ALEXANDRIA, Va.—The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) today presented Representatives Ben Ray Luján (NM-3) and Gus Bilirakis (FL-12) with its annual Congressional Leadership Award in recognition of the lawmakers’ exceptional, bipartisan commitment to supporting cancer research and treatment. The ASCO award honors Members of Congress who are leading champions for patients and survivors of cancer, their families, and their cancer care teams.

As members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, Reps. Luján and Bilirakis jointly sponsored the CLINICAL TREATMENT Act (H.R. 913), which would improve patient access to clinical trials by guaranteeing coverage of the routine care costs of clinical trial participation for Medicaid enrollees with a life-threatening condition.

"Virtually every American family is affected by cancer," said ASCO President Howard A. 'Skip' Burris III, MD, FACP, FASCO, who presented the award. "We are so grateful to have the strong leadership of both Representatives Luján and Bilirakis, who are working in Congress to advance legislation that improves access to high-quality cancer care for every patient. We applaud their leadership and appreciate their dedication to supporting policy priorities that will positively impact everyone in the cancer care community."

In addition to his work as a sponsor of H.R. 913, Rep. Luján has been a champion for protecting patients with preexisting conditions and reducing health disparities since he first entered office. As the Assistant Speaker of the House, Rep. Luján has made it a priority to expand access to Medicaid and strengthen Medicare to improve coverage for beneficiaries. He was also actively
engaged in developing the 21st Century Cures Act -- landmark legislation designed to improve and accelerate the pace of biomedical research in the U.S.

"The fight against cancer is one that is deeply personal to both my family and to millions of families across the country. I will continue to be a strong advocate for improving care for individuals battling this disease, including strengthening Medicaid and ensuring that medical researchers have the resources needed to find life-saving cures," said Rep. Luján.

A member of the Congressional Childhood Cancer Caucus, Rep. Bilirakis has backed legislation that creates a 10-Year Pediatric Research Initiative Fund to support the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and renews important breast and cervical detection programs. A strong advocate for federal research funding, he also encouraged his colleagues on the House Appropriations Committee to increase funding for the NIH by $2.5 billion this year to ensure continued progress against cancer. He is also an original co-sponsor of the Cancer Drug Parity Act (H.R. 1730), which would require private health insurance plans offering intravenous (IV) chemotherapy benefits to provide parity in patient cost sharing for oral anticancer drugs and traditional IV or injectable medications.

"I appreciate ASCO's recognition of my work, but it's really all about the patients," said Rep. Bilirakis. "I believe that we in Congress must do all that we can to ensure that patients with cancer have access to the cures and treatments that give them the best chance to fully recover. I am committed to investing in research to support the discovery, development, and delivery of new treatments and cures."

Dr. Howard Burris presented the award to Representatives Luján and Bilirakis during ASCO's Advocacy Summit, where ASCO volunteers from across the United States came to Capitol Hill to educate lawmakers about critical issues affecting patients with cancer and their cancer care team.

Learn more about ASCO's Advocacy Summit.

About ASCO:

Founded in 1964, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, Inc. (ASCO®) is committed to making a world of difference in cancer care. As the world's leading organization of its kind, ASCO represents nearly 45,000 oncology professionals who care for people living with cancer. Through research, education, and promotion of the highest-quality patient care, ASCO works to conquer cancer and create a world where cancer is prevented or cured, and every survivor is healthy. ASCO is supported by its affiliate organization, the Conquer Cancer Foundation. Learn more at www.ASCO.org, explore patient education resources at www.Cancer.Net, and follow us on Facebook.
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