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Media Contact

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Legislation Introduced to Bolster U.S. Critical Care System

*-- Ensures Most Pressing Medical Needs
in Nation's Critical Care System Are Met --*

WASHINGTON, D.C., (September 30) – Late yesterday, House Energy and Commerce Committee Member Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) introduced legislation to assess and strengthen the delivery and coordination of critical care health services in the United States. The Critical Care Assessment and Improvement Act of 2010 (H.R. 6306) calls for a much-needed evaluation of the current state of the U.S. critical care medical delivery system and the implementation of policies to improve the quality and effectiveness of care delivered to the critically ill and injured.

“With the aging of the baby boomer generation and in the wake of recent health threats such as the H1N1 virus, it’s essential that we take inventory of our critical care infrastructure and address any gaps that may hinder our current and future ability to care for the critically ill or injured,” said Congresswoman Baldwin. “America needs a robust critical care infrastructure and now is the time to ensure that we have one,” Baldwin said.

Critical care medicine is the care for patients whose illnesses or injuries present a significant danger to life, limb, or organ function and which require comprehensive care and constant monitoring, usually in intensive care units (ICUs). Each year, five million Americans are admitted into traditional, surgical, pediatric or neonatal ICUs, and nearly 80 percent of all Americans will experience a critical care injury or illness as a patient, family member or friend of a patient. Critical care medicine consumes a significant proportion of our health care expenditures, accounting for more than 13 percent of all hospital costs.

Despite the significant role critical care medicine plays in providing high-quality health care and its impact on health care costs, critical care is often not understood as unique and distinct within the continuum of health care delivery. Recent health care initiatives have not focused on the critical care delivery system as a priority, in spite of the nation’s increasing challenges to effectively and efficiently

care for the growing elderly population – a major consumer of critical care services – and those injured or ill as a result of a natural disaster or pandemic.

“The introduction of this bill represents a major step in recognizing the importance of quality critical care medicine, and is a significant development for patients, families and health care professionals,” said critical care pulmonologist Dr. Jeffrey Grossman, President and Chief Executive Officer of the University of Wisconsin Medical Foundation, Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Affairs, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. Grossman, who currently serves as Chairman of the Board of the Roundtable on Critical Care Policy, added: “The Critical Care Assessment and Improvement Act will advance a much-needed, comprehensive federal critical care agenda in Congress.”

The bill is designed to identify gaps in the current critical care delivery model and bolster capabilities to meet future demands, including improving federal disaster preparedness efforts to care for the critically ill or injured. Specifically, the bill will:

- Establish a Critical Care Coordinating Council within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to coordinate the collection and analysis of information on current critical care research, identify gaps in such research, and strengthen partnerships;
- Authorize the development of best practices for ICU evacuations during national emergencies or disasters;
- Establish a panel on emergency preparedness databases to assess existing networks and recommend ways to improve resource awareness;
- Report on the availability of critical care practitioners within the federal government’s medical response teams and develop methods to address any shortages; and
- Authorize studies to assess the current state of the critical care delivery system, including its current capacity, capabilities and economic impact on the U.S. health care system.

The Roundtable on Critical Care Policy – whose 2009 and 2010 National Summits on Critical Care Policy delegates defined many of the challenges facing the critical care community now addressed in this bill – applauds Congresswoman Baldwin’s commitment to strengthening the nation’s critical care infrastructure.

About the Roundtable on Critical Care Policy The Roundtable on Critical Care Policy provides a collaborative framework and forum for leaders in critical care and public health to forge and advance a common federal policy agenda to improve the quality, delivery and efficiency of critical care in the United States. For more information, visit www.criticalcareroundtable.org.

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