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**For Immediate Release**

**May 11, 2020**

## **CONGRESSMAN TOM O'HALLERAN VISITS GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY COVID-19 TEST SITE**

*During the visit Congressman O'Halleran stated that he "was very impressed with level of testing that is occurring at the Gila River Indian Community. It is this gold standard of testing that will lead Arizona and the Country out of this pandemic."*

Sacaton, AZ – On Saturday, Congressman Tom O'Halleran visited the Gila River Indian Community to see the Community's new testing site on the Reservation that is the result of a partnership between the Community and Steward Health Care Systems that took effect on Friday. Congressman O'Halleran's advocacy in Congress made this testing and the Community's expansive health response to COVID-19 possible.

The testing site is one of three key components announced this week that are part of the Gila River Indian Community's comprehensive response to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to the partnership with Steward Health Care Systems, the Community also announced an agreement with Mayo Clinic – Phoenix to process up to 500 tests weekly for the Community's most vulnerable populations including elders, dialysis patients, and Community members with underlying conditions.

The third announcement this week was the deployment of Gila River Health Care's new Mobile Hospital Unit to expand inpatient treatment space for patients with COVID-19. The Mobile Unit brings the Community's inpatient capacity to a total of 75 beds system-wide. The increased capacity is necessary because the Gila River Health Care system provides treatment for its 22,000 members as well as up to 100,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives annually from other tribes in Arizona and the Phoenix metropolitan area.

These testing agreements complement the testing the Community is able to perform with its Abbott Analyzer, a rapid test that provides results in a matter of minutes. This testing is used for patients presenting to Gila River Health Care with COVID-19 symptoms, first responders and front-line health care workers. The Abbott Analyzer was acquired after Congressman O'Halleran advocated to have testing equipment made available to tribal governments when supplies and equipment were in limited supply.

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(More)



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The testing site Congressman O'Halleran visited is the latest prong in the Community's testing plan which is testing of essential government employees and employees of the tribal businesses which will be ongoing prior to, and after, those businesses open, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of employees. The agreement with Steward will allow up to 800 tests to be performed daily.

Congressman O'Halleran visited the Community to see how the funding that he strongly advocated for in coronavirus-relief legislation was being put to use in tribal communities. Congressman O'Halleran tirelessly advocated for increased healthcare funding in the CARES Act that would help tribal governments combat this unprecedented pandemic. His efforts ultimately led to over \$1 billion in funding for tribal communities in Arizona and across the United States.

Governor Lewis remarked during the visit that "Congressman O'Halleran's tireless advocacy on behalf of the Gila River Indian Community and all tribes in Arizona have enabled the Community to establish a comprehensive plan to test, trace and treat any cases of COVID-19 in the Community. With lives at stake, it is reassuring to know that Congressman O'Halleran continues to use his voice in Congress to make sure tribal governments have the resources they need during this unprecedented crisis."

During the visit Congressman O'Halleran stated that he "was very impressed with level of testing that is occurring at the Gila River Indian Community. It is this gold standard of testing that will lead Arizona and the Country out of this pandemic."

Congressman O'Halleran and Governor Lewis both wore personal protective equipment during the visit and practiced social distancing to highlight the need to practice COVID-19 safety measures – especially while testing for the virus.

Congressman O'Halleran will continue his advocacy as congress begins to consider the next coronavirus-relief effort to provide health and economic relief to the citizens, business owners and front-line workers in Arizona.

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*Gila River Indian Community located on 372,000 acres in south-central Arizona and home to the indigenous O'odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) people. The Tribe is comprised of seven districts, the administrative offices and departments are located in Sacaton, and serve the people throughout these seven community districts. 100% of its profits from gaming and 17 other Enterprises are utilized by the community providing services and opportunities to achieve the highest quality of life.*

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