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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Senators Tom Udall (D-N.M.) and Martin Heinrich (D-NM) are continuing their push for reforms that would help all families access quality child care in New Mexico and across the country.

The senators announced Oct. 27 that they are backing a resolution outlining principles for how Congress can act to improve the quality of child care while reducing the cost. Those principles include ensuring child care professionals can get better training and pay, and that Congress provides adequate resources to help state and local governments support affordable child care in local communities.

“Quality, affordable child care is essential for working parents and their employers. But for many families in New Mexico, child care is either too expensive, or it’s simply unavailable - more than one in five children in our state is home alone after school. And that’s a serious problem affecting everything from children’s well-being to the strength of our workforce,” said Udall, who has introduced legislation that would boost investments in child care and other programs to improve child well-being in New Mexico. “Congress must show leadership. I will keep pushing for action to provide quality, affordable child and after-school care, and to support our kids, families and employers.”

“Balancing work and family is central to the challenges facing many New Mexicans. The soaring cost of child care puts a significant strain on a family budget,” said Heinrich. “Parents should have the peace of mind that when they go to work, their children are safe and cared for -without having to break the bank. Improving access to quality child care is an investment in the future and helps better prepare the next generation to succeed.”

In New Mexico more than 101,000 children under age 6 have either two working parents or a single working parent, yet the state only has the ability to serve a little over 66,000 children in child care centers. Although the cost of child care has nearly doubled since 1985 nationwide, median family incomes have not kept pace. Today, the median annual income in New Mexico is $47,300, while the average annual cost of child care is over $7,000 - more than the annual tuition at the state’s public colleges and a significant financial burden for many families.

The principles outlined in the resolution are:

• To provide child care assistance to each working family that needs it;

• To ensure that high-quality, flexible child care is available to parents during non-standard working hours so that they have a better chance of finding and keeping a job in the 24-hour economy;

• To improve the quality of child care by recruiting and retaining qualified caregivers and ensuring that they can earn a living wage;

• To ensure no working family has to pay more than 10 percent of its income on child care;

• To coordinate with states and local communities to ensure that they have adequate resources to expand high-quality job opportunities and affordable child care services.

The resolution was introduced by U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Ranking Member of the

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee.

Udall and Heinrich are strong proponents of policies that support working New Mexico families, including expanding the Child Care and Dependent Care Tax Credit. Udall and Heinrich are also cosponsors of the Strong Start for America's Children Act, a bill to expand quality preschool programs in New Mexico and throughout the country. The legislation is a 10-year innovative federal-state partnership to expand and improve early learning opportunities for children from birth to age 5.