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Friday, May 13, 2005

ENZI INTRODUCES WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT TO MEET WORKFORCE DEMANDS, CLOSE GAP IN SKILLED WORKERS

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee) has introduced the "Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2005," S 1021, a bill that will give states and local areas the flexibility to provide training for jobs in high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand occupations for which qualified workers are in short supply.

"We are facing an economic challenge that threatens our ability as a nation to compete in the global economy," Enzi said Friday. "This bill sends a clear message that we are serious about helping our workers and employers remain competitive and about closing the skills gap that is putting America's long-term competitiveness in jeopardy."

Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Ranking Member of the HELP Committee, co-sponsored the bill, which Enzi said is the product of a bipartisan process that began in the 108th Congress.

Combined with the "Perkins Career and Technical Education Act," which the Senate passed in March, and the "Higher Education Act," which Enzi said the HELP Committee will consider in the next few months, S 1021 will provide important resources that are needed to adequately prepare our workforce with the skills that are necessary for jobs and careers in high wage and high skilled occupations.

"About half of our current workforce does not have a postsecondary education degree or credential, even though our best projections suggest that job growth over the next decade will center on jobs requiring some postsecondary education or training," Enzi said.

"If Congress does not take action to remedy this shortcoming, more and more Americans likely will conclude that they cannot meet the skill demands of today's workplace and choose to drop out of the workforce. Clearly, we cannot let that happen."

The Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2005 includes provisions to:

- Provide workers with the training they need to find new or better jobs;
- Improve existing the One-Stop Career Center delivery system to ensure that it can respond quickly and effectively to the changing needs of employers and workers in the new economy and can address the needs of special populations, including individuals with disabilities;

- Strengthen connections of the job training system with the private sector, with post-secondary education and training, social services, and economic development systems to prepare the 21st century workforce for career opportunities and skills in high growth sectors;
- Remove barriers that have discouraged business involvement in workforce training, while finding new mechanisms to increase and improve business and industry influence in job training decisions in communities;
- Improve access to services in all areas, including rural areas.
- Increase the emphasis on ensuring that individuals with disabilities have physical and programmatic access to workforce activities at one-stop centers and approved training providers;
- Expand services to the business sector to make the system more demand-driven and responsive to employers' needs, including small employers;
- Improve youth job training activities by directing more resources to those out-of-school youth who are most in need of assistance;
- Enhance assistance to youth between from 16 to 21 years of age, which face barriers to employment.