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NRHA to honor Congressional Rural Health Champions

The National Rural Health Association (NRHA) is pleased to announce the winners of its 2018 Rural Health Champion Awards, which recognize outstanding leadership in rural health issues by both members of Congress and congressional staff.

The awards are presented during NRHA's 28th annual Rural Health Policy Institute, which brings more than 450 rural health professionals and advocates to Washington, D.C., Feb. 6-8.

This year's member recipients are Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV), Senator John McCain (R-AZ), Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), Representative Lynn Jenkins (R-KS-2), Representative Cheri Bustos (D-IL-17), and Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL-7).

Staff awards will be presented to Steffanie Bezruki, office of Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-IL); Beth Wikler, office of Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN); and Taylor Hittle, office of Rep. Markwayne Mullin (R-OK).

Sen. Joe Manchin is true advocate for rural health care. He brings a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing rural America to the Senate, especially those in his home state of West Virginia. Senator Manchin's thorough understanding of the connection between health care and the rural economy has spurred his tireless advocacy for access to health care in rural America.

Sen. John McCain is a friend of rural Americans and a champion for rural veterans. He has long fought for access to quality and affordable health care and health insurance in rural areas. Sen. McCain has worked to stabilize health insurance markets to ensure marketplaces continue to offer options to all Americans. His bold stand in support of a robust process of reforming health care, especially at the Department of Veterans Affairs, is a testament to his dedication to thorough and thoughtful reforms that do not leave rural Americans behind.

Sen. Susan Collins is a true leader in ensuring bipartisan and thoughtful solutions for health care in rural America. As a native of northern Maine, Senator Collins truly understands the challenges of rural health care. She has fought hard to expand and improve access to healthcare for rural Americans. As the chair of the Committee on Aging, she regularly works across the aisle to develop innovation solutions in drug treatment, behavioral and mental health, and supports for aging Americans.

Representative Lynn Jenkins is a strong advocate for rural Americans. Rep. Jenkins genuinely understands the struggle to develop and maintain robust health care in rural America, an understanding obtained while growing up on a dairy farm in Kansas. She is a tireless advocate that

has consistently championed legislation to ensure continued access to quality health care in rural America. Her knowledge and passion for rural Americans make her a true leader, and we will miss her voice in the House greatly when she retires at the end of 2018.

Representative Cheri Bustos (D-IL-17) truly understands the needs of rural providers in Illinois and throughout the nation. In her role on the House Agriculture Committee she has championed health care as a necessary component of a thriving rural economy. Rep. Bustos has developed and championed innovative solutions to health care in rural America including legislation to address the opioid crisis. She is a strong advocate for rural Illinois and all rural Americans.

Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL-7) works consistently to address the needs of rural Americans, especially underserved and minority populations in rural areas. Her impressive depth of understanding of the issues facing her rural constituents ensures that the issues of underserved Americans are well represented. Rep. Sewell has raised awareness of the issue of devastating loss of access to maternity care in rural America, especially for minority populations in rural Alabama. She has protected and preserved the rural health care safety net while serving on the Ways and Means Committee.

Steffanie Bezruki is a consistent advocate for rural America. As a key staff member for Rep. Bustos, Steffanie is constantly working to protect and expand access to care in rural America. Her creative and critical thinking has allowed her to develop and advance bipartisan solutions to rural health care and the opioid crisis. She understands the importance of health care in rural communities and explains the necessity of considering rural health care to the broader community and those focused on healthcare in general.

Beth Wikler is a champion for rural America. Her constant and unfailing dedication to the health of rural Americans in Minnesota and throughout the country is an example to staff in both chambers.

Taylor Hittle is a consistent and strong advocate for rural health on Capitol Hill. Her knowledge of the importance of rural health is impressive, surpassed only by her passion to ensure access to care for those living in rural America. She is a vital staff member for Rep. Mullins, taking on a growing role in his legislative priorities. She constantly considers the impacts of health policies on rural Oklahoma and throughout rural America.

NRHA greatly appreciates the hard work and dedication displayed by this year's legislative award winners.

NRHA is a nonprofit organization working to improve the health and wellbeing of rural Americans and providing leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education and research. NRHA membership is made up of more than 21,000 diverse individuals and organizations, all of whom share the common bond of an interest in rural health.