



For Immediate Release

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***ENZI INTRODUCES BILL TO ENCOURAGE DOCTORS TO
VOLUNTEER MEDICAL SERVICES FOR POOR,
UNINSURED PATIENTS***

Washington D.C. – U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), today introduced the Volunteer Health Care Program Act of 2008, a bill that will remove a legal barrier preventing physicians and health care professionals from volunteering their services to individuals who cannot afford or cannot access basic medical care.

“There is an overwhelming need for volunteer medical care among the poor in the United States, but medical liability concerns discourage doctors from providing voluntary services,” Enzi said. “This bill will protect doctors who want to give back to their communities, and will help provide access for the patients who need their care.”

“Protection from medical liability for charitable services will encourage physicians and other health care professionals to continue using their valuable skills to provide free medical care for patients who would otherwise go without treatment.”

Enzi said that many medical professionals are willing to volunteer at charity clinics and community health centers, but that concerns over medical liability insurance prevent many of them from volunteering. This is especially true for newly retired physicians and those in administrative positions who still have a license to practice medicine, but no longer carry liability insurance.

The Volunteer Health Care Program Act of 2008 would provide grants to states that would accept medical liability for volunteer medical providers. These programs would protect doctors from liability claims, while also assuring that injured patients could recover damages. Under this bill, the volunteer provider becomes an agent of the state and the state assumes the liability risk and covers the cost of defense.

“In this legislation, everyone wins; it protects both doctors and patients. The passage of this bill will take us one step closer to ensuring access to quality health care for all Americans.”

Enzi cited the state of Florida's charitable immunity program as a successful prototype for the Volunteer Health Care Program Act. Florida's program typically costs about \$600,000 to \$900,000 per year. Government grants pay the Department of Health to contract with eligible volunteer health care providers who then work with established charitable clinics to enroll uninsured patients who fall below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line. The Florida Department of Health reports that in the past 16 years, volunteers have provided more than \$1 billion in charity care. In the last year alone, over 20,000 physicians volunteered their services.

"My mother always told me that service to others is the rent we pay for the space we take up," Enzi said. "This bill will help ensure that doctors are not punished for the volunteer services they provide to patients in need."

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