



House Committee Chair Puts Hold on TNT Bill

In a move that many "Hill" watchers find astounding, House Armed Services Committee chairman Ike Skelton (D-M) is blocking a bipartisan Senate measure aimed at helping to alleviate the country's civilian nursing shortage. The Senate bill - S. 2705, Troops to Nurse Teachers Act (TNT) - introduced by Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and endorsed by the NLN, would allow certain active-duty nurses to teach at an accredited nursing school without leaving the military.

After two years of teaching, the nurses could be required to return to the military for at least four more years. In some cases, the schools that would benefit from having military instructors in their ranks would be required to provide scholarships to students. Those students, in turn, would be required to make a commitment to the military upon graduation. Representatives Lois Capps (D-CA) and Steven LaTourette (R-OH), who lead the Congressional Nursing Caucus, are backing the bipartisan House version of Durbin's bill.

"Mr. Skelton is concerned that some of the proposals would take midcareer-level nurses out of the Army, where there's also a shortage," said House Armed Services Committee spokeswoman Lara Battles. "What we're hoping for is for the secretary [of defense] to study

the issue and develop a plan." Battles noted that the military itself has a nursing shortage.

Skelton is worried that military nurses might be enticed into a university career. He has proposed a solution that specifically addresses the military shortage rather than the civilian shortage. He hopes to create a Department of Defense School of Nursing within the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS).

A compromise reached last year yielded neither a school nor a TNT program but, rather, a request that the Pentagon study the feasibility of the proposed nursing school. The study is expected sometime in May. Skelton probably will not lift his opposition to the TNT bill until the report is released. However, that could take longer than either side expects.

Carol Scheman, vice president of external affairs for the USUHS, which was tasked with preparing the report, has indicated that although the report will be completed in May, it still will have to go through many layers of vetting. Senate backers of the Durbin plan said that Skelton's proposed school and a simultaneous TNT program could complement one another. Given the faculty shortage, they also wonder where the Pentagon would find the teachers needed for the new school.

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Kansas Initiative “Overwhelming Success”

The original goal of the Kansas Board of Regents’ 10-year, \$30 million initiative was to increase by 25 percent the capacity of programs to educate RNs. According to the recently released *Nursing Initiative Annual Report* detailing the program’s first year, the nursing enrollment goal was exceeded by 103 percent. That accomplishment prompted Regents president Reginald Robinson to call the program an “overwhelming success.” In his statement issued with the report, Robinson said, “With the results already achieved, the state’s 22 public nursing programs have taken a major step forward in addressing one of Kansas’ most pressing work force development issues.”

Last year, with money approved by the state legislature in 2006, Kansas distributed more than \$3.4 million in grants among 22 nursing programs. The grant money, much of which must be matched by the school, has enabled programs to increase their faculty, enroll additional students, and acquire more equipment.

Wichita State University (WSU) received the third-largest award in the state – \$349,797 – and divided it three ways: \$176,443 for three additional full-time and six part-time nursing faculty members; \$96,673 for remodeling a

nursing lab; and \$76,681 for 14 nurse educator scholarships. This year, WSU will receive \$248,387 for faculty and supplies and another \$57,512 in scholarships. Juanita Tate, associate dean of WSU’s College of Health Professions, said that the nursing program increased enrollment from 80 to 120 last year because of such financial commitments. She added, “We were turning away all these students, and we had been doing this for years. Finally enough people started listening and saying we’ve got to do something.”

Another school benefitting from the initiative is Butler Community College. With its grant money of \$76,473 received last year, Butler added two part-time nursing faculty members, more classroom supplies, and additional nursing lab equipment.

A Kansas Department of Labor study estimated the state will need 11,350 new RNs by 2010 to keep up with work force demand plus open positions from retirements. Now, however, because of the state’s nursing initiative, significant steps to meet this need are being taken. Overall, the schools reported: 507 additional nursing students were admitted in 2007; 28 full-time and 23 part-time nursing faculty were hired; 53 nursing scholarships were awarded; and 27 human patient simulators were placed in classrooms.

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