

Tuesday, January 29, 2013

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

“Distinguished members of the New Mexico House of Representatives, the New Mexico Senate, Governor Martinez, Speaker Martinez, President Pro-Tem Papen, tribal leaders, honored guests, family, and friends, thank you for inviting me here today at this important time for our state.

“As I stand here today, it is painfully obvious that someone is missing from the Chamber, but we are here today representing every part of what he loved. Dad worked day in and day out for nearly four decades as a member of this distinguished body because he believed in the people of the Land of Enchantment – so much so that he continued to serve despite his diagnosis because, as he said, ‘We should never give up. We must persevere in our pursuit to do good, make a difference, and treat every man, women, and child with respect and dignity.’

“So I begin today by extending my sincere appreciation to all of you here in the Legislature and to our fellow New Mexicans. Thank you for the tremendous support you have shown my family during these toughest of times. The outpouring of support, the stories that were shared about my father and the fond memories touched our hearts and have been uplifting. I know that through you, through your stories, my dad will never be forgotten.

“Every one of you who work in this building, who serve the people of New Mexico, were part of his family. This Chamber was his second home and always, with Mom at his side, he fought for his state and the people he loved.

“He had an unwavering belief in the spirit of our people – he encompassed the diligent work ethic of New Mexicans and our determination to triumph over obstacles in the face of success. We share his firm conviction that here in the Land of Enchantment we are a proud and determined people who are willing to do the hard work necessary to build a better future for our collective family.

“There is no doubt that these are still difficult times for many of our friends, families, and neighbors; for so many fellow New Mexicans. But we know this to be true – the people of New Mexico are resilient. We are up to the task, ready for the work it will take to usher in brighter days. And as elected officials, it is our duty to live up to these hopes and aspirations – to rise to the challenges, not shrink from them, so that we can collectively create new opportunities here at home.

“Despite what some have suggested, New Mexicans are not takers. New Mexicans are not lazy or selfish. New Mexicans are hard-working and generous; proud and tough. We are giving in spirit, diligent in work ethic, and committed to our families and our communities.

“We have given back much to our country through the search for scientific knowledge at our national labs to the proud tradition of service in our nation’s armed forces. When America has called on New Mexico, New Mexicans have heeded the call.

“Let us join together and take a moment to thank and recognize the veterans, those missing in action and prisoners of war – may they never be forgotten – our active men and women in the military and our first responders, thank you for your service and sacrifices.

“I have the great honor of traveling our great state, getting to know more people and hearing their stories. And it could not be more clear to me, the people that I have met and learned from in my travels around the state do not want something for nothing and do not expect to be given a handout. They want to work, to have a sense of purpose, to be able to provide for their families with respect and dignity. But too often of late, those opportunities have been fading away.

“That is why, in these challenging days, we must come together with a focus on the concerns that are most pressing in the lives of the people we are honored to represent. With many issues needing our attention, let us not lose focus on the need to spur job creation and get our economy moving. Let us not get bogged down in petty political fights that are only meant to score points rather than strengthen the lives of New Mexicans.

“We saw the impact of this partisan gridlock on the federal level, when despite the bipartisan support we had for a new farm bill, partisan differences kept progress out of reach. This was a step we could have taken to support rural development, reform the dairy industry, provide support for farmers and ranchers suffering from drought conditions, and encourage value-added agriculture in rural economies.

“It is critical that we put our differences aside and pass legislation this Congress that helps New Mexico’s agricultural sector and enables us to diversify our economy through agricultural production.

“States throughout our region have seen their economies move forward, out of recession and creating jobs, while here at home we continue to lag behind and struggle from the impact of the deepest recession in a generation. Jobs are scarce and some people who were proud to call New Mexico home have had to leave for opportunities elsewhere.

“We cannot continue this troubling trend of being the only state in the region to see jobs disappear while the states around us see their job numbers grow. It is an issue that deserves far more action. This is a problem – a problem that cannot be ignored another day.

