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McMorris Rodgers, Hastings Author Bill to Improve Rural Air Ambulance Service

(Washington, D.C.) Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers and Congressman Doc Hastings today introduced a bill that would help improve air ambulance service – a key part of emergency health care in rural communities.

“Northwest MedStar and other air ambulance services are a vital component of providing emergency health care access to rural communities across the Northwest,” McMorris Rodgers said. “This legislation makes it easier for air ambulance companies to buy the new aircraft that will ensure rural patients can have the lifesaving care they need.”

“Our common sense bill recognizes the unique challenge of providing health care in rural communities,” said Hastings. “This is about making sure patients get the life-saving care they need as quickly as possible, and enhancing air ambulance service is a way to do just that.

The legislation amends the tax code to allow tax-exempt bond financing for airplanes that exclusively provide emergency medical services. The current prohibition on using tax-exempt bonds to purchase airplanes was put in place to prevent the use of these bonds for frivolous purposes, such as corporate jets. Using tax-exempt bonds to purchase a corporate jet or an airplane for any purpose other than providing emergency health care would still be prohibited under the new bill.

The proposal would make it more affordable for entities like Inland Northwest Health Services (INHS), a non-profit organization based out of Spokane, to purchase planes for emergency health care. INHS serves patients in Washington, Idaho, Oregon and Montana, and provided 2891 emergency medical flights in the Northwest last year. INHS currently has aircraft based in Richland, Spokane and Odessa – but there is a need to update the fleet by replacing aging planes.

“We applaud Congressman Doc Hastings and Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers for sponsoring this legislation, which should greatly assist financing needed upgrades to

our fleet of airplanes so that Northwest MedStar can provide more timely and safe air ambulance services throughout the rural areas of Eastern Washington, Eastern Oregon, Idaho, and Western Montana,” said Nancy Vorhees, Chief Operating Officer of Inland Northwest Health Services.

Some of the hospitals routinely served by INHS in the 5th District include: Walla Walla’s St. Mary Medical Center, Walla Walla General Hospital, Pullman Regional Hospital, Whitman Hospital and Medical Center in Colfax, Deer Park Hospital, Colville’s Mount Carmel Hospital, Ferry County Memorial Hospital, and hospitals in Spokane.

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