

McDermott Introduces Bill to Address Nation's Shortage of Primary Care Doctors

For Immediate Release: September 13, 2012

Washington, DC – Today, Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA) introduced “The RDOCS Act of 2012,” which proposes a ROTC-like model of offering full scholarships to medical school students in exchange for 5 years of service after residency training and specialization in primary care.

“Of all of the challenges facing our nation’s health-care system, perhaps the most neglected is the gaping hole in our workforce of primary-care physicians. One estimate projects a shortage of 45,000 primary-care doctors by 2020. This bill will go a long way towards addressing that shortage, improving health outcomes, and reducing the nation’s health care costs,” said Congressman McDermott, who is a senior member of the House Ways and Means Committee – the U.S. House’s tax-writing committee. **“With the retirement of a generation of physicians, the aging of our population, and the coming entry into the system of some 30 million newly insured thanks to the Affordable Care Act, we do not have enough primary-care doctors to meet the demand, and the problem will continue to worsen without a major initiative to produce new doctors.”**

Primary-care doctors are the front lines of our physician workforce. Under the right conditions, they oversee and coordinate health care for their patients. They educate patients on how to prevent illness and manage chronic conditions. They are the medical generalists who establish long-lasting bonds with patients. Proper primary care is also one of the keys to containing health-care costs. On the other hand, inadequate primary care leads to neglected and mismanaged conditions, which causes costly emergencies and illnesses downstream.

Modeled after the successful ROTC program, RDOCS offers full scholarships to medical students in exchange for a 5-year service commitment in a medically underserved area. RDOCS will be administered by the states, which will send RDOCS scholars to their state-operated medical schools. RDOCS officers (as they are known after graduation) will then become licensed and serve as primary-care doctors in their state of residence. The program is authorized to start immediately and begin graduating its first additional 4,000 new primary-care doctors in 2020, and 20,000 new doctors by 2024.

McDermott added, **“Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, we are going to get close to universal health coverage in the United States. But universal coverage will not be meaningful if we don’t have enough doctors to serve our population. I am optimistic that Congress can demonstrate leadership in restoring our doctor workforce for the next generation.”**