

April 30, 2004

Dear Friend,

Earlier this month, I attended events and held town hall meetings throughout New Mexico. I had the opportunity to meet with hundreds of residents, listen to their concerns, and answer their questions. Learning about your experiences and opinions is very important to me. These chances to meet personally with my constituents are some of the best parts of representing you in Washington.

Of the literally hundreds of issues raised during my meetings, there was one issue that I heard about from throughout the vast Third Congressional District: health care. I have been moved by the stories of New Mexicans who cope each day with the high cost of their health insurance, their prescription drugs or even accessing care.

From Clovis to Taos, from Santa Fe to Gallup, my constituents shared with me their frustrations with health care. Here is a small sampling of what I heard:

SANTA FE - An elderly woman at the Mary Esther Gonzales Senior Center told me that the new Medicare prescription drug "benefit" won't help her because it doesn't do anything to rein in the rising cost of prescription drugs. As she pointed out, what good will the new discount cards (being released next month) do when the big pharmaceutical companies are increasing their prices? For more information on this issue, click [here](#).

ESPAÑOLA - A man from Chimayo thanked me for spotlighting problems that affect residents of nursing homes. He explained his grandfather is in a facility in another state and claimed that he had been the victim of abuse. He stated that "the people who cared for us, deserve better." The man's family is getting ready to bring him to New Mexico. His wife will have to quit her job in order to take care of the grandfather.

GALLUP - A woman who has worked at a local restaurant for 30 years was diagnosed with cancer last year. Her employer doesn't provide health insurance, and she desperately sought financial help to pay for her chemotherapy. Imagine her surprise to learn that she makes "too much" to qualify for Medicaid. As she said, "I could have gotten better

health care if I had just never worked at all." Sadly, even the recently passed Medicare bill may not help solve this problem. Learn more by clicking [here](#).

CLOVIS - A veteran who proudly served his nation during World War II explained to me the problems he has had since being diagnosed with Hepatitis C. Prior to Hep C tests, a number of Americans who served in the Armed Forces were infected with the disease. In his case, he believes it happened in France when all the men were given vaccinations with the same needle. Today he finds a Department of Veterans Affairs that will not treat him unless he can "prove" his service-connection to the disease. For more information on this issue, click [here](#).

TUCUMCARI - A beleaguered wife told me about her impending trip to Minnesota with her husband so that he could finally receive a long-awaited liver transplant. She recounted the hours and hours of paperwork that she and her sick husband have had to endure every step of the way.

LAS VEGAS - A doctor in Las Vegas told me more than 43 million Americans have no health insurance today, and millions more have inadequate insurance. Employers who have long provided quality coverage for their employees are cutting back benefits and raising workers' out-of-pocket expenses to deal with the rising cost of health premiums. He said this is the "number one problem facing our country."

TAOS - A small business owner told me that he urgently wants to provide health insurance to the four people that he employs, but the programs are too expensive. In just two years, small business owners who provide employee health insurance have watched premiums rise by an average of 28 percent - forcing them to make a Hobson's choice between providing health insurance and just staying afloat. He said that he has lost many good, dedicated people over the years that eventually have to leave for another job that provides health insurance.

RIO RANCHO - A number of veterans who honorably served their country in World War II and Vietnam expressed their frustration with waiting times at the VA in Albuquerque. As they acknowledged, these wait times aren't the fault of the devoted staff of the VA. It's the symptom of a growing, burdened department that continues to be underfunded by the Bush administration and majority in Congress. As one man said, "What's going to happen to these troops when they come back from Iraq? These brave

men and women sacrificed and it is unconscionable that they should now have to fight for basic medical services." For more information on Veterans' issues, click [here](#).

PARADISE HILLS - A teacher told me that she is increasingly concerned about the dramatic increase in overweight and obese children. She said more could be done in school, such as an increased emphasis on physical education and healthier eating choices. I agreed with her when she said, "Poor eating habits and inactivity are self-destructive. They shorten the life-span. They erode the quality of life. And they burden our health care system that in many ways is already stretched far too thin." Click [here](#) for more information on my work in Congress on Preventive Healthcare.

LOS ALAMOS - A scientist from LANL urged me to support an increase in federal funding for medical research. He told me that the medical community is on the verge of breakthroughs in treatments for cancers, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, AIDS and a broad array of serious and life-threatening diseases.

The stories are heartbreaking, deeply troubling and an indictment of our current health care financing system. They remind me of the people all across our state and the nation that are being denied what should be a given in a country like the United States - access to affordable health care. It won't happen overnight and it won't happen unless a bipartisan effort is launched. Health care shouldn't be about partisan politics. Click [here](#) for more information on efforts to address this problem.

Until then, I want to thank the scores of New Mexicans who shared their stories, their ideas and their time with me this past month. Meeting with so many of you has strengthened my resolve to fighting for and passing your priorities in Congress. That means creating jobs by helping small businesses, making health care more affordable, and providing the best education for our children, and a safer and more secure America.