

News from the

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

Michael B. Enzi (Wyoming), Chairman



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Statement of Michael B. Enzi, Chairman

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

**Enhancing Public Health and Medical Preparedness:
Reauthorization of Public Health Security and Bioterrorism
Preparedness and Response Act (P.L 107-188)**

Today, we are happy and honored to welcome Secretary Leavitt and a distinguished panel of speakers to testify before us as we formally begin the process of the re-examination of our bioterrorism and essential public health security. We need to get prepared for the bird flu and toughen our defenses against bioterrorism, and we do that by making sure all levels of government are coordinated to face these threats.

When we last examined these critical issues, there was tremendous cooperation between Democrats and Republicans to address the urgent concerns raised by the events of September 11 and the subsequent anthrax attacks. I know that we will work again in a cooperative fashion, recognizing that as members of this committee we are stewards of the public health system.

The importance of working together cannot be overemphasized because the enemy we will face already lies in wait on our horizon. Its presence cannot be ignored or denied. We do not know when the threat will be realized and an attack will begin and we cannot identify or categorize what danger we will face. It could be a natural disease like the bird flu or it could be an orchestrated attack by a terrorist group. We can't know for certain what it will be. But, we do know full well that we must have a public health system prepared for it.

The 9/11 attacks produced a phrase we have all heard and we should keep in mind during our consideration of this legislation. It has been said that part of the problem was a failure of imagination – an inability to predict in detail the kind of threats that we face. Needless to say, we cannot afford to have another failure to prepare for a threat to our national security.

The stewardship of the public health system is not a responsibility the federal government bears alone, but one that is shared with state and local health departments. The federal government cannot provide for all our public health needs. Rather, public health authority begins and ultimately lies with the states. Although we have developed and enhanced key federal resources, the lion's share of public health authorities, even during an emergency, rests at the state level. When we last examined this critical infrastructure, Congress understood the need to invest in modernizing our state public health system and to enable them to respond to newly emerging threats.

As an accountant by training, I am very comfortable with evaluating a program by measuring the outcomes and effectiveness of past investments. Here we need to do similar evaluations. We have to determine if we are getting enough 'bang for our buck'. We have to make sure that states are using the federal funds wisely and if they have the resources to make all Americans safe from bioterrorism or bird flu.

This new reauthorization must provide better coordination, better preparation, bigger and better supply of drugs, vaccines and other medical products and better evaluations of each state's preparedness.

I would like to take a moment to commend the Bioterrorism Subcommittee and its Chairman, Senator Burr and the Majority Leader, Senator Frist, and their staffs for their persistence and leadership on these issues. I also want to commend Senators Gregg, Hatch, and Hagel for their attention to these issues. In addition, I would like to express my deep appreciation to Senator Kennedy and the Democrats on this committee and their staff as well as Senators Lieberman and Obama for their continued hard work and leadership on these issues.

Senator Burr and I look forward to working with the entire HELP Committee in developing the legislation that will lead us to the next level of public health preparedness. Again, thank you for coming here today to engage in this discussion of the threat that lies before us and how we can improve our preparedness. I look forward to working with this Committee and our Subcommittee to do what is needed to ensure a strong national public

health system is in place to protect and safeguard the health and well being of all Americans.

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