

Thursday, May 19, 2005

HIGHER EDUCATION BILL MUST PROMOTE BUSINESS-EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS TO CLOSE SKILLS GAP, 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 Senate's planned reauthorization of the "Higher Education Act" must help forge new partnerships between business and education in order to close the growing gap between supplies of skilled workers and new jobs.

"Simply put, if we continue on the path we are on, we will not have people with the talent and the skills we will need to fill the jobs that will be created over the next few years," Enzi said Thursday, during a roundtable meeting with educators and corporate leaders. "Within the next five years it is predicted that we will face a workers gap of seven million workers. Two-thirds of this gap will be due to a shortage in skilled workers."

Enzi told participants at the event that America's competitive edge in the global economy is dependent on the supply of "education and training that is flexible and responsive" to rapid changes in the marketplace. The roundtable drew ten leaders from across the country to discuss ways to counter the growing skills gap affecting the nation's workforce.

It is estimated that by 2015, three quarters of all workers will have some postsecondary education or training. However, by 2020, the nation will need 14 million more skilled workers than currently can be provided.

"Institutions of higher education need new ways to work with employers and their employees that will focus training on new students attending college for the first time as well as adult learners who will be returning to college for additional training," Enzi said. "It is clear that the decisions we will make about education and workforce development during the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act will have a dramatic impact on the economy and our society for a long time to come."

Enzi outlined his priorities as Chairman of the HELP Committee to counter the growing skills gap, including:

- supporting rigorous training and education programs that will lead to degrees or industry-recognized credentials and employment;
- providing training and relevant job skills to small business owners or operators to facilitate small business development in high growth industries;
- expanding or creating programs for distance, evening, weekend, modular, or compressed training opportunities that will provide skill training in high growth, high demand industries;

- promoting entrepreneurial skill and micro-enterprise training;
- strengthening connections between employers and postsecondary education and training.