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For Immediate Release

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Washington D.C. - Congressman John Murtha's campaign to reverse the diabetes epidemic in Western Pennsylvania is gathering steam with the expansion of a rural outreach and education program that he initiated in the 12th Congressional District and funded through the Department of Agriculture.

The program was developed by the nationally renowned Joslin Diabetes Center, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School. Included in the project are a grassroots, community-based diabetes outreach program called "On the Road," which is being offered by Penn State Cooperative Extension, and the use of a retinal imaging system called the Joslin Vision Network (JVN).

Using funding Murtha obtained in fiscal year 2006, the Extension Service will purchase a traveling van equipped with program and funding signage, a JVN camera and workstation to test patients for diabetes-related eye diseases, and diabetes testing and educational materials. Tentative plans are to deploy the van to at least six different locations in the upcoming year, with Carrolltown, Cambria County, and Tarentum, Allegheny County, already designated as possible sites.

Murtha also included program funding for fiscal year 2007 in a Department of Agriculture spending bill that was passed late yesterday by the House Appropriations Committee. The bill now moves to the full House for consideration.

"We face special challenges in rural areas where the incidence of diabetes is particularly alarming," Murtha said. "These programs can help us make inroads by reaching out to people who may not be aware that in many cases, diabetes can be prevented or delayed through proper diet and exercise. Those already diagnosed will receive the accurate information they need to make lifestyle changes that can help control their disease."

"In addition, this van will reduce the need for patients to travel long distances to get the regular checkups they need to catch diabetes-related eye diseases early, before they cause one of the disease's most devastating side effects, blindness.

"I'm delighted that we're able to take this care directly to people where they live. Each person we reach contributes to our goal of preventing or delaying the onset of diabetes and improving the quality of life for those already diagnosed."

The Extension Service is conducting an "On the Road" starter program consisting of four one-hour group sessions focusing on tests that determine future complication risks. Patients learn how to understand the results, which are provided immediately, and how to better manage their diabetes.

The Joslin team also is developing a new nutrition program based on established "On the Road" principles that will be combined with Joslin's new exercise program. The two programs, combined with the JVN screening, will be integrated as a series.

The Department of Agriculture, through its educational arm, the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES), has the mission and long history of improving the nutrition and health of rural populations.