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June 7, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

I am encouraged by your continued commitment to ensuring 70% of eligible Americans are either fully or partially vaccinated by the July 4, 2021. I write to urge you to utilize community newspapers and other local media in rural areas across the nation, and in South Texas, to promote safe practices related to COVID-19 and ensure trusted voices are providing reliable vaccine information in every community.

Local newspapers and community media can help us reach this goal and combat misinformation in South Texas and across the country.

The United States must continue its national campaign to vaccinate all eligible individuals to ensure our population reaches herd immunity. During the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau maximized its outreach to minority ethnic groups and non-English speakers by utilizing local and non-traditional media in multiple languages. The Department of Health and Human Services should adopt a similar approach.

I am proud that the Rio Grande Valley, located at the Southernmost part of the 15th Congressional District of Texas, has achieved a vaccination rate of approximately 43%, which is higher than the statewide vaccination rate of 35%. However, we must continue building vaccine confidence and work to reach those who have not yet received the vaccine, whether due to skepticism or lack of information. Local newspapers, radio and television stations are equipped to communicate this important information to those concerned or facing barriers to accessing a vaccine.

I look forward to learning more on how your Department intends to include local media outlets in marketing to ensure rural communities are provided with the resources and information they need to get vaccinated.

Sincerely,



Vicente Gonzalez  
Member of Congress