

*News from the*

**U.S. Senate Committee on  
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

**Michael B. Enzi (Wyoming), Chairman**



**For Immediate Release**

**Contact: Craig Orfield 202.224.6770**

**Thursday, February 9, 2006**

**Enzi: American Competitiveness Initiative Must Boost  
Graduation Rates, Promote Lifelong Learning**

**Washington, D.C.** – U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, today said the nation faces dual challenges meeting global competition for high-paying 21<sup>st</sup> Century jobs: boosting graduation rates to prepare students for postsecondary education and the job market; and promoting lifelong learning to keep established workers armed with the skills needed in today’s workforce and in the future.

During a hearing, “The Role of Education in American Competitiveness,” Enzi said: “The need to respond to these challenges becomes more pressing each day. It will require both short term and long term strategies to bring our education system up to world standards. We are facing challenges that we must view as opportunities.”

“We must ensure our children develop the strong foundation they will need in math and science to acquire skills and knowledge needed in today’s job market. It’s equally important that established workers – those already on the career ladder – get the additional training and retraining they will need to advance in the marketplace of tomorrow and throughout their lifetimes.”

While hearing testimony from Department of Education Secretary Margaret Spellings, Enzi praised the American Competitiveness Initiative outlined by President Bush during his State of the Union address delivered January 31, saying, “The President’s outlook served to increase my optimism that we can and will meet these challenges by continuing to improve our schools and the education we provide our children” As part of the Competitiveness Initiative, the President’s budget proposes almost \$400 million to strengthen schools and improve elementary and secondary instruction in math and science.

“National and international test results for American elementary and secondary students heightens the concern we all should have about the preparation our students are receiving,” he said, noting that American students have lagged behind their peers in Asia and Europe in math and science skills.

For example, only 7 percent of America’s 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders reached the advanced level on the 2003 Trends in International Math and Science Study. By contrast, 38 percent of Singapore’s 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 44 percent of their 8<sup>th</sup> graders reached the advanced level. Moreover, American 15 year-olds ranked 24<sup>th</sup> out of the 29 developed nations in mathematics, literacy and problem-solving on the most recent program for the international student assessment test.

Meanwhile, the number of American students who have graduated from college each year with degrees in engineering also has lagged far behind foreign nations. In 2004, China graduated about 500,000 engineers, while India graduated 200,000 and the United States graduated 70,000. In less than five years, China has more than doubled the number of their students who have graduated from college each year with degrees in engineering.

According to Enzi, statistics for minority students and the prospects for their future participation in a global economy add even greater cause for concern. Nationally, about one-third of all high school students do not complete their course of study on time. For minority students this figure hovers around 50 percent.

“At a time when most jobs will require some postsecondary education, we must focus on how to graduate more students on time, with less need for remediation, and give them a greater likelihood of success in college or the workplace,” Enzi said.

He pledged to lead the HELP Committee to continue its work in the coming session of Congress to move forward legislation directed at retaining America’s competitive edge in the global economy by ensuring that higher education prepares today’s students for the demands of tomorrow’s workplace.

Under Enzi’s leadership last year, the HELP Committee laid a foundation to boost competitiveness of American workers with passage of “The Higher Education Amendments Act of 2005” (HEA), the “Workforce Investment Act” (WIA), and “The Deficit Reduction Act,” a bill that includes provisions to give low-income college

students eligibility for billions of dollars in new federal grants if they pursue degrees in math, science or critical foreign languages.

Working in conjunction with HEA and WIA, the “Perkins Act,” which awaits conference committee action, will require state agencies to work together on identifying the needs of the workforce and in designing education and skills training programs to match those needs.

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