

Higgins: Seniors will now receive automatic COVID-19 stimulus payments, after Ways & Means members 'fought for change'

Congressman Brian Higgins, D-NY-26, and his colleagues on the House of Representatives Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Security requested and won agreement by the U.S. Department of Treasury to automatically provide stimulus checks to senior citizens who are Social Security recipients – reversing course on previous directives that would have required seniors to complete forms to receive the COVID-19 relief payment.

IRS guidance issued on March

30 stated: "People who typically do not file a tax return will need to file a simple tax return to receive an economic impact payment. Low-income taxpayers, senior citizens, Social Security recipients, some veterans and individuals with disabilities who are otherwise not required to file a tax return will not owe tax."

Higgins and other members of the Ways and Means Committee objected to this requirement, which would have created additional hurdles and delayed pay-

ments for seniors. In a letter to the Treasury secretary, the members wrote: "We are extremely displeased to see the IRS guidance recently notifying the public that Social Security and Supplemental Security beneficiaries who did not file tax returns in 2018 or 2019 must file a return in order to get the rebate. This requirement presents substantial and unnecessary hardships for these beneficiaries and delays critical relief for our most vulnerable citizens."

On Wednesday, the U.S. Treas-

ury announced it would no longer require Social Security beneficiaries to file an abbreviated tax return to receive an economic impact payment. Instead, payments will be automatically deposited into their bank accounts.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, approved by Congress, authorizes a one-time automatic payment to most Americans as the nation confronts the COVID-19 pandemic. The Internal Revenue Service will disburse a

\$1,200 payment to every eligible adult (\$2,400 for joint filers), plus an additional \$500 per dependent child under 17. These payments gradually phasedown for individual incomes exceeding \$75,000, \$112,500 for head of households, or \$150,000 for joint filers.

A summary of COVID-19 relief available to seniors can be found in a fact sheet on Higgins' website, at higgins.house.gov/issues/coronavirus-disease, and on The Sentinel website, wnypapers.com.

IN THE NEWS

Cuomo extends school closures extra 2 weeks

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo on Friday announced all schools in New York state must remain closed for an additional two weeks, until April 15, to ensure consistency and uniformity across the state in instruc-

tional time for this extraordinary school year. Schools will be required to continue child care, meal and distance learning programs, and the state will extend the 180-day waiver to April 15.

The directive contained in Executive Order 202.4 related to the closure of schools statewide shall hereafter be modified to provide

that all schools shall remain closed until April 15, 2020, at which time the continued closure shall be re-evaluated. No school shall be subject to a diminution in school aid due to failure to meet the 180-day in session requirement as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, provided their closure does not extend beyond the term set forth herein. School districts must continue plans for alternative instructional options, distribution and availability of meals, and child care, with an emphasis on serving children of essential workers, and continue to first use any vacation or snow days remaining.

Eichel donating protective masks

Buffalo Sabres forward Jack

Eichel has purchased 5,000 personal protective equipment masks from hockey equipment manufacturer Bauer that will be distributed to various hospitals throughout Western New York.

"I am so thankful to all those medical professionals that are on the front lines taking care of our community in the battle against this virus," Eichel said. "The dedication to Western New York that they continue to show is incredible. I am happy to work with my friends at Bauer to purchase these masks. Hopefully, they will help play a part in keeping our hospital workers safer and healthier."

"We're all on the same team in helping our medical professionals get the necessary protective equipment they need to help in the fight against COVID-19," said Mary-Kay Messier, VP of global marketing,

Bauer Hockey. "Nurses, doctors and so many others are risking their own health to save the lives of others. These are the true heroes of coronavirus. Our team was eager to step up and do what we can, just like Jack is stepping up to help his community in Buffalo. We're grateful for this partnership with Jack and the Buffalo Sabres, and we hope others continue to help, because we all need to support our families, friends and neighbors right now."

Bauer Hockey and Cascade Lacrosse, both owned by Peak Achievement Athletics, switched from manufacturing sports equipment to producing medical face-masks at the Bauer Innovation Center in Blainville, Quebec, and the Cascade facility in Liverpool, New York.

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