Transformation is under way, and improvements are being made in the system. Adding new money is putting funds into a better system and it would be a perfect opportunity to expand Medicaid with all of these financial incentives. However, the legislature hasn't passed a budget in several years so internal wrangling may delay it.

Another question was posed how premium pay to start workers and others doing essential work might look.

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This is targeted at government entities, but may also include private entities that provide essential services. He thought it would be tricky since it's not likely that the state would provide funds to non-governmental workers, but likely will cover health care, education and public safety workers.

The Treasury Department will provide guidance, but in previous distributions, such as PPE, the guidelines were changed frequently, but were not easily located in documents. The current administration under Secretary Yellin is trying to do it once and do it correctly.

The next question asked how should we help small towns (1) plan for this public investment and (2) manage the compliance and audit work?

The Councils on Government are working on it. Communicating with them and the League of Municipalities will help get started while waiting for the Treasury guidance to be issued. Coordinating with the state auditor's office will help prevent future disallowances.

Are there any online resources to refer to?

You need to wait for Treasury guidance. Otherwise, it's all guesswork.

Can you talk about assistance for vaccine distribution?

Link to DHHS on becoming a vaccine provider: <https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/media/2415/download>

We've heard discussion about the infrastructure spending bill that comes next. Are we done with economic stimulus regarding COVID recovery?

There's a high probability yes. The infrastructure bill may include not just highways and transportation, but many legislators are also concerned about human infrastructure, such as increasing salaries of home health aides and increasing reimbursements for Medicaid, for example. The money won't be distributed until the agencies create guidelines on how the money will be spent, so there will be a delay in releasing the funds.

Todd asked, what have we learned about state and local responses for future disasters, such as hurricanes?

Disasters normally aren't global. Natural disasters don't generally affect the entire state at one time. State agencies and non-profits should have a team in place with a documented plan for response, taking lessons learned from previous disasters.

The information will be archived on the Foundation website. bit.ly/ruralfightscovid

The next call will be on April 28, 2021.