

October 28, 2009

*In Letter to Tribal Leaders, Lawmakers Outline Changes in Legislation to Improve IHS*

Washington, DC –Representatives Ben Ray Luján, Harry Teague and Ann Kirkpatrick continued their fight for Native Americans in the health insurance reform bill. Today, they sent a letter to tribal leaders, outlining the recent changes to the House health insurance reform legislation that will now include an amendment by Chairman Nick Rahall on Indian health.

The amendment would reauthorize the Indian Health Care system through 2025 and continue funding for health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. It would also help make long-awaited improvements in the system, enhancing and expanding care and better addressing the unique needs of people in Indian Country. The reauthorization has been under consideration since 1999.

Last week, the trio wrote a letter to Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer asking for inclusion of the language. Their efforts resulted in the successful inclusion of the Rahall Amendment in the health insurance reform legislation. Reps. Luján and Teague

represent 21 of the 22 Tribes in New Mexico including the Pueblos, the Jicarilla and Mescalero Apache nations. Reps. Luján and Kirkpatrick share Navajo Nation, and Rep. Kirkpatrick represents 11 different Tribes in Greater Arizona.

“Native Americans throughout my district have demanded better access to quality, affordable health care,” said Rep. Luján. “We are encouraged that the Indian Health Service will be reauthorized in the House health insurance reform bill, and we are looking forward to continuing to fight for the Indian people.”

“Native American healthcare has been overlooked for far too long,” said Rep. Teague. “The government needs to honor the commitments it made. Securing a steady source of funding for the Indian Health Care System will mean increased access and provide better quality care for southern New Mexico’s Native American families. The House must pass a reauthorization and improvement of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act.”

“We have been pushing the federal government to live up to its responsibilities in Indian Country, and this marks an important step in the right direction,” said Rep. Kirkpatrick. “With this reauthorization, we would be closer than ever to getting the modern medical services we have been working towards.”

In the letter sent today, the Representatives wrote:

*Dear Tribal Leader,*

*Recently, the House of Representatives added important language to the health insurance reform legislation that will protect and improve the Indian Health Care System (IHS). We are pleased to tell you that these improvements will help the Indian people throughout the country. House leadership has made the decision to include language in the House version of the health insurance reform bill to reauthorize the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA). IHCIA governs the Indian Health Care system. Prior to this decision, we sent a letter to House leadership asking for the language to be included.*

*The inclusion of this provision will sustain, expand, and modernize the Indian Health System. The provision will reauthorize the Indian Health Care system that provides health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. The amendment includes language from the Indian Health Care Improvement Act – which will provide much needed modernizations to the Indian health delivery system – such as the development of Indian epidemiology centers, long term home - and community-based health services, and assisted living services to Indian people.*

*Moreover, the provision ensures that Indian health care providers are able to participate equally in the health delivery system. Due to the enormous health disparities facing Indian people, it is critically important that health insurance reform respects and fulfills the federal responsibility to Indian tribes, while remaining sensitive to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Indian health providers' special needs.*

*It is the responsibility of the federal government to provide for the wellness of the Indian people. We are proud that this language was included in the final legislation, and we look forward to working with you in the future.*

*Sincerely,*

*Ben Ray Lujan*

*Member of Congress*

*Harry Teague*

*Member of Congress*

*Ann Kirkpatrick*

*Member of Congress*