

****Fact sheet and bill summary included**
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**KENNEDY OFFERS BIPARTISAN KATRINA PLAN TO PROVIDE HEALTH CARE
AND SAFETY PROTECTIONS AS THE REBUILDING BEGINS**

INTRODUCES HEALTH AND WORK RELIEF PACKAGE

Washington, DC: Today Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Senator Mike Enzi introduced major portions of their Katrina Relief package, covering health and work protections for the people impacted by the disaster. Their plan will help ensure that victims get and can pay for the health care they need, that the men and women who work to rebuild the region are safe and healthy, that vulnerable populations such as the disabled and elderly are given services, and that impacted businesses are given temporary relief from their financial obligations.

“This disaster reminds us that we are all part of the American family - and we have a responsibility to help members of that family when they are in need,” Senator Kennedy said. “Our government must respond in ways that are as good and compassionate as the American people. This bipartisan bill will deliver the help that the people of the Gulf Coast deserve.”

In the past few weeks Senator Kennedy has visited New Orleans, spent time with evacuees at Camp Edwards in Massachusetts and met with recovery experts and officials from the area to determine the best course of action. Kennedy and Enzi introduced the education portion of their plan on September 15 to accommodate misplaced students and reopen schools, and will offer further education provisions in the near future.

The provisions related to healthcare, entitled the “Public Health and Health Insurance Emergency Response Act” focus on two goals: 1) helping survivors pay for and keep their healthcare and 2) removing administrative barriers and strengthening the ability of health professionals to treat victims and prepare for future disaster. For example, the bipartisan bill would provide individuals with a three month waiver from health insurance premiums for the health care they receive.

After meeting with evacuees in Massachusetts, Kennedy became especially determined to ensure that all of those who were impacted by the hurricane get the mental health services that they may need. His bill ensures that appropriate support services including equipment, supplies, medications, and other types of assistance are available to vulnerable populations including the elderly and those with disabilities.

The provisions related to labor take into account the dangerous work that the men and women in the Gulf Coast are doing and provides health and safety protections for them. Thousands of men and women have been working around the clock to find and rescue families, to provide them with food and shelter, and to evacuate them from the area. In the coming days thousands more

will be on the ground reestablishing communications, cleaning up debris, restoring services, and rebuilding infrastructure. Kennedy's bill urges OSHA and other health and safety agencies to follow the Worker Health and Safety Annex protections of our National Response Plan. And it authorizes funds to be spent for additional personnel, enforcement of health and safety standards, critical safety information for workers and employers, and safety and health training.

Below are summaries of the health and labor provisions of the Kennedy-Enzi package:

Public Health and Health Insurance Emergency Response Act

Background:

Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding devastated the landscape of the Gulf Coast and lives of those in its path – leaving the country in a state of crisis. In response, thousands of workers and volunteers rushed to assist in the rescue, recovery, and reconstruction effort. Many of those in the affected areas were, and still are, exposed to hazards, potentially compromising their health and well-being.

Federal agencies have confirmed various bacterial and infectious diseases and other ailments among the affected population, and continue to identify hazards threatening those in the disaster area. HHS is assisting those in need; however, face many administrative barriers in their efforts to providing immediate assistance. The Public Health and Health Insurance Emergency Response Act will provide HHS with limited expansions of executive authority to strengthen the agencies response effort, and increase victims' access to health care and social services.

Strengthening the health response to Katrina and future disasters:

□□□□□□ Provides the Secretary of Health and Human Services with waiver authority in respect to reporting and select FDA requirements.

□□□□□□ Grants the Secretary authority of waive the matching requirement for entities in affected areas, to enable continuation of funding and receipt of newly appropriated funds.

□□□□□□ Extends the availability of unobligated funds, for a particular fiscal year, by 180 days.

□□□□□□ Allows the Secretary to waive eligibility requirements for the Vaccines for Children and Section 317 programs. This will increase access to recommended vaccines via existing vaccine stockpiles.

□□□□□□ Enables the Secretary to designate health profession shortage areas, to attract health

professionals to the region and increase access to health services among underserved populations.

□□□□□□□ Waives licensing requirements for health care professionals in good standing, who are volunteering as part of a coordinated emergency response. Information about licensure waivers and related liability protections should be disseminated via Internet and other resources, to properly inform eligible professionals.

□□□□□□□ Requires the Inspector General of HHS to conduct audits and investigations of HHS response and recovery activities and provide the Committee with regular reports.

□□□□□□□ Requires the Secretary to provide the Committee with an independent review of the lessons learned from health-related planning, preparedness and response efforts.

Strengthening access to mental health services and assistance for those with disabilities:

□□□□□□□ Requires the Secretary to give affected States and localities priority funding for Emergency Mental Health Centers.

□□□□□□□ Allows entities receiving Title I disability funding to locate and respond to the needs of individuals with disabilities affected by Hurricane Katrina.

□□□□□□□ Authorizes States, in coordination with DHS, to establish a registry and track the transfer of individuals with disabilities who are placed in an emergency shelter due to a public health disaster. As soon as practicable, the Commissioner the Administration on Developmental Disabilities should have authority to enter the shelter(s) and provided necessary services.

Helping survivors to maintain health care coverage:

□□□□□□□ Provides temporary premium assistance for individuals and small businesses to maintain their existing health insurance coverage.

□□□□□□□ Gives Secretary of Health and Human Services the authority to extend certain HIPAA and COBRA provisions in the case of a presidentially declared disaster or terroristic or military action.

The Katrina Worker Safety and Filing Flexibility Act
Bill to Provide For Health and Safety Protections, Filing Extension Deadlines, and Department of Labor Program Oversight after Hurricane Katrina

Safety and Health:

- Sense of the Senate that OSHA should implement the parts of the Worker Safety and Health Annex of the National Response Plan, which includes: communicating with and providing resources to employers and recovery and reconstruction workers on workplace safety and health; working with other federal agencies to develop a roster of affected workers; identifying the need for personal protective equipment; and providing monitoring and surveillance of risks to workers.
- Requires OSHA and other involved agencies to brief Congress within 60 days and submit a written report within nine months on its progress in meeting these worker health and safety goals.
- Authorizes funds for needed OSHA personnel and safety and health training for first responders and recovery and reconstruction workers.

Labor-Management Financial Reporting:

- Authorizes the Secretary of Labor to extend the time period for unions and employers in the disaster area to file labor-management financial reporting forms.

Auditing of Department of Labor Programs:

- Department of Labor Inspector General will audit and investigate programs carried out by the Department of Labor involving Hurricane Katrina response and recovery efforts.
- Inspector General will provide a list of ongoing audits and investigations to the HELP Committee and Education and Workforce Committee each week and a formal report to Congressional Committees every six months until their investigations activities are concluded.

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