

August 14, 2009

*Rep. Luján Meets with New Mexicans, Talks with Officials*

Santa Fe, NM – Rep. Ben Ray Luján has recently returned from a bipartisan Congressional Delegation visit to Iraq and Afghanistan. Rep. Luján met with members of the New Mexico National Guard and officials in the regions to discuss the situation on the ground.

“New Mexicans are serving bravely and honorably in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was my privilege to meet with them and thank them for their service and sacrifice,” said Rep. Luján.

Rep. Luján met with several New Mexicans including members of the 720th and 1115th divisions of the New Mexico National Guard. Rep. Luján also met with several officials including General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan and NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Afghan President Hamid Karzai, and Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, a United State diplomat to Afghanistan.

“It was also important to have discussions with officials in Iraq and Afghanistan about the situation on the ground,” said Rep. Luján. “President Obama has outlined clear withdrawal dates in Iraq – with a goal of withdrawing all combat troops by August 2010. The benchmarks are being met, and the Iraqis are beginning to take responsibility for their own country. These are positive steps. Although I believe that President Bush never should have invaded Iraq in the first place, it is important that we support our troops as they continue this withdrawal. I will be following developments in the country closely, especially the withdrawal of troops to make sure

that we are reaching our goals.”

“The situation in Afghanistan is difficult, we never should have taken our eye off the threat in Afghanistan by invading Iraq. There is violence in the southern region, and the drug trade is still strong - feeding the Taliban with money that allows them to fund their violent activities which are preventing global peace,” said Rep. Luján. “With that said, it is important for the American people to have a report presented to them, a comprehensive report that outlines a clear strategy and goals for Afghanistan. That is why I supported the McGovern bill calling for such a report to Congress. There is still much work to do in the country, and the Afghan people have to be committed to establishing a democracy in their country, addressing human rights, education and eradicating drug production. We can work toward these goals with the 42 nations who have committed support.”

In June, Rep. Luján voted in favor of an amendment that would have required the Secretary of Defense to provide Congress, by the end of the year, with an outline of its exit strategy for U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. The amendment was considered as part of the FY 2010 National Defense Authorizations Act (H.R. 2647). The amendment failed by a vote of 138 to 278. There was a similar standalone bill introduced earlier by Rep. James McGovern (D-MA), HR 2402, which Rep. Luján cosponsored.

The eight day bipartisan Congressional Delegation visit allowed Rep. Luján to visit with top United States, Iraqi and Afghan officials. Rep. Luján participated in the bipartisan Congressional Delegation visit through the House Armed Service Committee.