

Monday, January 31, 2011

Santa Fe, NM – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico’s Third District addressed the New Mexico State Legislature this morning. Below are his remarks as prepared.

“Distinguished members of the New Mexico House of Representatives, the New Mexico Senate, Governor Martinez, Speaker Lujan, President Pro-Tem Jennings, honored guests, family, and friends, thank you for allowing me to come before you today to discuss the critical efforts taking place and my hope that we will work together to move New Mexico forward and build stronger communities, a stronger state, and a stronger nation.

“Let me first thank all of you for everything you do on behalf of New Mexicans. I recognize and appreciate your hard work, and I come here today not just as the United States Representative of the Third District, but as a fellow New Mexican and partner in this effort.

“The economic challenges facing our state and our nation are great, but even greater is the need to join together toward a common goal, to fulfill our purpose as officials entrusted by our constituents to build a stronger New Mexico.

“The land of enchantment must also be the land of opportunity. New Mexicans are looking for a chance to work hard and make a better future for themselves and their families.

“We have seen the middle class slowly begin to disappear, that is not acceptable. We need a strong middle class – a strong middle class is good for the economy, and a strong middle class is good for America.

“It is our responsibility to defend and preserve this bedrock truth of our nation. To do so, we must push forward, innovating across the spectrum, whether it’s in the area of job creation, education, or energy.

“We must build on our existing foundation while finding new sources of economic growth; we must provide a good learning environment to educate our children so they can compete. It is critical that while we face growing budget constraints, we do not sacrifice long-term success by shortchanging the investments that will spur growth and create jobs.

“In the U.S. House of Representatives last year, we pursued a ‘Make it in America’ agenda to revitalize our shrinking manufacturing sector. Here at home it’s my hope that we develop our

own initiative – to invent it in New Mexico, to make it and grow it in New Mexico – an initiative that commits to helping our local businesses, our local growers and producers, and showcases all that New Mexico has to offer.

“This means supporting an agricultural sector that for generations has been the livelihood and backbone of so many communities across our great state. I know we love our New Mexico chile, and many of us can’t get enough New Mexico green chile cheeseburgers. That is why we must recommit our efforts to ensure that local producers can grow our food right here at home.

“I look forward to continuing to work together to support our acequias, support our farmers’ markets, and support families that have been growing chile and raising sheep and beef for generations. If we want to be able to answer the famous New Mexico question: ‘red or green?’ we have to do our part.

“In other sectors, this means strengthening where we see success – the film industry, robotics, and nanotechnology – while developing areas that have potential for further growth that depend on the transfer of technology and the resources to get that ‘big idea’ off the ground.

“The President made it clear in his State of the Union Address last week that investing in innovation is a top priority. This year in the House, I will be leading an effort to expand the ‘Make it in America’ agenda to focus on the high tech sector, to redevelop America as an Innovation Nation.

“We know New Mexico is well positioned to be a leader in this effort. The resources we have are unparalleled. For a state with a population of just over 2 million, we have two national laboratories, an Air Force research lab, and research and agricultural universities that all yield a significant resource of highly skilled engineers and scientists.

“That is an incredible set of resources we have right here in New Mexico that can serve as a foundation for future growth. These resources already contribute to our economy in many ways, but I believe they are not being utilized to their full potential to contribute to the growth of our local economy.

“By working closer with New Mexico’s small businesses and entrepreneurs they will provide new technologies that will lay the foundation for innovative ventures and will provide a means to attract industry to the region. When you think of high tech or start ups, when you think about Silicon Valley or MIT, you should think New Mexico.

“I am in the process of starting a bipartisan Technology Transfer Caucus in the House to help move these goals forward. I look forward to working with you to build this opportunity here in New Mexico.

“While the state and our nation face difficult decisions when it comes to investing our limited resources, there is one area in particular we must not shortchange – that is education.

“That is why I was pleased that before the 111th Congress came to an end, we successfully passed the America COMPETES Act – policy to advance America’s competitiveness in a global economy.

“That is an idea I look forward to working toward in New Mexico, a New Mexico Competes package that advances goals to strengthen the economy, empowers small business owners to create jobs, and helps diversify New Mexico’s economy to advance the innovation capacity that we know to be true.

“Further, the COMPETES Act authorizes key investments in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, ensuring that our students are prepared for the jobs of the future, ready to compete in a local, domestic and global economy.

“I don’t have to tell you the importance of education, of early childhood literacy programs, of access to technology, and distance learning opportunities. If we are willing to innovate and support efforts to find new ways of engaging students that excite them, to learn the tools they need to compete, they will succeed.

“We have resources that no other state can boast of and we owe it to our children to ensure that we are using those resources to the best of our ability. To achieve innovation in our education system, it must be a collaborative effort that brings together science and business communities; brings together private partners and our national labs; and brings together parents and educators.

