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STATEMENT OF SENATOR MIKE ENZI - "HEAD START: ENSURING DOLLARS BENEFIT THE CHILDREN"

"I want to thank Senator Alexander for his leadership on early childhood education policy, and for putting this hearing together. There is no better investment we can make for our future than to support the programs that help our children learn and Head Start is an important part of that effort. I am looking forward to hearing from today's witnesses about the future of the Head Start program, and how we can make sure it is working effectively to help children enter school ready to learn.

The testimony we will receive today will help shape the reauthorization of the Head Start program in a way that will make it stronger, better, and more effective for the children it serves.

That is important because, as the father of three children and one grandson, I understand the importance of early learning. Head Start provides an important service for thousands of children by providing a safe and healthy learning environment. Many of these children do not receive the same support at home as some of their more advantaged peers, and Head Start helps meet many of their needs.

The Head Start program has demonstrated a great deal of success since its creation almost forty years ago. Lately, however, several instances of financial mismanagement and other troubling incidents have been brought to our attention, both through the recent report issued by the Government Accountability Office, and from dozens of news reports from around the country.

We will not be disparaging programs or accusing practitioners at this hearing. Instead, we will look to our witnesses for help in identifying how Congress can ensure that Head Start program dollars are being used for the purpose for which they were intended: helping disadvantaged children succeed.

One of the findings in the recent GAO report is that the monitoring process for the Head Start program could be improved substantially to help ensure the program is more effective. It is my hope that today's witnesses will discuss options for Congress to help strengthen the program's integrity, as well as its impact on student outcomes.

In the past Congress, this committee unanimously supported a Head Start reauthorization bill that would have made many of the improvements suggested by the GAO study. It is my hope that today's witnesses will comment on these efforts and suggest some alternative policy options as well.

In the current economy, continued learning is more important than ever. We need to make sure that federal programs such as Head Start are giving children the best start possible, since today's students are tomorrow's leaders. The Head Start program is an important beginning to a lifetime of education opportunities that will make it possible for today's students to support families in the future. It is essential that all children get a good start, and that the Head Start program provides the type of educational foundation that will support a lifetime of learning and success.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing. I expect it will be very useful as the Committee continues its work on the reauthorization of the Head Start program.”