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HELP COMMITTEE APPROVES S.306, GENETIC NON-DISCRIMINATION BILL, EXTENDS GRANT PROGRAM SUPPORTING STATE HIGH-RISK INSURANCE POOLS

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), today announced the passage of five bills, including the "Genetic Nondiscrimination Act of 2005," which he called "the first civil rights act of the 21st Century," the "State High Risk Pool Funding Extension Act" and three additional bills.

Enzi said the bills will encourage progress on two important fronts in health care policy: security of personal genetic information and access to health insurance for individuals with preexisting health conditions.

"The genetic nondiscrimination legislation approved by the HELP Committee today will ensure that the promise of genetic information is not hindered by fears about its misuse or unwarranted disclosure," Enzi said. "It also prohibits discrimination on the basis of genetic information when folks apply for health insurance or employment, two big fears many Americans have as a result of the rapid advances we have made in breaking and understanding the genetic code."

Over half of the states currently have laws governing genetic information. However, they differ in terms of how genetic information is handled and used by insurers and employers. Enzi said both employers and insurers will be better served if federal law establishes clear and consistent rules regarding disclosure and use of genetic information, as required under the bill approved today, S.306.

Enzi also praised the Committee's passage of S. 288, the "High Risk Pool Funding Extension Act," which will extend seed money and federal grants that support state based programs to maintain health insurance pools for high-risk individuals who, because of their health problems, cannot find coverage in the private insurance market.

S.288 reauthorizes \$15 million in untapped seed grants for Fiscal Year 2005 and FY 2006 for states establishing new high risk pools. In states with existing high risk pools, it also increases and extends grants to sustain those pools by authorizing \$75 million for FY 2005 through FY 2009.

Other bills approved at today's mark-up, include:

- S. 265 - reauthorization of the Trauma Care Systems Planning and Development Act: a bill to help states develop and implement trauma care systems;
- S.302 - the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health Improvement Act: a bill making technical changes to improve how the Foundation operates;
- S.285 - the Children's Hospitals Education Equity and Research Act: a bill to reauthorize support for the training of the next generation of pediatricians – support that children's hospitals do not receive through Medicare's add-on payments for medical education.

The following nominations also were approved:

Allen Wilson Greene, of Virginia, as member of National Museum and Library Sciences Board;

Katina P. Strauch, of South Carolina, as member of the board of the National and Museum Library Sciences;

Edward L. Flippen, of Virginia, as Inspector General of the Corporation for National and Community Services