



For Immediate Release:
July 2, 2009

Contact: Courtney Goodwin – (703) 966-1214
Tim Graves – (512) 458 -1257

Representatives Gonzalez, Green, Gohmert, Green, Edwards and Hall Praised as Champions of Texas Seniors' Quality Nursing Home Care

Federal Lawmakers Fight to Stop Pending Regulation Cutting \$108.6 Million in Texas Seniors' Medicare Funds, Costing 1,649 Key Front Line Caregiver Jobs; More Help Needed From Lawmakers as Health Reform Legislation Moves Forward

Austin, TX– While noting the battle to protect nursing home patients' Medicare benefits will be ongoing throughout the year, the leader of the Texas Health Care Association (THCA) today praised U.S. Representatives Charles Gonzalez (D-TX), Gene Green (D-TX), Louie Gohmert (R-TX), Al Green (D-TX), Chet Edwards (D-TX) and Ralph Hall (R-TX) for joining a key bipartisan congressional effort to stop the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from pursuing a pending Medicare regulation that will cut \$108.6 million in Texas seniors' Medicare Part A nursing home benefits in the year ahead, and cost hundreds of the key front line care jobs in Texas facilities. Nationally, the Medicare funding cuts will amount to \$1.05 billion in the year ahead, \$7.23 billion over five years, and \$16 billion over ten years, according to the Administration's own budget projections. Front line caregiver job losses will exceed 30,000 nationally.

Representatives Gonzalez, Green, Gohmert, Green, Edwards and Hall have joined 116 other members of the U.S. House of Representatives in signing a letter from Representatives Shelley Berkley (D-NV), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) and Earl Pomeroy (D-ND) urging HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to reject the proposed Medicare regulation.

Tim Graves, President of THCA said, "We thank U.S. Representatives Gonzalez, Green, Gohmert, Green, Edwards and Hall for taking a firm, declarative stand when it comes to fighting on behalf of their elderly constituents who need and deserve continued access to quality nursing home care. Representatives Gonzalez, Green, Gohmert, Green, Edwards and Hall have demonstrated strong leadership for opposing this Medicare regulation that will cut good-paying health jobs and undermine badly-needed economic stimulus initiatives. We must keep in mind that signing this letter is a good first step, and as the health reform debate proceeds, we look forward to working with Representatives Gonzalez, Green, Gohmert, Green, Edwards and Hall to continue fighting for the interests for our state's most vulnerable citizens."

An excerpt of the letter (available in its entirety at www.ahca.org) is as follows:

"We are deeply concerned that access to high-quality skilled nursing care for America's seniors will be threatened if the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) moves forward with an administrative proposal that will drastically cut Medicare funding for skilled nursing facility (SNF) care. This proposal will reduce reimbursements to SNFs by a projected \$7.23 billion over five years, rising sharply to \$18 billion over ten years. These cuts will result in the loss of at least 30,323 jobs in skilled nursing facilities around the country and diminish business activity by

\$2.5 billion, further reducing federal, state and local tax revenue. On behalf of our nearly 2 million Medicare beneficiary constituents who receive care in SNFs annually, we urge the Department to reject the proposed rule and the resulting cuts to essential nursing and rehabilitative care.

“Given the well-recognized underfunding of SNF care by the Medicaid program, it is important to examine federal reimbursements as a whole when making decisions with such potentially harmful consequences. Medicare and Medicaid are linked in the funding of long term care and overall federal support must be maintained at an adequate level to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens have access to high-quality post-acute care. On behalf of our many constituents in the more than 15,000 SNFs nationwide, we urge you to reject this proposed rule.”

Graves said the pending Medicare regulation – rightly sidetracked last year due to significant bipartisan U.S. Senate and House opposition – will be especially damaging to seniors in states like Texas that have endured significant Medicaid funding short-falls for years. As independent research has corroborated time and again, Medicare and Medicaid funding are inextricably linked, and the cuts to the Medicare program will squeeze Texas facilities in a manner harmful to patient care needs, our local economies, and our caregiver jobs base.

#

Founded in 1950, the Texas Health Care Association (THCA) is the largest long term care association in Texas. THCA represents a broad spectrum of long term care providers and professionals offering long term, rehabilitative and specialized health care services. Member facilities, owned by both for-profit and non-profit entities, include nursing facilities, specialized rehabilitation facilities, and assisted living facilities.