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## **Fort Worth Welcomes National RV Tour “Driving for Quality Care” Highlighting Need to Protect Texas Seniors’ Access to Quality Care, Preserve Local Caregiver Jobs**

*Cross-Country Grassroots Effort Urges Governor Perry, Texas Legislature to Use Portion of Just-Passed Emergency Federal Medicaid Relief To Help Soften Blow From New \$25.6 Million State Medicaid Cuts*

**FORT WORTH, TX** – With vulnerable seniors’ continued access to quality rehabilitation, skilled nursing and assisted living care relying heavily upon the collective funding adequacy of state Medicaid and federal Medicare funding, the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living’s (AHCA/NCAL) nationwide *Driving for Quality Care* petition initiative arrived at the tour’s 38th stop in Fort Worth today to urge President Obama, Congress and Governor Rick Perry to help resolve the chronic underfunding of Texas’ and the nation’s rehabilitative and long term care services. The petition event was held at Southwest Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, in Fort Worth.

“This national RV tour emphasizes the need for adequate, stable and consistent Medicaid funding, which is crucial for high quality care, quality of life, and quality staffing in care communities across Texas,” stated Mack Baldrige, the Administrator of Southwest. “We urgently need Governor Perry and the Texas Legislature to help ensure a portion of the recently passed federal emergency Medicaid relief – with \$858 million potentially available for Texas -- to help preserve seniors’ access to quality care, and to protect the local caregiver jobs so important to the Fort Worth area and communities across our state.”

The organizers of *Driving for Quality Care* said the nationwide RV tour helps empower seniors, family members, and caregivers by inviting them to sign the initiative’s actual or online national petition, to reach out to local legislators, to recruit supporters via social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter, and to follow the tour’s progress from Washington, DC to Long Beach, CA on its interactive website, [www.drivingforqualitycare.com](http://www.drivingforqualitycare.com).

“We applaud and thank those members of Congress who stood with us and voted for the extension of needed federal Medicaid funds,” stated Tim Graves, President of the Texas Health Care Association (THCA) in Austin, who appeared at the Fort Worth event. “As Mack Baldrige indicated, our patients, care-giving staff and the viability of many facilities and jobs throughout Texas are dependent upon ensuring the actual costs of providing quality health care for our seniors is reimbursed dollar for dollar by the Texas Medicaid program. This is not the case today – and with \$25.6 million state Medicaid cuts going into effect just days from now, on September 1, our situation will become even more challenging.”

Baldrige and Graves pointed out that with approximately 60 to 70 percent of facility costs in Texas and nationwide directly related to staffing, the lack of stable, adequate Medicaid funding -- and cumulative federal Medicare cuts of nearly \$27 billion in just the past nine months -- will continue to place vulnerable seniors’ ongoing care needs in direct jeopardy, and puts key facility jobs at substantial risk.

“Keeping Texas’ long term and rehabilitative care sector strong keeps Texas strong,” Graves continued, citing the state’s long term care sector as an integral, critical segment of the state economy, contributing \$13.1 billion annually in Texas economic activity, and helping employ more than 100,000 workers. “As the *Driving for Quality Care* RV makes its way across America, we want to remind our elected officials here in Texas that, for many communities, our care facilities are often the largest employer -- especially in rural Texas. We also want

to underscore the fact these facilities provide the very services local seniors depend upon in order to recuperate and return home -- which is the central objective of facilities here in Texas and throughout the nation.”

The THCA President said a recently commissioned public opinion survey from Basalice & Associates to assess Texans’ attitude towards Medicaid cuts – and specifically towards the \$25 million cuts scheduled to go into effect September 1, finds Republicans, Democrats and Independents alike strongly opposed to the \$25 million state cuts to seniors’ rehabilitation and skilled nursing care. Specifically, the survey found, 79 percent of all Texans oppose the recently announced cuts, with a full 70 percent of Republicans opposing them; 80 percent of Independents in opposition; and 88 percent of Democrats in opposition. (Poll details are available at [www.txhca.org](http://www.txhca.org)).

“This recent data is a powerful wake-up call to elected officials at every level of Texas state government that the \$25 million cut to Texas seniors’ rehabilitation and skilled nursing care are enormously unpopular, and that local lawmakers who vote to cut Medicaid moving forward will have a difficult task explaining this action to local seniors,” Graves continued.

The assembled group of eldercare advocates also noted a newly released 2010 Quality Report finding ongoing quality improvements are paying off with positive trends in many areas of quality and patient outcomes. Between 2008 and 2009, they noted, Texas’ nursing facilities made measureable improvements in several quality measures including reductions in resident weight loss, patient pain and pressure ulcers.

“Without the funding stability that we are calling for today, our ability to maintain and build upon these improvements is severely hindered,” Baldrige noted. “We respectfully ask our state and federal leaders to recognize the vital role adequate Medicare and Medicaid funding have in ensuring ongoing quality advancements in our state’s senior care, and to help us sustain these positive quality trends.”

*Specific RV Tour Itinerary and Additional Information Available at [www.drivingforqualitycare.com](http://www.drivingforqualitycare.com)*

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