

Tuesday, April 19, 2005

ENZI HOLDS HEARING TO REVIEW S.334; SAYS SAFETY MUST TAKE LEADING ROLE IN DRUG IMPORTATION DEBATE

Washington, D.C. – Maintaining that public safety must be the primary concern in weighing any drug importation plan, U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), today said he believes it may be possible to safely allow importation of prescription drugs, but called for a thorough review of the risks to public health in opening domestic markets to imports on a massive scale.

Enzi's remarks came during a hearing convened to review S. 334, the "Pharmaceutical Market Access and Drug Safety Act of 2005," the so-called Dorgan-Snowe bill. It was the third HELP Committee hearing Enzi has convened this year to address the issue of drug safety and importation.

"Like many Americans, I am concerned about the high and rising costs of prescription drugs. However, I doubt the importation of drugs from other countries will solve this problem all by itself," Enzi cautioned. "We need to answer many questions before we can open our borders to imported drugs without endangering consumers or jeopardizing research and development of new, lifesaving products."

He called for a thorough review of potential new vulnerabilities to the nation's drug distribution system before legalizing an untested drug importation program on a large scale. The Dorgan-Snowe bill would allow drug importation from more than 20 countries worldwide.

Enzi also emphasized that a drug importation program comparable to the Dorgan-Snowe plan has never been undertaken, making it even more important that Congress move forward cautiously. But he pledged to work with HELP Committee Members, other interested Senators and stakeholders to develop a drug import bill.

As HELP Chairman Enzi said he will ensure that any final bill to be considered by the Committee:

- Does not put artificial trade restraints on American drug manufacturers by dictating with whom they must do business, how much they must sell, and at what price they sell their products. Such mandates will ultimately limit consumer access to new drugs, Enzi maintained;
- Protects patent rights of domestic and international drug manufacturers in order to preserve financial incentives for investment in research and development of new drugs;
- Limits importation only to those drugs that have been approved by the FDA and manufactured in FDA-inspected facilities.

“I’m sure that Senator Dorgan, Senator Snowe, and all of our witnesses agree that a counterfeit or tainted drug is unsafe at any price. As Chairman of the Committee charged with protecting public health, I want to be certain we don’t add to that risk by legalizing large scale importation without proper safeguards and due caution,” Enzi added

“We already have a problem with counterfeit and substandard drugs here in the United States. Americans who buy prescription drugs in Canada and other countries or purchase drugs from Internet pharmacies that operate outside the United States are taking an even greater risk.”