“Already here in New Mexico, a number of organizations have dedicated their efforts to this noble goal. I have been proud to work with many in the community to look for ways to expand their efforts.

“For example, the High Desert Discovery District, HD3, is bringing together people with experience and contacts in business, marketing, and capital so that we can link those with the entrepreneurial spirit to create new businesses to the technical resources they need to be successful. The HD3 Academy for New Mexico Students will introduce students to the joined worlds of business and science and technology while equipping them with hands-on experience in commercializing a technology and forming a business.

“Innovate + Educate is building collaborative partnerships among education, business, community, and government leaders to try new models and use existing resources to support innovative projects. I look forward to working with Innovate + Educate to build their efforts to create a statewide STEM network.

“The Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation is a key partner, investing millions of dollars in grants to schools, non-profit organizations, government agencies, and Pueblo and Tribal communities. These are important organizations we must partner with to turn education around in New Mexico. In the coming weeks, I will be asking the labs to meet with me to work toward a stronger collaborative effort that brings all stakeholders together to recommit to our students, schools, and communities.

“Our national labs represent the best in innovation our country has to offer. We need access to the resources at their disposal, because if we focus our efforts on enhancing the good work that is being done right here in New Mexico, I know we can instill a lifelong passion for learning in our children and educate the next generation of leaders.

“Another area I hope we all agree on is that we as a nation must address and end our dependence on foreign sources of energy. With hundreds of billions of dollars leaving America to nations that are not very friendly to us, we must work towards domestic solutions that build American jobs and take advantage of American ingenuity.

“New Mexico is poised to be on the forefront of efforts to create a clean energy economy that creates sustainable, good paying jobs. Our state is a leader in solar capacity, our ability to take advantage of wind generation, and natural gas production.

“Look, we know that New Mexico is perfectly positioned in these areas, but only if work together to commit to support these resources, to generate electricity and power our vehicles. President Obama outlined his goal to have 80% of our energy come from clean sources by 2035. This is a bold goal, but it is achievable.

“Just as we must get ready for more electric vehicles on the roads of New Mexico needing the infrastructure to ‘plug in,’ so too, must we get ready for vehicles running on natural gas. Natural gas will play a critical role in providing a safe and reliable fuel source to generate electricity, firm up solar and wind, as well as power our vehicles.

“New Mexico will benefit from cleaner modes of transportation, which will reduce pollution and improve the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink. And keep dollars in New Mexico too.

“I applaud your efforts to promote the use of natural gas in government fleets, and I hope you will build on that to promote the expansion of natural gas fueling stations so that private partners and citizens of New Mexico will have certainty when making decisions to replace fleets and purchase cars and trucks.

“Next week, I will introduce a bill to promote infrastructure for natural gas vehicles because I believe it is critical to the future and safety of both America and New Mexico. In addition, I will

reintroduce my Community College Energy Training Act to establish a grant program for clean energy job training programs in community colleges.

“Already New Mexico’s community colleges are training the next generation of clean energy workers in solar and wind. We have to only look to Mesalands Community College in Tucumcari or Santa Fe Community College, which is making great strides with its Sustainable Technologies Center.

“Strengthening New Mexico’s clean energy economy will put New Mexicans to work. It is our obligation to provide the environment to prepare them to take advantage of this critical economic sector.

“I know there are conversations taking place around access to health care. This is a critical issue to our competitiveness both for our families and small businesses. One area I respectfully ask you to consider is investing resources upfront to increase the capacity of tribal governments to build, strengthen, and expand their health systems. There are literally millions of dollars in the pipeline to position our tribal governments to initiate large scale strategic health initiatives provided there are strategic partnerships and collaborations in place to maximize the availability of these resources.

“We are all called to service in different ways. As I travel across New Mexico, I meet people who are dedicated, passionate, and committed to a common purpose, the common purpose of making New Mexico better and stronger every day. I want to say thank you for all you do.

“I want to acknowledge the hard work of the public employees from state agencies, local governments, and the legislative staff. You provide critical services to our communities with little recognition. Thank you.

“But I want to give a special recognition to those of you who volunteer, that mentor young people, and that take time to read to young children. Thank you for being an example to us all.

“We have a responsibility to do our part, have the will to take on big problems and the commitment to make a difference so that New Mexicans can unleash the dreams they hold, the dreams of the entrepreneur, the dreams of students, the dreams that parents have for their kids.

“And as we come together today, the memory of the Arizona tragedy continues to weigh upon us. We can never forget the memory of those who were injured and those who lost their lives simply because they wanted to be engaged in our democracy.

“As we keep them in our hearts, let us also reflect on our communities, particularly here in New Mexico. Let us work together to make New Mexico and our nation worthy of the dreams and aspirations of those we are so honored to represent, so that we progress together where we can, that we respectfully disagree where we must, and that we always keep the interest of this Great State in our hearts. Thank you.”

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