

May 28, 2010

*National Defense Authorization Act Passes House by a Vote of 229 of 186*

Washington, DC – Today, the House of Representatives passed the National Defense Authorization Act, which included two amendments from Rep. Ben Ray Luján. The National Defense Authorization Act ensures that our Armed Forces have the resources they need, strengthens our counterterrorism efforts, and increases support for troops and their families. Rep. Luján included an amendment to promote job creation and economic development in New Mexico and an amendment to improve mental health services for our troops. The National Defense Authorization Act also included the repeal of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy. Rep. Luján voted in favor of the repeal. The National Defense Authorization Act passed the House by a vote of 229 to 186, and it will now be considered by the Senate.

“At a time when our country is waging two wars, it is critically important to make sure our troops have the resources they need,” said Rep. Luján. “We must continue to work to keep our country safe during this challenging time.”

Rep. Luján included an amendment to instruct the Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration to encourage technology transfer activities at its national laboratories that will lead to private-sector job creation. Both Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico would be subject to this amendment, which will improve American competitiveness, increase economic growth, and encourage new employment opportunities by giving the labs additional incentive to create jobs.

“With the current state of the economy and the high rate of unemployment, it is important to create jobs and encourage economic growth in America,” said Rep. Luján. “By promoting technology transfer between our national labs and small businesses, we can drive economic

growth in New Mexico.”

In addition to instructing the Administrator to encourage those technology transfer activities that will lead to new jobs, it also requires the Administrator to submit a report each year detailing the number of new private-sector employment opportunities created as a result of the technology transfer activities at each lab. The laboratories already report the numbers of patents filed and the number of patents licensed each year. This amendment would also require them to report the number of jobs created. Since the 1980s, technology transfer has been legislatively mandated at national laboratories.

Rep. Luján also added an amendment with Representatives Michael McMahon (D-NY), Tom Rooney (R-FL) and Harry Teague (D-NM) that will improve mental health services for our soldiers.

“Our soldiers sacrifice for us, and we must make sure that there are adequate resources to meet their mental health needs ,” said Rep. Luján. “This amendment will expand the number of mental health counselors eligible to serve American soldiers and their families under the Department of Defense’s TRICARE health insurance program.

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Congress requested that the Institute of Medicine (IOM) convene a committee to examine the credentials, preparation, and training of licensed mental health counselors. In this report, sponsored by the Department of Defense (DOD), the IOM committee makes recommendations for permitting counselors to practice independently under the TRICARE program. In addition, the committee recommends that TRICARE implement a comprehensive quality management system for all of its mental health professionals.

This amendment urges the Secretary of Defense to comply with these recommendations by December 31, 2010. Allowing counselors to practice independently would ultimately increase the mental health staff working with DOD, increasing access for service men and women in need and eventually reducing the horrifying trend of rising suicide rates and post-traumatic stress disorder among our troops.

The National Defense Authorization Act will repeal the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy contingent

upon the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs certifying that its repeal is consistent with military readiness, effectiveness, unit cohesion & recruiting.

Rep. Luján is also a cosponsor of separate legislation to repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

"If a young man or woman wants to defend our nation, they deserve to have that opportunity," said Rep. Luján. "By repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell, we will end the practice of discriminating against patriotic Americans who are fit to serve our nation. Repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell will make our armed forces stronger and is the right thing to do."