

**Remarks for the Committee on Ways and Means Member Day  
Congresswoman Xochitl Torres Small**

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Chairman Neal, Ranking Member Brady, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak about the pressing issues facing New Mexico's Second Congressional district.

As a new member of Congress, I first want to applaud the Ways and Means Committee's work to lift up rural and underserved communities.

Because those are the communities that I represent and they are often the ones who feel the most left behind.

Our rural communities are important threads in the fabric of our nation. They provide the food we put on our tables and a place for small businesses to get their start. More importantly, they represent the American values and traditions that are at the heart of our who we are.

I love our values and our way of life, but our rural communities are facing increased hardships like never before.

In just the first 100 days I've been in office, I've visited all 19 counties in New Mexico's Second Congressional District.

And in each place that I visited, residents voiced the same message. They want the same economic opportunities and the same health care access that the bustling cities and growing suburbs have.

These are the issues I came to Congress to tackle, and it is also why I am here today speaking before the Committee with broad and far-reaching jurisdiction to address these problems.

When meeting with my constituents, access to basic health care leads nearly every conversation, because in southern New Mexico, it's not just about health care affordability, it's also about health care accessibility.

I have met expecting mothers who have to drive for hours, often across state lines, for every prenatal appointment.

I have met veterans who have to get on a bus in the middle of the night to get to a doctor's appointment in Albuquerque the next day.

I have met teenagers in crisis who face a long waiting list for a much-needed mental health appointment.

And I have visited rural and community hospitals that are in crisis and on the verge of closing.

This is a crisis. One that we must fight to solve for the 60 million Americans living in rural communities.

I'm by no means an expert, but I think it is clear that one way to increase health care access in rural areas is increasing the number of doctors in rural areas.

In March, along with a bipartisan group of colleagues, including Rep. Terri Sewell of this Committee, I helped introduced The Resident Physician Shortage Reduction Act of 2019, H.R. 1763.

This bipartisan legislation would take critical steps toward reducing nationwide physician shortages, with an emphasis in rural areas, by increasing the number of Medicare-supported residency positions by 15,000 positions.

For the past two decades, an artificial cap on the number of residents funded by Medicare – which is the primary source of payment for residents – has limited the expansion of training programs and the number of trainees.

If passed, H.R. 1763 will significantly increase training programs for rural physicians and take the first steps towards expanding rural healthcare access and incentivizing medical students to serve our rural communities.

H.R. 1763 already has 117 cosponsors, including Representatives Pascrell, Davis, Higgins, Chu, Moore, Boyle, Suozzi, and Horsford on this Committee. I strongly encourage the Committee to support this bill.

Second, it is essential that we help those in rural communities get to their health care providers, even if they live several towns or counties away. When lack of transportation prevents people from attending routine or preventative care appointments, it increases health care costs and leads to worse health outcomes.

Currently, there are several federal programs that help patients in rural communities reach their medical providers with non-emergency medical transportation. Studies have proven that programs like these not only increase access to health care but also pay for themselves through health care savings.

However, these programs can't meet the immense need. We need to do more to expand federal patient transportation programs to ensure that no American is prevented from seeing their doctor due to issues with transportation.

Last, we have to work on reducing prescription drug costs. It is unconscionable that our friends, parents, and grandparents are forced to choose between paying for drugs they need to stay healthy and the food and bills they need to stay alive.

Somehow, this problem seems to only get worse each year. Drug companies are raising prices in a never-ending search for larger and larger profits, regardless of the impact on patients.

Over the past decade, the price of insulin, a drug that keeps millions of Americans alive each day, tripled. From 2018 to 2019, the average drug price increased 6.3%, three times more than the rate of inflation. People are dying because they can't afford their prescriptions.

This isn't a partisan issue. Democratic leadership and the President agree that we need to work together to lower the price of prescription drugs. I can attest that across my diverse district,

Republicans, Democrats, and independents all agree drug prices are too high and that Congress has an obligation to lower them.

Last month, I supported the passage of the Strengthening Health Care and Lowering Prescription Drug Costs Act, a package of seven bills that would protect and expand access to affordable health care and lower prescription drug costs.

Now, I urge members of this Committee to join me and my colleagues in building on the momentum of this legislation's passage and continue putting forth pragmatic measures to protect our constituents suffering from inflated and unregulated drug prices.

Members of this Committee, even with the hardships rural communities face, we are often the first to be forgotten when legislators and health care experts discuss health care quality, access, and affordability. By working to solve these issues, this Committee can be on the forefront of advancing health care, no matter where a person lives.

Thank you again, Chairman Neal and Ranking Member Brady for holding this hearing, and for your work delivering better health care to all our constituents.