

Wednesday, February 16, 2011

*Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico’s Third District spoke today on the House floor in opposition to House Republicans’ Continuing Resolution, which contains drastic cuts to vital services. Below are his remarks as delivered.*

“Mr. Chairman, I rise today in opposition to the drastic cuts in this continuing resolution and the amendments that make further cuts that threaten to weaken our economy and destroy jobs. It is critical that while we face growing budget constraints, we do not shortchange investments that will create jobs or provide vital services that New Mexicans rely on.

“Unfortunately, many of the cuts proposed in this bill and in a number of amendments would negatively impact our communities in New Mexico. For example, in the wake of the natural gas outages that left thousands of homes across the state without heat, this bill cuts the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program that helps working families, senior citizens, and disabled individuals heat their homes.

“At a time when New Mexico needs critical investments in education so that we can prepare our children to be the next generation of leaders, the House Republican plan makes drastic cuts to education at all levels. Beginning with early education, Republicans cut the Head Start program, which helps build a strong foundation for New Mexico’s children. The bill also cuts funding for programs that help poor school districts. With more than one-third of New Mexico’s students failing to graduate from high school, we must do more, not less, to ensure our children succeed. In addition, the Republican bill cuts Pell Grants that our young adults rely on to help make college more affordable.

“Arbitrary cuts to New Mexico’s national labs that are contained in this bill will hinder their ability to promote U.S. competitiveness and job creation. We are ending our ability to win the race before we can even begin. Instead of making these cuts, we need to outpace the competition –

we need to out-educate and out-innovate the rest of the world in order to grow our economy and put people back to work right here in New Mexico.

“And as we debate the proposed amendments in this section of the bill, I am extremely concerned with amendments that will be proposed today that make cuts to the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). In New Mexico, we take pride in our beautiful landscapes and the protection of our water. The LWCF has helped to protect dozens of New Mexico icons including Tent Rocks National Monument, Valles Caldera National Preserve, Rio Grande River Gorge, Santa Fe National Forest, and Petroglyphs National Monument, just to name a few.

“These attacks on the Land and Water Conservation Fund would eliminate a bipartisan program that has existed for 45 years by preventing revenues deposited in the LWCF account from being used for their authorized purposes, such as protecting public lands and promoting recreation.

“The Land and Water Conservation Fund was established by Congress in 1964 as a bipartisan conservation offset for offshore oil and gas drilling. Under current law, Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas leases and royalty receipts are deposited in a dedicated LWCF account in the Treasury. However, only a fraction of the annual receipts deposited in the LWCF account are appropriated, despite a surplus of over \$17 billion.

“In New Mexico, outdoor recreation is an integral part of the economy. I know when I visit with many of our colleagues here in the Congress, Democrats and Republicans, everyone is eager to get out to New Mexico. The Outdoor Industry Association reports that recreation contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy, supports nearly 6.5 million jobs across the country, and generates \$88 billion in annual state and national tax revenue. A recent study by The Trust for Public Land found that every \$1 invested in LWCF returns \$4 in economic value. Protecting the Land and Water Conservation Fund will expand opportunities for all Americans to have access to parks and natural areas, for outdoor recreation, and for hunting.

“Protecting the Land and Water Conservation Fund has immediate relevance to our efforts to create jobs in this country and it is critically important that we ensure funding for this important federal program is protected – while also working together to find a permanent solution to LWCF funding shortfalls over the long-term.

“I urge my colleges to oppose these amendments and vote no on this short-sighted spending bill that will hurt families and put more people out of work. While Republicans say, ‘so be it,’ to chopping American jobs, the people of New Mexico deserve better.”

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