



Office of Representative Heath Shuler

Representing North Carolina's Eleventh Congressional District

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Rep. Shuler, FCC to Announce \$3.59 Million Health Care Technology Grant *WCU, Eastern Band to Create Broadband Network to Improve Community Care*

Washington, D.C. – Representative Heath Shuler today announced that that Western Carolina University will join with the Eastern Band of Cherokees and the Jackson County Board of Health, in the FCC's Rural Health Care Pilot Program. He was joined at the announcement with Derek Poarch, the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau chief, and Larry Blythe, Vice Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee. Western Carolina University will be the official recipient of the grant for \$3,590,000 through the pilot program to develop the system.

Through the program WCU will connect the university's health care facilities to the Cherokee's community health care facilities via Balsam West FiberNet's broadband network. These clinics, many of which are outlying facilities, serve a significant portion of the Cherokee's population.

“By improving our technological infrastructure we will improve the quality of health care health care patients are receiving. I am committed to expanding broadband access across Western North Carolina access and making sure that our rural communities are receiving the highest level care possible,” said Rep. Shuler.

By increasing the telehealth capabilities on the Cherokee Reservation and throughout the western counties of North Carolina, patients in these rural areas will have better access to critically needed medical practices, such as cardiology, pediatrics, and radiology, without leaving their communities. Additionally, intensive care doctors and nurses can monitor critically-ill patients constantly.

“This broadband, telehealth network will reduce costs, save travel time, increase information sharing, and make health care more efficient,” Rep. Shuler concluded.

The WCU-EBCI grant is part of the FCC's nationwide \$417 million investment in 42 states.

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