

February 29, 2016

Oregonians for Rural Health
522 SE Washington Avenue, Suite 107
Roseburg, OR 97470

We are pleased to join the coalition of healthcare providers and others in support of the construction of a regional medical college in Roseburg, Oregon.

Southern Oregon faces growing healthcare provider shortages that limit access to critical care. And, the demand for both physical and mental healthcare is expected to rise. Healthcare delivery has steadily increased in recent years as national reforms have connected more individuals with physical and mental services. The number of uninsured Oregonians has dramatically dropped, especially in Southern Oregon. Plus, a “silver tsunami” of soon-to-retire baby boomers with increasing healthcare needs will put an even greater strain on our system. And, notably, Southern Oregon already has a larger percentage of older adult residents than other areas of the state.

Oregon’s healthcare industry consistently tops the list of total job vacancies, as well as difficult-to-fill jobs, among private industries in the state. Despite the recession, the industry has posted consistent job growth since the 1990s. Yet, job vacancies for nursing assistants, registered nurses and other healthcare positions are becoming increasingly difficult to fill. The reason is largely due to the lack of applicants and qualified candidates. Rates of difficult-to-fill healthcare jobs are especially high in many areas across Southern Oregon and are expected to worsen as more workers soon retire from the labor force.

Building a skilled healthcare workforce will work to reverse growing access issues. Those who train in rural areas are more likely to stay and work in rural areas than those trained in urban areas. A new stream of graduates would fill growing job vacancies within Southern Oregon and rural communities throughout the state. The net result will be increased access to physical and mental healthcare services both locally and in other rural areas struggling to provide services.

Healthcare is vital to our communities and the region as a whole. Our regional economy has struggled for decades now, despite post-recession gains being made in other areas of the state. We need to ensure a strong healthcare system as a cornerstone of our region’s economic infrastructure. The proposed medical college will have a net positive impact on retaining and attracting businesses to our regional by providing well-trained professionals to deliver essential healthcare services.

We look forward to the opportunity to collaborate with the regional medical college in establishing a pipeline of trained healthcare professionals for the region and other rural areas. Building a regional medical college will ensure access to essential healthcare, while serving as a much-needed economic engine for our region.

Sincerely,



Paul Janke
President/CEO