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The National Rural Health Association Applauds House Representatives' Pomeroy and Walden — Health Care Access and Rural Equity Act of 2007 Unveiled

Alexandria, VA . . . Today, the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) applauds the Honorable Earl Pomeroy (D-ND) and the Honorable Greg Walden (R-OR), and many of their colleagues from the House Rural Health Coalition, to unveil a new rural health care bill designed to increase equity and improve access to high quality care in rural America.

HR 2860 or the Health Care Access and Rural Equity Act of 2007 (H-CARE) will:

- Authorize health information technology grants for rural practitioners.
- Require prompt payment to rural pharmacies by Medicare prescription drug plans.
- Ensure adequate rural representation on the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission.
- Establish a Rural Health Quality Advisory Commission.
- Allow flexibility in the number of beds Critical Access Hospitals (CAH) may provide.
- Raise Rural Health Clinic reimbursements to more appropriately cover costs.
- Extend several expiring Medicare adjustment payments for rural practitioners including physicians practicing in physician-scarce areas, rural ambulance providers, rural home health agencies, and specific classes of rural hospitals.
- Create the Rural Community Hospital (RCH) program, providing the option of Medicare cost-based reimbursement for inpatient and outpatient services for hospitals with 50 or fewer beds.
- Require Medicare Advantage plans pay Critical Access Hospitals at least as much as they would receive under the traditional Medicare program.
- Re-authorize Rural Outreach and Network grants. These important programs provide capital investments so that rural communities can plan and launch innovative projects that build networks across providers, increase access to care, and are specifically designed to become self-sufficient.
- Expand the 340B program discount drug program to cover rural entities.

The bill also furthers the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) recommendation to

implement demonstration projects in rural communities that test innovative ways to improve health care quality.

"On behalf of millions of rural Americans, I thank Representatives Pomeroy and Walden for their support of rural health," said George Miller, president, NRHA. "The membership of the NRHA is thrilled with the introduction of the H-CARE Act of 2007 that helps the entire landscape of the rural health system strengthen the quality of its care. We will work to make sure this vital message of access to quality care for all Americans is heard in the halls of Congress."

"This bill is about ensuring that not only can hospitals in rural areas keep their doors open, but that people living in rural America have the same access to medical services that those living in urban areas enjoy. Whether you live in Miami, Florida or Jamestown, North Dakota, everyone deserves to have the same access to quality health care services," added Congressman Pomeroy.

"Rural caregivers and rural patients deserve a better partner in the federal government when it comes to the health of rural America," Congressman Walden said. "It is high time that rural America stops being treated like a second-class constituency when it comes to issues like Medicare reimbursement. The H-CARE Act delivers commonsense solutions to obstacles that can inhibit the delivery of quality health care to millions of Americans."

The NRHA is a national nonprofit organization, with more than 15,000 members that provides leadership on rural health issues. The Association's mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of rural Americans and to provide leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education and research. The NRHA membership is made up of a diverse collection of individuals and organizations, all of whom share the common bond of an interest in rural health.

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