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HELP COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN ENZI, RANKING MEMBER KENNEDY, URGE
PRESIDENT TO NOMINATE FDA COMMISSIONER

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, and Senator Ted Kennedy, D-MA, the Committee's Ranking Member, today urged the President to nominate a permanent Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and pledged to move "expeditiously" to hold confirmation hearings on a qualified nominee.

"The nomination and confirmation of a Commissioner of Food and Drugs is necessary to bring to bear the expertise, resources and authority of that agency in the most effective manner possible," Enzi and Kennedy wrote in a letter released today. "An Acting Commissioner, regardless of his or her qualifications and accomplishments, simply lacks the mandate for action that comes only through the Constitutional process that includes the Commissioner's nomination by the President and subsequent confirmation by the Senate."

The Senators described the FDA as "at a crucial juncture in its history," and emphasized that "Congress and the public are intensely scrutinizing the agency's processes for reviewing drug applications and for ensuring drug safety." At the same time, advances in genetics, pharmacology, and related fields soon will challenge conventional regulatory approaches, Enzi and Kennedy wrote.

"The FDA needs a leader with the vision to guide the agency through this critical period and maintain the public's confidence in its work," the Senators said. The letter also was signed by 15 other Senators, all who serve on the HELP Committee.

The Senators urged the President to identify and nominate a candidate for FDA Commissioner who has demonstrated leadership capabilities, a strong knowledge of science, and an unwavering commitment to promoting and protecting the public health as soon as possible, and promised to hold confirmation hearings quickly. Placing a strong and effective Commissioner at the helm of the FDA will be essential to support the work of the President's newly-installed head of the Department of Health and Human Services, Secretary Mike Leavitt, Enzi and Kennedy said.