

University's expansion to help address Vermont's future nursing needs

Northfield, VT - Joining the next generation of Vermont's nurses at Norwich University, Rep. Peter Welch facilitated a discussion with students and administrators on the nursing shortage in Vermont and announced federal funding for an expansion to the school's nationally-recognized nursing program.

Welch announced he secured \$341,000 in federal funding for improvements and expansion to the University's nursing program. Norwich has pledged to match the funding.

"If we don't begin planning now, Vermont will face a critical shortage of nurses in the near future. Norwich University is doing exceptional work in training Vermont's future nurses. This expansion will help alleviate the shortage we face on the horizon and have a positive impact throughout our community long into the future," said Welch. "Particularly in a rural state, Vermonters rely on receiving quality care through well-trained nurses."

"Norwich is investing significant resources to prepare today's nursing students for continued success in the future, but we could not do this alone," said Norwich University President Richard Schneider. "We appreciate Congressman Welch's support in helping us raise the quality of our program and increase the quantity of students to fill the need for skilled nurses here in Vermont and across the region."

A recent report found that the average age of Vermont's nurses is 48, and 79 percent of all working nurses in the state are older than 40. The Vermont Department of Labor projects 272 openings a year through 2014 for registered nurses - 155 from growth in demand, and another 117 to replace those leaving the workforce (*Times Argus*, 5.14.07).

With the help of Senators Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders, the funding was secured in the Omnibus appropriations bill at the end of last year. Welch originally requested the funding in the House-passed 2008 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill.

The funding will be used to help build new nursing station labs that will provide a variety of scenarios to meet the many challenges that nurses will face after graduation. The project equips new classrooms and clinical areas, adds human training simulators, and an advanced classroom.

With many graduates remaining in Vermont, the program's expansion will help lessen the projected shortfall in Vermont's trained nurses.

The Norwich students will continue to do their clinical training at the Central Vermont Medical Center, Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, Fletcher Allen Health Care, Woodridge Nursing Home, Central Vermont Home Health and Hospice, and several other nearby health care facilities.

The goal is to have the construction work completed by fall 2008.

The Army has certified Norwich University as a Partnership in Nursing Excellence School, just one of 17 such programs in the nation.

Last month, Welch successfully amended the Higher Education Act to require the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to study the barriers that exist in training more registered nurses and develop recommendations to remove these barriers. Welch has also called for \$200 million for Nursing Workforce Development funding in next year's budget. The president proposed eliminating this important program.