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Klobuchar, Collins, Heitkamp Introduce Bipartisan Legislation to Increase Number of Doctors in Rural and Other Medically Underserved Areas (<https://www.heitkamp.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=42F31A17-3FDE-457B-9541-70B955546492>)

The legislation, which has been endorsed by major health organizations, would allow international doctors trained in the United States to remain in the country if they practice in underserved areas

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Susan Collins (R-ME), and Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) have introduced bipartisan legislation to boost the number of doctors able to work in rural America. The *Conrad State 30 & Physician Access Act* would allow international doctors to remain in the U.S. upon completing their residency under the condition that they practice in underserved areas, such as rural communities.

“Rural communities in Minnesota and across the country are short on doctors, and they rely on the Conrad 30 program to fill the gaps. Over the last 15 years, the Conrad 30 program has brought more than 15,000 physicians to underserved areas,” said Senator Klobuchar. “It doesn’t make sense to force doctors that we educate and train right here in the U.S. to leave our country once their residency is over. Our bipartisan legislation would make this critical program permanent, allow doctors to remain in the communities they serve, and improve healthcare for families across the nation.”

“We must provide opportunities for American-trained and educated physicians to remain in the country and practice where there is an identified need for quality care,” said Senator Collins. “This legislation would allow for expanded access to health care in our rural or underserved communities, and in turn, would promote healthier lives.”

“Families in rural America deserve access to the best doctors in the world,” said Senator Heitkamp. “That’s the entire purpose of the Conrad 30 program, which has helped doctors from other countries who have been trained at our top notch universities and medical schools to stay here and serve those in rural areas and in other communities across North Dakota and the country that struggle to recruit and retain an adequate physician workforce. Making this critical program permanent would enable more doctors to use it to practice and support quality care in rural areas – that’s something everyone should want to accomplish.”

Currently doctors from other countries working in America on J-1 visas are required to return to their home country after their residency has ended for two years before they can apply for another visa or green card. The Conrad 30 program allows doctors to stay in the U.S without having to return home if they agree to practice in an underserved area for three years. The “30” refers to the number of doctors per state that can participate in the program.

The senators’ legislation extends the Conrad 30 program until 2021, improves the process for obtaining a visa, and allows for the program to be expanded beyond 30 slots if certain thresholds are met, while still protecting small states. The bill also allows the spouses of doctors to work and provides worker protections to prevent the doctors from being mistreated. A version of the bill was included as an amendment in the comprehensive immigration bill that passed the Senate in 2013.

The legislation has received the endorsement of the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association, and the Association of American Medical Colleges.

“The American Medical Association (AMA) strongly supports the “Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Act,” a bill that would reauthorize the law for three years and make improvements to the J-1 visa waiver program,” said the American Medical Association. “J-1 visa waivers play a significant role in placing physicians in communities that face healthcare access challenges. Many communities, including rural and low-income urban areas, struggle to attract physicians to meet their patient needs. This legislation will help ensure continued access to care in medically underserved communities across the U.S. We appreciate the leadership of Senators Klobuchar, Collins, and Heitkamp on this important issue and look forward to working to advance this legislation.”

“The latest extension of the Conrad State 30 Program will expire on April 28. We urge swift action to extend this vital program. Without timely reauthorization, many communities that have benefited from these physicians may find themselves without access to such services,” said the American Hospital Association. “We support the enactment of the program improvements contained in the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Act as part of this extension and stand ready to work with you and your colleagues to accomplish this goal.”

Permalink: <https://www.heitkamp.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/4/klobuchar-collins-heitkamp-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-to-increase-number-of-doctors-in-rural-and-other-medically-underserved-areas> (<https://www.heitkamp.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/4/klobuchar-collins-heitkamp-introduce-bipartisan-legislation-to-increase-number-of-doctors-in-rural-and-other-medically-underserved-areas>)

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