

MINUTES
SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

- DATE:** Thursday, January 26, 2023
- TIME:** 3:00 P.M.
- PLACE:** Room WW55
- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Lent, Vice Chairman Toews, Senators Den Hartog, Nichols, Carlson, Herndon, Lenney, Ward-Engelking, and Semmelroth
- ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** None
- NOTE:** The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the Committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.
- CONVENED:** **Chairman Lent** called the meeting of the Senate Education Committee (Committee) to order at 3:00 p.m.
- PRESENTATION:** **Idaho's First Medical School Update. Dr. Tracy J. Farnsworth**, President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine (ICOM), provided the Committee with an update on the status of the ICOM. **Dr. Farnsworth** said the ICOM was announced in 2016 by former Governor Butch Otter as a public/private partnership with Idaho State University (ISU) to help address Idaho's physician shortage and connect rural Idaho with more primary care physicians. He noted the inspiration for ICOM was to address the ranking Idaho was given as last in the nation for number of active physicians per capita, 47th for resident physicians per capita, and 45th for primary care physicians. He said the need to address these shortages was urgent because the process of undergraduate education through residency was a commitment of at least 10 years, and it could take time to see returns. ICOM and its partners created the Mountain States Institute for Graduate Medical Education and Research, a 501(c)(3) tasked with the execution of a 10-year plan that would increase the presence of graduate medical personnel in Idaho to practice in the State. The biggest barrier that was identified was a lack of available residency slots available to graduates, which led to significant talent flight, where graduates left for other states to ply their trade in high-quality programs Idaho did not have yet.
- ICOM created partnerships to offer joint Master of Science in Health Informatics (MHSI), Master of Public Health (MPH), and Master of Healthcare Administration (MHA) programs. ICOM had been in high-demand, as the school received over 3,000 applications each year with only 162 slots available per class. In its six-year history, ICOM graduates performed better than the national average in pass rate for their first national board exams. It costs roughly \$150,000 per student per year to train. Because of those costs, ICOM was appreciative for all the financial support the State offered, covering between \$40,000 and \$60,000 of those costs. ICOM partnered with Blue Cross of Idaho to start the Primary Care Initiative, which focused efforts on raising funds for medical student scholarships and tuition loan repayment for physicians that chose to practice in Idaho after graduation. Most of those students finished their education having accrued between \$200,000 and \$300,000 in tuition debt (Attachment 1).

DISCUSSION: **Senator Ward-Engelking** asked Dr. Farnsworth what duration of rural practice was required to earn tuition repayment. **Dr. Farnsworth** clarified for the Senator that the program she was referring to was the Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, Idaho (WWAMI) administered by the University of Washington, where students could get tuition repayment if they chose to work in Idaho after graduation. He said the ICOM welcomed supplemental financial support from the State to implement a program like that for the practice of osteopathic medicine. **Senator Ward-Engelking** asked which problem: residency slots, hospital capacity, or fundraising was the greatest concern. **Dr. Farnsworth** replied, "all of the above," because the programs were very costly to administer and many hospitals had struggled.

Senator Herndon asked if the annual cost to train a physician was less in Idaho compared to the rest of the country. **Dr. Farnsworth** was uncertain how Idaho compared to other states, but he could confirm in Idaho, and nationally, the cost was between \$150,000 and \$160,000 per resident per year to train. He continued to say that, through Medicare and Medicaid, some of that cost was covered, in addition to State and private dollars. **Senator Herndon** asked what the average, expected salary was for recent graduates during their first five years of practice. **Dr. Farnsworth** speculated the average salary was between \$175,000 and \$185,000, but continued to say those who completed surgical or specialized programs could see salaries two to three times greater, which created a shortfall in the number of primary care physicians, the ones that had been best-equipped to handle at least 80 percent of health needs for Idahoans.

Senator Nichols asked about the ICOM's recruiting practices and what their application process looked like. **Dr. Farnsworth** said ICOM would get around 2,500 applications per class, with 800 to 900 of those selected for interviews before a decision was made on who would fill the 162 available slots.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Lent** adjourned the meeting at 3:28 p.m.

Senator Lent
Chair

Linette Grantham
Secretary

Kieran Sprague
Assistant Secretary