



For Immediate Release

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**U.S. Rep. Ciro Rodriguez Praised for Touring Buena Vida Care and Rehab Center,
Seeing First-Hand the Funding Challenges Facing Vulnerable Seniors, Facilities
in San Antonio Area**

*New Study: Congressional Failure to Pass Emergency Medicaid Relief Extension
Costs Texas \$1.7 Billion*

San Antonio -- In thanking U.S. Rep. Ciro Rodriguez (D-TX) for touring the Buena Vida Care and Rehab Center, Tim Graves, President of Texas Health Care Association (THCA) in Austin, said on-site events of this nature help policymakers better understand why facilities like Buena Vida are integral to the local economy and jobs base, how nursing homes are changing in terms of the nature of its patients, and how ongoing shortfalls surrounding Medicare and Medicaid funding undermines not just facility operations, but seniors' care itself.

"We are grateful and honored Congressman Rodriguez has taken the time to tour the facility, and to see first-hand how nursing homes like Buena Vida are fighting daily to provide the excellent care our seniors deserve, while also facing a challenging federal and state reimbursement system that all too often falls short of actually meeting the cost of providing care," Graves said.

Graves said it is essential throughout 2010 to have an informed public discussion to ensure Austin lawmakers understand why keeping Texas' Medicaid program financially sound in the face of deep Medicare cuts from Washington is vital to protecting seniors in San Antonio and throughout the state. He pointed out that passage of federal health care reform just months ago entailed ten year cuts of \$14.6 billion nationally – on top of a \$725 million, ten year cut just for Texas passed by way of regulation in October 2009.

The THCA President also pointed out that Congress failed to pass an emergency Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) Medicaid relief extension for all states in an effort to protect vulnerable populations in the midst of the nation's deep, enduring recession. A Families USA study estimates that congressional failure to pass this measure will cost Texas approximately \$1.7 billion in lost funding for vulnerable populations, including seniors.

The bipartisan National Governors' Association (NGA), he said, notes that "Funding for FMAP is a particularly effective countercyclical tool because it immediately allows Governors to eliminate planned budget cuts required to meet balanced budget requirements and continue services for those with the greatest need."

"Throughout the year, THCA member facilities will continue to highlight the fact that meeting seniors' ongoing care needs -- as well as sustaining a strong workforce and local jobs base -- will be contingent upon sustaining appropriate Medicaid funding levels from Austin in the face of deep cuts to Medicare in Washington," he continued. "With sixty percent of our facility costs directly related to staffing, it has not taken long for the cumulative funding squeeze to hurt."

Graves also pointed out that independent health experts and studies corroborate that Medicare and

Medicaid funding must be viewed together – not in isolation. “The combination of a squeeze to both programs presents a clear and present danger to every aspect of facility operations -- and ultimately to San Antonio seniors’ ongoing ability to access the care they both require and deserve,” Graves stated. “The bottom line at every facility is that adequate, stable and consistent Medicaid and Medicare funding will always be directly linked with high care quality and staffing stability.”

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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.