
NEWS RELEASE

U.S. Senators Domenici, Kennedy, Enzi & Dodd

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DOMENICI, KENNEDY, ENZI & DODD
CELEBRATE SENATE PASSAGE OF
MENTAL HEALTH PARITY IN TAX PACKAGE

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) and Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) today celebrated Senate approval of a broad bipartisan mental health parity agreement and expressed their confidence the Congress would enact the legislation before the impending end of the 110th Congress.

The Senate today approved the mental health parity legislation as part of the **Renewable Energy and Job Creation Act of 2008** (HR.6049), the so-called Senate compromise tax extenders legislation.

Domenici, Kennedy, Enzi and Dodd have made it a priority in the 110th Congress to enact new mental health parity legislation. The provisions in HR.6049 represent a much-anticipated update to the landmark 1996 Mental Health Parity Act authored by Domenici and the late Senator Paul Wellstone. The new legislation is expected to improve mental health care coverage for an estimated 113 million Americans.

“We are on the cusp of enacting legislation that is critically important to those with mental illness and their families. We have a finite amount of time to get this through Congress and we are anxious to see get it done. Thousands of hours have been put into coming up with a good bipartisan bill that will at long last place insurance coverage for mental health care on par with medical and surgical coverage,” **Domenici** said.

“It is wrong to rob people of their potential and deny their hopes and dreams because their insurance will not pay for the mental health care they need. Today, after ten years of stalemate, the United States Senate passed our legislation to require insurance companies to cover mental illnesses and physical illnesses equally. This is a civil rights issue. With passage of this bill, fundamental justice arrives for millions of our fellow Americans who deal with mental illness. Today, the United States Senate says to them loud and clear, you will no longer have to suffer in the shadows,” said **Kennedy**. “We have worked for 10 long years to reach this moment. We remember the work of the late Senator Paul Wellstone. This would not be possible without his leadership or that of Senator Pete Domenici, Congressman Jim Ramstad and Congressman Patrick Kennedy, of whom I am enormously proud.”

“Passing this mental health parity legislation offers new hope to millions of Americans with mental illness and their families. **This bill unites the mental health advocacy, health care provider, employer, and insurance communities to bring fairness and relief to individuals and families who need help. The bill is years, if not decades, in the making, and reflects** countless hours of sweat and negotiation. I want to thank Senator Domenici, Senator Kennedy, and Senator Dodd for their invaluable leadership to bring an end to the legislative paralysis on this important issue,” **Enzi** said.

“For more than ten years, Senators Kennedy, Domenici, Enzi and I have been working to make fair treatment for those with mental illness not just a right but a reality. It has been a long and difficult road, but today, I am happy to say that we are taking a giant leap toward the finish line,” said **Dodd**. “Today’s victory for the millions of Americans who live with mental illness is a tribute to the late Senator Paul Wellstone, who fought day and night to achieve parity for mental health and substance abuse. I hope the House of Representatives will act quickly to approve this bill so we can send a strong mental health parity bill to the President’s desk.”

The \$150 billion tax extenders bill, which also includes such provisions as an alternative minimum tax fix and renewable energy tax credits, now requires approval from the House of Representatives before it can be forwarded to the White House. The Bush administration on Tuesday issued a statement in support for HR.6049, including the mental health parity provisions.

Domenici, Kennedy and Enzi authored the Mental Health Parity Act of 2007 (S.558), which was passed in the Senate by unanimous consent in September 2007. That bill had 57 cosponsors, including Dodd who has been instrumental in moving the parity legislation forward. The lawmakers reached a subsequent agreement with parity advocates in the House of Representatives and have since worked to find suitable offsets to pay for the legislation.

The new Mental Health Parity Act would require health insurance plans that offer mental health coverage to provide the same financial and treatment coverage offered for other physical illnesses. The legislation developed in talks with mental health, insurance

and business organizations to craft compromise legislation. It does not mandate that group plans must provide any mental health coverage.

The 1996 parity law, authored by Domenici and Paul Wellstone, only provided parity for annual and lifetime limits between mental health coverage and medical surgical coverage.

The new parity legislation expands parity by including deductibles, co-payments, out-of-pocket expenses, coinsurance, covered hospital days, and covered out-patient visits. The measure also includes a small business exemption for companies with fewer than 50 employees, as well as a cost exemption for all businesses.