

12/06/2006 Moran Praises House Passage of Legislation to Bring Physicians to Underserved Communities

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Legislation Reauthorizes Physician Recruitment Program

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jerry Moran today announced House passage of legislation he introduced to reauthorize a program to recruit physicians to practice in underserved areas. The J-1 visa waiver program, which expired on June 1, 2006, allows foreign-born, U.S.-educated physicians to serve in areas that have a shortage of physicians.

"The physician shortage in America is real," Moran said. "Both rural areas and inner city neighborhoods continually face challenges in recruiting doctors and specialists. The reauthorization of this program is about good health and saving lives. This allows us to continue improving access to health care for many Kansans and many Americans."

The J-1 visa waiver program allows international medical graduates to stay in the U.S. in exchange for three years of practicing in areas experiencing a shortage of doctors. Since 1994, 115 foreign doctors have served in Kansas communities through this program and more than half have stayed and practiced following the completion of their three-year service obligation.

"We are relieved there is continued congressional support for this important program," said Barbara Gibson, Director of State Primary Care office. "The impact it has on our rural Kansas areas is particularly powerful."

Under the program, a state is allowed to sponsor up to 30 doctors per year. Kansas allows visa waivers for 15 primary care physicians and 15 specialists. Primary care physicians include general medicine, internal medicine, family practice, general pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology, emergency medicine and psychiatry.

Senators Sam Brownback (R-KS) and Kent Conrad (D-ND) introduced the companion legislation in the Senate, where it now awaits approval.

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