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NEWS RELEASE



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ANA RESPONDS TO STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

SILVER SPRING, MD – In response to the president’s State of the Union address last night, President Rebecca M. Patton, MSN, RN, CNOR, on behalf of the American Nurses Association (ANA), criticized Mr. Bush for giving so little focus on health care, a vital issue that affects every single American.

“Last night, Mr. Bush said the government has an obligation to care for the elderly, the disabled and poor children,” explained President Patton, “But his actions belie his words. ANA believes that access to high quality health care is a basic human right, and remains committed to working with Congress to implement health system reforms that ensure guaranteed access to high quality, affordable health care for all.”

President Bush’s plan to extend Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) is an inadequate response to this country’s escalating health care crisis. “While they may serve to reduce employer costs, they shift more responsibility for health care spending onto the individual,” Patton remarked, “These plans also carry the unacceptable risk of discouraging consumers from seeking primary and preventive care.”

“Nurses are the nation’s largest group of health care providers,” Patton continued. “It is impossible to begin the discussion on how to improve health care quality and accessibility without mentioning the vital role nurses play in the delivery of that care.”

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At a time when this country is facing a critical nursing shortage, one that threatens to impact the quality of health care, it is imperative that lawmakers address the need to improve working conditions for nurses. Congress must resolve to pass legislation that will support the education, recruitment and retention of more registered nurses to serve America and its expanding health needs.

The ANA supports The Registered Nurse Safe Staffing Act (HR 4138/S. 73), which would hold hospitals accountable for the development of valid, reliable unit by unit nurse staffing plans to assure patient safety. A coordinated plan, requiring input from direct patient care registered nurses (RNs) would be based on each hospital unit's unique characteristics and patient needs. The bill also would make nurse staffing information available to the public, and includes whistleblower protections for RNs and others who want to file a complaint regarding potential harm to patients as a result of inadequate staffing.

Research demonstrates that appropriate registered nurse staffing – requiring both the number and skill level of nurses to provide safe care -- improves patient outcomes. More RN hours per patient day are associated with decreased length of patient stay. Cost savings resulting from decreased length of stay would largely benefit the payer.

ANA also supports the Medicaid Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) and Physician Assistant (PA) Access Act (H.R. 2066/S. 59) which removes legal barriers that prevent Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) from fully participating in the Medicaid program. ANA believes this legislation is vital to increasing access to care for low-income Americans. APRNs provide cost-effective, high quality care, and are often willing to provide services in rural and inner city areas where access to physicians is limited. ANA affirms that passing this legislation would go a long way toward providing the affordable and available health care the President himself insists is 'required' for a future of hope and opportunity.

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The ANA is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 2.9 million registered nurses through its 54 constituent member nurses associations. The ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public.