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Congressman Pete Gallego accepts the Distinguished Community Health Defender Award, which is given by the National Association of Community Health Centers, from Rachel Gonzales-Hanson.

Health center association honors Gallego

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He doesn't have a cape, but that doesn't make Congressman Pete Gallego any less of a hero to the National Association of Community Health Centers.

Rachel Gonzales-Hanson, chief executive officer of Community Health Development Inc., presented Gallego with the Distinguished Community Health Defender Award on Monday during a lun-

cheon held in the congressman's honor.

According to the national association, the award is given annually to members of Congress who have displayed outstanding leadership in expanding health care access to millions of uninsured and medically underserved Americans.

"He gets the access-to-health-care issue as well as the economic impact issue," Gonzales-Hanson said on Tuesday, the day after the award presenta-

tion. She went on to talk about Gallego's dedication to ensuring that veterans, especially, have easier access to health care.

Accepting the award on Monday, Gallego spoke about how having a child changed his life, opening his eyes to the importance of accessibility to health care.

"Some of you have probably heard me say this, but your life changes so radically and so dramatically - at least it did for me - when I held this incredible

little 7-pound, 7-ounce kid in my arms. Some of you have met him," Gallego said. "Now I understand more that saying about how if you don't have your health, you don't have anything. And it's so hard for parents to look at their kids, and know that there's something wrong with their kids, and yet not be able to do anything about it. That feeling... has got to be one of the worst feelings for a parent. And

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DEFENDER: Gallego likens health care to an investment

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to have a place where you can take your son or your daughter, where they can help make things better, is incredibly, incredibly important."

The congressman went on to liken health care to an investment.

"We need to make sure that in rural areas in particular... we need to remind everybody else that we deserve every bit as much of a rate of return on our tax dollar as somebody that lives in any other part of the country.

Gallego, who represents the 23rd Congressional district in Texas, is no stranger to CHDI. In mid-August 2013, he was there for a town hall meeting where topics ranged from the Affordable Healthcare Act, competition between political parties, voter turnout, student loans, public school funding and oil field traffic.

He also toured the facilities and happened upon a class at the health center's teaching kitchen, sampling the healthy offerings

taught to students. Also last August, Gallego and his staff were in Uvalde to present a \$147,649 check (a grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration) to CHDI.

A portion of the money was used to add two new employees to educate the public on health care exchanges, as a part of the Affordable Care Act.

The congressman was also a panelist in a live-stream discussion aired last December at Our Health/Centro De Salud. The discussion was aimed at possible solutions for the future of Medicare and Social Security.

"When you have a congressman who truly gets how his constituency will be impacted... that's something that speaks to that individual," Gonzales-Hanson said Tuesday.

"This [health care] is a big deal for me. So wherever I can help... you can call on my office anytime, for anything," Gallego said.

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