

UDALL: SENATE PASSES HISTORIC HEALTH REFORM LEGISLATION

Bill Dramatically Expands New Mexicans' Access to Affordable Care

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Tom Udall, D-NM, today voted in favor of historic health care reform legislation that will provide quality, affordable health coverage to 96 percent of New Mexicans while reducing health care costs for individuals, businesses and government. The Senate approved the bill 60-39.

The legislation, called the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, expands health care coverage to 31 million Americans, including 305,000 additional New Mexicans. It also reduces the federal deficit by \$132 billion in the first 10 years, provides critical support for small businesses, expands access to preventive care and increases access to care in rural areas, and permanently reauthorizes the Indian Health Care Improvement Act.

“Americans have waited generations for health care reform and, with this legislation, we establish a strong foundation for us to build upon moving forward,” Udall said. “This bill provides stability and security to those who have insurance, extends coverage to those who don’t, and lowers costs for families, businesses and governments across the country.”

The legislation now goes to conference committee to resolve differences between the House and Senate bills before moving on to President Obama for his signature.

Highlights of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*:

- **Establishes a National Non-profit Insurance Plan** patterned after the federal employee health care plan. This new plan would provide another option for individuals who are unable to access coverage through their employers and will seek insurance through the health exchange. It would have at least one non-profit option among its coverage choices.
- **Holds Health Insurers Accountable** by requiring insurers to cover every person who applies, regardless of health status, age, gender or pre-existing condition; requires insurers to cover more preventive care; caps out-of-pocket expenses and deductibles; and eliminates unreasonable yearly and lifetime limits on coverage.
- **Provides Additional Support for Small Businesses** to offer prevention and wellness coverage for their employees along with large business plans, and expanded eligibility for tax credits. Some 22,700 small businesses in New Mexico will be eligible to receive assistance.

· **Improves Access to Preventive Care.** Proposed by Udall as part of the Freshman Package, this provision would reauthorize the program that trains physicians for careers in primary care and public health. This provision also doubles the current number of preventive medicine residency spots nationally from 307 to more than 600. New Mexico, like states across the country, is experiencing a dramatic shortage in physicians, particularly in the fields of primary care and public health. In addition to this provision, the bill also eliminates co-pays and deductibles for clinical services like colonoscopies and cholesterol screenings; improves education on disease prevention and public health, and invests in a national prevention strategy.

· **Expands Health Care Options for Rural Residents.** Also proposed by Udall as part of the Freshman Package, this amendment would analyze clinical health outcomes and cost-effectiveness of telehealth systems in medically underserved areas. Telehealth programs, including several highly-regarded projects in New Mexico, allow rural residents to receive specialist treatment not otherwise available in their local areas. This may include treatment for chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and other illnesses. This package also includes a provision to analyze and make specific recommendations about why doctors are not choosing primary care as their career specialty, especially in rural and underserved areas. Currently in New Mexico, 30 of 33 counties are classified as “medically underserved, and all but one county are considered “health profession shortage areas.”

· **Permanently Reauthorizes the Indian Health Care Improvement Act.** This law, which provides the framework for health care delivery for the nation’s 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives, has not been reauthorized in more than a decade. Currently, it is underfunded and outdated. The manager’s package would permanently reauthorize this critical law, allowing the United States to meet its treaty obligations to provide quality health care to Native Americans.

· **Protects Medicare and Lowers Costs for Seniors.** Reduces the size of the prescription “doughnut hole” by providing a 50 percent discount for brand-name drugs in this coverage gap, and \$500 toward closing the gap. This will save seniors, including roughly 51,900 Medicare beneficiaries in New Mexico, thousands of dollars a year. In addition, this reform cuts waste, fraud and abuse in Medicare, and ensures Medicare funds go to improving seniors’ care, not to insurance companies’ profits.