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Contact: Tim Graves, (512) 458-1257, tgraves@txhca.org
Rebecca Reid, (410) 212-3843, rreid@txhca.org

Growing Importance of March 4 Texas Primary Requires 2008 Presidential Candidates to Better Address Eldercare Financing Issues

Texas Health Care Association Urges Clinton, Obama, McCain, Huckabee to Further Discuss, Outline Long Term Care Platforms

Austin, TX (February 12, 2008) – As Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton begins her two-day Texas campaign swing today to compete in the increasingly important March 4 Texas primaries, the Texas Health Care Association (THCA) urged the major presidential candidates of both parties to go beyond the discussion of increasing Americans' health insurance access, and to also include a needed discussion on how to strengthen long term care programs for the benefit of Texas' most vulnerable population of seniors and disabled citizens.

"With one in four Texans lacking health insurance, expanding access to health insurance is deservedly a driving issue in this increasingly important primary -- but it is also vital for candidates of both parties to outline their plans to protect our oldest, most vulnerable seniors and disabled citizens, whose lives depend upon Medicare and Medicaid being adequately financed," stated Tim Graves, President of THCA. "As more Boomers enter our retirement system, our residents and the caregivers who serve them want to know specifically what each candidate will do to bolster Medicare and Medicaid financing in a way that ensures we have the ongoing capacity to provide quality care today as well as tomorrow."

Graves said proposed federal cuts to Medicare and Medicaid contained in the Bush Administration's FY 2009 budget -- on top of Texas' already over-burdened state Medicaid program -- will create an even more problematic scenario for the state's most vulnerable elderly and disabled residents. "With upwards of 60 percent of nursing home operating expenses driven by labor costs, additional financial pressures placed on facilities caused by federal funding cuts will undermine patients, and further destabilize our direct care workforce," Graves continued.

In the wake of federal efforts to reduce Medicare and Medicaid funding, THCA is encouraging a broader public debate surrounding long term care financing issues, and why Texas' daily Medicaid reimbursement rate has slipped to 49th in the nation, which, Graves observed, does not have the capacity to meet the growing complex care needs of Texas' rapidly aging population.

While the average national daily Medicaid rate per patient is \$153.83, the Texas rate is just \$106.59 (49th), according to independent data from the national accounting firm BDO Seidman, and other sources. Even on a regional basis, he said, Texas is falling behind: New Mexico ranks 30th nationally, at \$137.24; Oklahoma ranks 44th, at \$116.84; Arkansas ranks 47th, at \$111.76; and Louisiana ranks 45th, at \$115.00.

“We are committed to solving these long term care financing challenges in a collaborative, bipartisan manner – and we look forward to hearing more on this front from the 2008 presidential candidates in the weeks ahead,” Graves concluded.

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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.