**Congress approves NNA language directing HHS advertising to community media**

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**PENSACOLA, Florida** — Three years of planning and effort by the National Newspaper Association and its partners resulted this weekend in an emphatic recognition by Congress of the vital role community newspapers play in sharing health information to small and rural markets.

As part of the final batch of appropriations bills approved by the Senate in the early hours of Saturday morning, funding to the Department of Health and Human Services included report language directing the Secretary of HHS to use part of its public health paid advertising budget to reach small or rural markets through local media outlets, including small daily and weekly newspapers. President Joe Biden signed the bill.

“This effort gained traction during the COVID pandemic,” said John Galer, NNA’s Chair and publisher of The Journal-News in Hillsboro, IL. “While we watched the U.S. government spend tens of millions of dollars in health outreach, almost nothing was spent in reaching many of our small and rural populations through their most-trusted source, the local newspaper.

“We quickly realized that we needed an all-out effort to educate federal officials on the vital role we play in our communities and that we needed to elicit the help of Congress to do so,” Galer said. “This was a very tall hill to climb, and we’re very excited to be able to announce this achievement for our members and our industry.”

Claudia James, Managing Director of Cogent Strategies, a public affairs firm which teamed with NNA on this project, will work to ensure that HHS fulfills its responsibilities under this bill, according to Lynne Lance, Executive Director of NNA.

“Our work with Cogent has been so in-sync with our association that we know now is a great time to celebrate the victory, but to not rest on our laurels,” Lance said. “We still have a lot of work to do to make sure the bill is fully implemented at the agency level.”

NNA Chair Galer thanked Martha Diaz-Aszkenazy of the San Fernando Valley Sun, CA; Brett Wesner of Wesner Publications, Cordell, OK; Jeremy Gulban of CherryRoad Media, Parsippany, NJ; Horace Moore, The Northwest Alabamian, Fayette, AL; and Tonda Rush, NNA’s General Counsel for their specific outreach to members of the House Appropriations Committee and advice on legislative language. NNA would also like to thank Jeb Bladine, publisher of the News-Register, McMinnville, OR; Laurie Hieb, executive director, Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association; Layne Bruce, executive director, Mississippi Press Association; and Felicia Mason, executive director of the Alabama Press Association and Alabama publishers.

Wesner thanked the Appropriations Committees in both houses of Congress, with special recognition for Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK), Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-AL) and Rep. Stephanie Bice (R-OK).

James included members of Cogent’s team in recognition of their efforts, including Shellie Purvis and Randall Gerard.

The report language sent to the President reads as follows:

The Committee recognizes the critical role local media plays in delivering public health messages to small or rural communities. Therefore, the Committee directs the Secretary to ensure that local media in small or rural markets are part of the Federal public health advertising campaigns. To further this goal, the Committee directs the Secretary, in coordination with the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs and their media buyer contractors, to prioritize local news media in rural areas for HHS Federal advertising campaigns to reach citizens in these communities with key health messages. Local media should include newspapers, including non-daily newspapers, television, and radio. The Committee directs the Office of the Secretary to provide to the Committee within 90 days of enactment an update on the efforts of the Department to ensure that local media in rural areas are part of the Department’s public health advertising campaigns, including a breakdown of money allocated to local media in rural areas for each of the health focused public affairs campaigns for fiscal year 2023.

The NNA Public Policy team will be working with the Cogent team to make sure HHS is following these guidelines. As always with government agencies, it will take some time to get things moving. We will keep members informed as the plan moves forward.