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Contact: Craig Orfield  
(202) 224-6770

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Statement  
Senator Michael B. Enzi

Hearing  
Addressing Healthcare Workforce Issues for the Future  
February 12, 2008

Thank you for holding this hearing and for providing an important forum for the Committee to work from to identify and address the healthcare workforce issues that confront us. Today's hearing will give us all an opportunity to highlight not only those issues that are unique to our states but also those that affect our nation's healthcare system as a whole.

In my home state of Wyoming, one of our biggest challenges is providing timely access to healthcare providers. That kind of access has been hampered because Wyoming is currently facing a shortage of health care professionals – and I am not referring only to specialists. Clearly, that is a problem that needs to be addressed on more than one level.

To begin with, to have access to more health care professionals, we need more than a new, more effective grant program to increase their numbers. We need real reform of our medical system as a whole. I have introduced a Ten Step bill that will, when it is adopted, will greatly reduce the health professional crisis we are already seeing in states like Wyoming, Vermont, Alaska and Massachusetts.

We will be focusing on the training of health professionals, today, but I want to make it clear that work-force issues also include affordable medical insurance for patients, health information technology, better telehealth capabilities, and a liability environment for health care providers. Together, these foundations will help to make people feel more satisfied with their career choice, more fulfilled by the work they do, and ultimately attracted to not only begin, but pursue the call of medicine for many, many years.

That is necessary because Wyoming has a long list of health care needs. We do not have enough primary care physicians, dentists, physician assistants and nurse practitioners.

That is in addition to our shortage of subspecialists.

Title VII of the Public Health Service Act is an important component of training our nation's health care providers. Loan repayment, underrepresented minority programs, faculty training, and various other education programs are important programs that need to be continued. At the same time, we must coordinate the goals of the programs with the outcomes that we measure. We need to improve these programs and our health care delivery system. A few small tweaks are likely not sufficient. That would be like adding a new heel to an old shoe that we would be better off replacing with a new pair.

I appreciate the efforts of Senator Kennedy, Senator Sanders and Senator Murkowski for beginning this conversation. I look forward to examining many aspects of our health work force training including how we plan and pay for our pre and post graduate training. Before that, we need to encourage more individuals to consider a career in health care and serving in areas that are currently underrepresented. It seems to me it is also important that we may need to broaden training sites to include more ambulatory care sites in rural areas.

Recent experience in Wyoming shows that with concentrated effort almost 2/3 of the family practice physicians who train in Wyoming will stay in Wyoming.

I am interested in our witnesses' thoughts on establishing a National Health Work Force Commission so that we can start addressing the shortages identified today in a comprehensive and coordinated way.

Again, I thank each of our witnesses who have taken the time to come here today. I look forward to continuing the dialogue on this important topic and working with my colleagues on solutions that will place good and affordable health care within the reach of all Americans.

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