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Comenzando Bien (A New Beginning) Focuses On
Pre-Natal Care, Early Motherhood and Childhood

Hackensack, NJ - Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9), whose congressional district is nearly 20 percent Hispanic-American, today helped kick off a March of Dimes and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation initiative, Comenzando Bien (A New Beginning), designed to improve the health of Hispanic-American mothers and babies - a population at risk for premature births, birth defects, and lack of insurance.

"The Comenzando Bien (A New Beginning) program will bring important pre-natal education and support to Hispanic-American women - helping ensure healthier pregnancies and, of course, healthier babies and mothers," Rothman said. "I will continue to fight and do everything I can to make sure that Hispanic-American families have access to the best possible quality health care and health education."

Statistics illustrate a health crisis among Hispanic-American women and their babies:

- Nearly 24 percent of Hispanic-American women receive inadequate prenatal care;
- Hispanic-American babies are more likely to be born prematurely or at a low birth weight;
- Hispanic-American babies are significantly more likely to be born with a neural tube defect (a defect of the brain and spine) than non-Hispanic-American babies; and
- Thirty-eight percent of Hispanic-American women in their childbearing years in the U.S. do not have health insurance and 25 percent of Hispanic-American children also are uninsured.

Comenzando Bien is designed to increase awareness of the importance of preconception and prenatal health in the prevention of birth defects and infant mortality, and increase access to prenatal health care services. As part of the program, Hispanic/Latino-American women are provided access to education in areas including 1) the importance of a healthy diet rich in folic acid, 2) the effects of alcohol and drug use on a pregnancy and 3) the importance of stress management and utilizing existing family/community support in order to have a healthy pregnancy.

"There is so much more that must be done to help all our children have a better chance at being healthy," Rothman said. "A partnership among the agencies here -- faith-based community agencies and churches, the March of Dimes, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and all levels of government -- will be what makes the difference not only for Hispanic-American babies and families, but for all New Jersey families."

The Comenzando Bien Prenatal Education Program is a free statewide, Spanish-language program run by the March of Dimes and funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, New Jersey Health Initiatives Program. The train-the-trainer style program prepares facilitators in health care, community-based and faith-based organizations to present a support group-based educational offering to Hispanic /Latino-American women of childbearing age.

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