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NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON CRITICAL HEALTH CARE DECISIONS MUST CONTINUE TO SPARE FAMILIES HARDSHIP, ENZI SAYS

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee) today said the national dialogue that began with Terri Schiavo must continue "so that many more American families will discuss and document their beliefs and desires about what healthcare measures they would want following a catastrophic injury or illness."

"Terri Schiavo very dramatically brought these issues to the attention of the nation, and their importance did not diminish with her loss," Enzi said Wednesday during a hearing to examine issues surrounding health care for non-ambulatory persons. "Because there are so many individuals in similar situations, we need to increase our focus on the challenge of providing appropriate healthcare to the millions of people who require additional health care services, especially those who are so severely injured that they cannot even communicate their wishes to their caregivers."

From advance medical directives, to living wills, to financial planning, Americans need to know how to prepare themselves for the unthinkable, Enzi maintained, adding that it "is appropriate for Congress to explore these issues in settings like today's hearing."

"We as a nation all need to focus on what actions are appropriate under the tragic circumstances in which someone cannot direct his or her own healthcare. And we need to continue to make advances in the diagnosis and treatment of individuals with significant, multiple disabilities so they can benefit from the tens of billions we spend on medical research every year."

According to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, the cost of a nursing home ranges from \$30,000 to \$80,000 per year, and even home and community-based care can cost up to \$50,000 per year, making it imperative that every family discuss the critical financial issues surrounding long-term care.

"Beyond advance directives and living wills, Americans should also consider long-range financial planning to deal with the costs of long-term care," Enzi said.