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DURBIN'S *TROOPS TO NURSE TEACHERS* PROGRAM WINS SENATE APPROVAL

[WASHINGTON, D.C.] – With thousands of qualified students denied admission into America's nursing colleges because of a shortage of nursing faculty, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) led a bi-partisan effort to adopt a pilot program aimed at encouraging nurses retiring from the military to become nurse educators. The *Troops to Nurse Teachers* program was included in the Senate 2008 Department of Defense Authorization bill late last night.

“Even as America is experiencing an acute shortage of nurses, qualified students who wish to dedicate their future to nursing are being denied that opportunity,” Durbin said. “Nursing schools last year turned away 40,000 qualified applicants, including 2,000 in Illinois, because they don't have enough teachers on staff. Unless we address this lack of faculty, the shortage of nurses will only worsen.”

Durbin's *Troops to Nurse Teachers* proposal seeks to increase the number of nurse faculty members so nursing schools can expand enrollment and alleviate the ongoing shortage, both in the civilian and military sectors. Additionally, it is meant to help military personnel make successful transitions to second careers in teaching. Nurse Corps leaders in the Army, Navy and Air Force have pointed to a serious shortage of military nurses – at least a 10 percent shortage across the board and nearly 40 percent in some critical specialties. Civilian hospitals face similar challenges – 72 percent of hospitals experienced a shortage in 2004.

“Nurses who have spent time in the military can help fill a critical gap that hurts both military and civilian health care facilities. Their service to our country will go beyond their work in military hospitals and include our classrooms and lecture halls,” Durbin said.

The *Troops to Nurse Teachers* program will provide transitional assistance for service members who have served at least 20 years and are already qualified to teach. Eligible service members will receive career placement assistance, transitional stipends, and educational training from accredited schools of nursing to expedite their transition.

The *Troops to Nurse Teachers* proposal will also establish a scholarship program that will provide financial assistance for attendance at an accredited school of nursing to

members of the Armed Forces, who have served at least 20 years on active duty, are eligible for retirement and intend on becoming nurse faculty. Tuition, stipends, and financing for other educational expenses will also be provided. Recipients must also undertake activities deemed appropriate by the Secretary of Defense to encourage current and prospective nurses to pursue a career in the Nurse Corps.

With a projected shortfall of one million nurses by 2020, Durbin said a program like the *Troops to Nurse Teachers* offers an innovative solution that will help place more qualified nurses in faculty positions, which will in turn, increase the pool of trained nurses sought by civilian and military facilities. “The military faces the same difficulty in recruitment and retention of nurses as civilian medical facilities. If we are going to address the nursing shortage over the long term, and ensure that Americans have the quality nursing care they deserve, we must increase the number nursing faculty members,” he added.

Finally, the *Troops to Nurse Teachers* program will provide nurse officers in the Armed Forces with a graduate degree in nursing an opportunity to serve a two-year tour of duty as faculty member at a school of nursing. In exchange, the school agrees to provide scholarships for nursing students who agree to serve as a nurse officer in the military after graduation.

Last year, Durbin introduced an amendment to the Defense Authorization modeled after Troops to Teachers that addressed the nursing shortage which passed by voice vote on June 15, 2006. The Troops to Teachers program, created in 1994, operates in 30 states and has supplied more than 8,000 new educators since the programs inception. The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense provided \$500,000 for the program on August 3, 2006. Unfortunately, the program was dropped from the final conference agreement.

Durbin’s proposal is endorsed by the American Nurses Association; American Association of Colleges of Nursing; American Organization of Nurse Executives; American Health Care Association; and the National League of Nursing. It is also supported by the Nurse Corps at the Air Force, Army and Navy and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

The legislation is cosponsored by Senators Joe Biden (D-DE), Susan Collins (R-ME), Elizabeth Dole (R-NC), James Inhofe (R-OK), Daniel Inouye (D-HI), Joe Lieberman (I-CT), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Barack Obama (D-IL) and Jack Reed (D-RI).