“A focus on job creation should be the driving principle that guides our efforts, so that when we seek to make tough decisions about spending cuts and revenue we do not do so in an arbitrary manner with little regard for the impact on middle-class and poor families; so that we don’t ask seniors and the most vulnerable among us to bear the burden of deficit reduction; and so we do not jeopardize our future by failing to invest in the areas that spur job creation and STEM education.

“High-quality teachers and a rigorous curriculum that focuses on the needs of employers for the jobs of tomorrow are essential to the future of our children and our state.

“Two years ago, I came before this body and discussed the need to invest in innovation, to take advantage of the resources we have in New Mexico that are unparalleled to others. We are home to two national laboratories, the Air Force research lab, TVC, Arrowhead, HD3, and the universities and colleges that yield a significant resource of highly skilled engineers and scientists.

“These resources have the potential to serve as a foundation for future growth. We can work with our assets to do more in the area of technology transfer, which is the movement of technology and innovations to the marketplace in partnership with local businesses across the state.

“While we have not seen as much progress as we would have liked, I am pleased to report that we have seen a commitment from President Obama to encourage technology transfer across federal agencies and departments. Let us show our support at the state level to reap the benefits and to diversify our economy. Let us work together to achieve these gains.

“I introduced legislation that will assist in creating new partnerships that will lead to a more seamless transition from laboratory advances to technologies that generate new businesses and empower entrepreneurs.

“Here in New Mexico we all know the impact that our national labs have on our economy. So while Washington debates the budget and how to address the country’s deficit, funding for many of our state’s priorities will be threatened. And with many in the Congress advocating for spending cuts as the only solution, we must fight as hard as ever, with a unified front to protect New Mexico.

“I believe we need a balanced plan that reduces spending where we find waste or can accomplish our goals more effectively. But we must not shortchange investments that will support economic growth or make cuts that undermine our competitiveness down the road.

“Earlier this month, I joined as a co-chair of the new House Science and National Labs Caucus. I joined with two Republicans and another Democrat to raise awareness about the importance of the national labs to the long-term economic vitality and security of our nation. I am encouraged that even during this time of strong partisanship that we can come together as Republicans and Democrats to advocate for an idea important to America.

“We all have a role to play in this effort. At the federal level, the delegation will continue our work. We need your voice in the fight as well. That is why in the spirit of bipartisanship I have

reached out to Governor Martinez, through her Administration, to change the national conversation and communicate to her colleagues—not only fellow Governors but those in Washington—how important our labs are to the vitality of science and research in our country and the competitiveness of the United States.

“I am hopeful we can all work together, unified in our desire to stand up for New Mexico.

“Those of us who were called here to serve did so because of our passion and our love for the communities we call home. We come from different places, we come from different backgrounds to unite as a family, a family that my father believed in, not blue, not red, simply Nuevo Mexicanos.

“He instilled that passion in me. It’s what I take with me every week when I board my flight to Washington, as I walk the halls of Congress, and as I work on policy to better the lives of all Americans.

“Last week, I couldn’t help but stop and wonder what Dad would be thinking about this time and place we find ourselves in. If I could only tell him about the White House meeting with my fellow Hispanic Caucus Members, as our country’s first African-American President and a room full of Hispanic leaders put forth a plan to fix our nation’s broken immigration system. It’s something I take pause to reflect on.

“As we go forward, we must ask ourselves, are we doing our part, are we willing to make a difference every day. Let us remember that what unites us as New Mexicans is greater than what divides us. That is why I am confident that we can rise above the challenges we face, find common ground, and remember why we chose public service in the first place – to improve the lives of the people we represent, and not let bitter partisanship stand in the way of progress for the people of New Mexico.

“And with that, I say – let us go forth together in common cause, united in our mission to build a stronger tomorrow for all of New Mexico’s people and treat every man, woman and child with the respect and dignity they deserve.

“Thank you.”

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