



For Immediate Release

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ENZI PRAISES SENATE FOR PASSING BIODEFENSE LEGISLATION TO STRENGTHEN PUBLIC HEALTH, PROTECT AGAINST BIO-HAZARDS

Washington, D.C. – Saying the pharmaceutical industry is commercializing drugs to fight infectious disease at too slow a pace, while the specter of bioterror and a possible bird flu epidemic continues to loom, U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, today praised the Senate for taking action on legislation to address both problems by passing the “Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act,” S. 3678.

“A few years ago, we had hoped that through the creation of the Bioshield Fund the pharmaceutical industry would create the drugs necessary to protect Americans,” Enzi said. “We cannot close our eyes and pretend that effort has been a success – it hasn’t. The pharmaceutical industry is not commercializing enough drugs to fight the spread of infectious disease—whether they are spread naturally, accidentally or through the efforts of man.”

“It is clear, without the passage of this legislation, little will change,” Enzi added. “This bill includes a provision that replicates a strategy and process similar to those that have been proven effective by the Army, through the Department of Defense’s Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). By applying the success of the DARPA programs to bioterrorism, we hope we can spur the pharmaceutical industry to address this urgent need. It is not clear whether this strategy will be enough to protect public health but it is clear, if we do nothing, nothing will change.

“DARPA is the military’s technological engine for transformation. Its revolutionary research comes from an innovative organizational structure that we should implement in the fight against infectious diseases.”

The bill would also reauthorize the “Bioterrorism Act,” passed in 2001 after a string of anthrax attacks in the United States, to help state and local governments prepare for future attacks. However, the threats of an avian flu pandemic and the lessons learned in the area of public health in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina have reignited the need to reauthorize the legislation.

“More needs to be done to ensure that state and local public health agencies know exactly what needs to be done and how they should be prepared,” Enzi said. “This bill strengthens what we have already started to do and gives us the flexibility to prevent future biological events from happening in the future.”

“I want to commend Senator Burr (R-NC) for his valuable leadership on this important issue and for working alongside Senator Kennedy (D-MA), whom I am also grateful for his hard work, to ensure better coordination, better preparation, more accountability and more careful evaluations of each state’s readiness for whatever public health crisis may face us next,” Enzi said. “I also want to thank Senator Frist (R-TN), Senator Gregg (R-NH), Senator Roberts (R-KS), Senator Clinton (D-NY), and Senator Joe Lieberman (D-CT) for their attention to these issues and their contributions to this effort.”

Key provisions of S. 3678 include:

- Promoting public health awareness with a nationwide, near real-time network, built on existing surveillance programs, to detect and contain public health threats;
- Ensuring that emergency medical care can be delivered rapidly and effectively through improved training, stronger logistical support, and a clear organizational framework for health care workers;
- Improving the capability of local hospitals to respond to a surge in patients needing emergency care through the use of mobile medical assets and federal facilities;
- Strengthening the state and local public health workforce through grants for individuals who agree to serve in a state or local public health department in an underserved area;
- Requiring states and hospitals that receive federal resources and cooperative grants to meet minimum standards and conduct regular exercises;
- Directing the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to lead all Federal public health and medical response emergencies; and,
- Transferring the National Disaster Medical System to HHS, to provide an effective, coordinated federal response to public health emergencies.

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