

*Rep. Luján Urges Inclusion of Renewable Energy, Education, Veterans in Budget*

Washington, DC – Today, Rep. Ben Ray Luján appeared before the Committee on the Budget and outlined priorities to benefit New Mexicans in the Budget Resolution for Fiscal Year 2010. Rep. Luján discussed expanding renewable energy production, increasing educational opportunities, and expanding benefits for veterans—arguing that New Mexico and the nation would benefit from an emphasis in these areas.

“At this time of economic uncertainty, creating a comprehensive and strong budget is extraordinarily important,” said Rep. Luján. “While our national budget must fund the operations of our government, it also reflects our priorities and our shared vision for the direction of our country. We need to invest in innovative sources of renewable energy production, ensure our workforce is trained to seize the opportunities of a new clean energy economy, and encourage job creation during these difficult economic times.”

Rep. Luján also discussed the importance of providing veterans with the benefits they have earned and deserve.

“We must remember the unique needs of our returning veterans,” said Rep. Luján. “They not only need the health care they are entitled to, but we need to provide them with access to higher education and job training, and offer the resources to help them successfully reintegrate into their families and communities. In recognition of the service provided by our veterans, this Congress must generously support the Veterans’ Health Administration and the Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success. It is important that we remember that rural veterans often have to travel long distances to receive the care they need. Our veterans deserve access to local and rural clinics for their health care needs and reimbursements by the Veterans Administration for miles traveled.”

Chairman John Spratt invited members to outline their priorities for the Budget Resolution for Fiscal Year 2010. The House Committee on the Budget heard testimony from members of the 111th Congress and will take the testimony under advisement while drafting the Budget Resolution for Fiscal Year 2010.

## **FULL REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

Chairman Spratt, distinguished members of the Committee on the Budget, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony before you about the priorities for my constituents in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget.

At this time of economic uncertainty, creating a comprehensive and strong budget is extraordinarily important. While our national budget must fund the operations of our government, it also reflects our priorities and our shared vision of the direction of our country. For eight years, we've been on the wrong track and have avoided confronting the realities of a changing world. We need to invest in innovative sources of renewable energy production, ensure our workforce is trained to seize the opportunities of a new clean energy economy, and encourage job creation during these difficult economic times.

Although we are facing tough times, we must not forget that this budget represents a great opportunity to rebuild our nation. Through perseverance and innovation, we can get the economy moving in the right direction towards a clean energy future.

We must invest in new electric grids, new wind turbines, new solar panels, and cleaner cars. These investments should be designed to promote green jobs—jobs that can help ensure the future of our economy and our planet.

We need innovation, courage and a commitment to develop and improve clean energy

technology more now than ever before. Our ability to get our country back on track relies on our ability to change the way our country generates and uses energy.

We must harness the incredible innovation of the great National Laboratories in my home state of New Mexico. By directing investments towards the research and development projects done by the labs at Los Alamos and Sandia, we will reap enormous benefits down the line. The technologies under development by the labs include new ways to transport and store renewable electricity more efficiently as well as smart grid electric networks that will allow us to use it more effectively.

If our goal is a stronger, better economy—education is how we get there. The Americans who will drive our clean energy economy must be well-educated in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics careers.

Many schools across the third Congressional District of New Mexico are already training students for the jobs of the future in clean energy generation, in towns like Espanola, Farmington, Santa Fe, Rio Rancho, Taos, Portales, Las Vegas and Tucumcari. Our budget must support these children beginning with Head Start, but also in K-through-12 and beyond.

Schools like Northern New Mexico College Solar Energy Research Park and Academy, the North American Wind Research Center at Mesa Lands Community College, and San Juan College are providing students with workforce training in green jobs. Our budget needs to support and promote these innovative programs to create a nation of highly-trained workers ready to build a clean energy infrastructure for our nation and a productive career for themselves.

We must make a commitment to restore science and innovation as the keys to a new American Economy. Innovation is the future for my great state, and it is up to us to ensure that those new solar panels, chips for computers, and a workforce for the 21st century are built right here in the United States. This budget must ensure that New Mexicans will make America a cleaner, more prosperous, and safer place for all of us.

Finally, we must remember the unique needs of our returning veterans. About a third of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are estimated to have a serious mental health problem such as

depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. As many as 7,000 New Mexican veterans are homeless. Many have lost their jobs after extended deployments and are forced to start over once they return home.

They not only need the health care they are entitled to, but we need to provide them with access to higher education and job training and offer the resources to help them successfully reintegrate into their families and communities. In recognition of the service provided by our veterans, this Congress must generously support the Veterans' Health Administration and the Centers of Excellence for Veteran Student Success.

It is important that we remember that rural veterans often have to travel long distances to receive the care they need. Our veterans deserve access to local and rural clinics for their health care needs and reimbursements by the Veterans Administration for miles traveled. Our returning troops deserve mandatory mental-health screening and a program to better monitor their mental and physical health.

As we push on towards a universal health care system, it is of vital importance that we remember the needs of our veterans and that they receive the care that they have earned. It is also important that we remember to meet the needs of the rural communities that make up so much of my District.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for this opportunity.