



For Immediate Release

Contact: Craig Orfield
(202) 224-6770

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Enzi Finds Plenty of Room for Improvement in Bill that Costs \$1 Trillion, Leaves 36 million Uninsured

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, today said he would use the Committee process to highlight and correct the numerous flaws in the Kennedy health care bill, which preliminary analysis shows will cost more than \$1 trillion, leave about 36-37 million Americans without coverage, and force 10 million more to lose their current health insurance.

“The misguided policies in the bill will cause approximately 10 million Americans who have health insurance from their employer to lose that coverage,” Enzi said. “President Obama promised that under his health reform proposal, every American who had coverage that they liked could keep it. This bill fails to deliver on that promise.

“With a bill that spends one trillion dollars and leaves 36 million Americans uninsured, I assume that we all agree that this bill provides plenty of room for improvement. That is why I intend to use the opportunity presented by this mark up to highlight the many mistakes in this bill and try my best to correct them.”

In its recent preliminary analysis, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) said that the Kennedy Affordable Health Choices Act would spend \$1 trillion dollars to cover only 16 million individuals, leaving 36-37 million Americans uninsured, and force 10 million Americans to lose their current health insurance.

“I agree with President Obama, that expanding coverage should not interfere with the health insurance of Americans who like what they have. I also support the President’s commitment to fully pay for health reform,” said Enzi, the Senate’s only accountant. “Unfortunately this bill fails on both of these counts.”

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PREPARED REMARKS OF SENATOR MIKE ENZI HELP COMMITTEE MARK UP JUNE 17, 2009

I regret that we find ourselves here today, marking up this bill. The Committee’s activities today represent a wasted opportunity to enact real health care reform that would benefit millions of Americans. Rather than considering the partisan bill before us, I wish that we could instead be marking up a bill that could gain real bipartisan support and make a difference for America.

My Republican colleagues and I have stood ready for months, hoping to get a chance to help write a bill that could fundamentally reform the insurance market place, offer new protections to guarantee that consumers could buy affordable, high quality health insurance, provide subsidies for low income workers to help them buy insurance and harness competitive forces to increase quality and drive down health care costs.

These are concepts that enjoy broad bipartisan agreement. They are also policies that would fundamentally transform how we provide health care in this country. These are the kinds of changes that could be the key cornerstones of a bill that could easily gain the support of 75 to 80 Senators, which could then be sent to the President for his signatures before the August recess.

Unfortunately, that is not the bill that we will be marking up today. Instead, we will begin to consider a bill that was drafted by Senator Kennedy's staff with no input from Republicans. It contains policies designed to appease one particular ideology rather than provide common sense bipartisan solutions for average Americans. Perhaps most troubling of all, it will fail to achieve its stated objectives of expanding health insurance coverage to all Americans, while allowing those who like what they have to keep it.

This bill costs too much, covers too few and will cause 10 million Americans to lose the insurance they currently enjoy. These are not my opinions – rather they are the facts supplied by the non partisan Congressional Budget Office (“CBO”). In their recent preliminary analysis, CBO said that the Kennedy Affordable Health Choices Act would spend \$1 trillion dollars to cover only 16 million individuals, leaving 36-37 million Americans uninsured.

In addition, the misguided policies in the bill will cause approximately 10 million Americans who have health insurance from their employer to lose that coverage. Earlier this week, in speaking to the American Medical Association, President Obama promised that under his health reform proposal, every American who had coverage that they liked could keep it. This bill fails to deliver on that promise.

I agree with President Obama, that expanding coverage should not interfere with the health insurance of Americans who like what they have. I also support the President's commitment to fully pay for health reform. Unfortunately this bill fails on both of these counts.

This bill does not include any real pay-fors to account for the trillion dollars in new spending. This is grossly irresponsible and I cannot support a bill that does not pay for the cost of any new coverage expansion. Our nation is drowning in a sea of debt, and unsustainable entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid are going to automatically add trillions of dollars in additional debt. This bill will exacerbate this crisis by piling up huge new unfunded liabilities, which in turn will increase interest rates, harm economic growth and eliminate millions of American jobs.

The bill also fails to address one of the fundamental worries of most Americans – namely ever increasing health care costs. Health insurance premiums have more than doubled over the past seven years, and skyrocketing costs have forced more and more small employers to either cut back or drop the health insurance they currently provide.

Rather than addressing the fundamental problems that contribute to increasing health care costs, the bill would create a vast new government bureaucracy to promote health and wellness. Under

the bill, the government would spend billions of dollars to create new federal programs to build jungle gyms and sidewalks, while mandating that restaurants provide healthier menu choices.

Reducing health care costs has to begin with promoting healthier behaviors. We know that obesity, smoking and lack of exercise lead to billions of dollars in preventable health care costs every year. Rather than creating new government health and wellness bureaucracies, we ought to finding ways to encourage people to lead healthier lives.

Unfortunately, this bill will actually make it more difficult for employers like Safeway CEO Steve Burd to offer incentives to their workers to improve their health. We know that these strategies will lower costs and it is incomprehensible to me why this bill does not promote more of these incentives.

The fundamental flaws in this bill are the direct consequence of how the bill was put together. The bill was drafted exclusively by Democratic staff, who excluded Republicans from the process of preparing the actual legislation. That is not how Senator Kennedy and I worked together in the past, and this is not how we managed to produce an impressive record of bipartisan accomplishments at this committee. The process of putting this bill together was a real departure from this Committee's record of bipartisanship.

In their haste to assemble their partisan bill, the Kennedy staff have made numerous and unnecessary errors. These errors were compounded by an arbitrary timeline that denied the Members of this Committee sufficient time to review the bill and try to participate in meaningful negotiations to develop viable alternatives. We were given less than a week, from the time the bill was filed to the start of today's mark-up, to try to "negotiate" possible solutions. Our constituents sent us here to work in good faith on the tough issues. We each bring valuable and unique experiences and perspective to the legislative process. But all of this is squandered when a bill is drafted hastily and in secret.

This is the most comprehensive legislation that any of us will ever work on. It will fundamentally impact one sixth of our nation's economy. It will literally affect the health care of every single American. While expedience can sometimes be a virtue, it can often lead to serious errors. This bill and the issue of health reform are too important to not take the time to get it right.

I can think of no better way to highlight the flaws in the process at the HELP Committee than by contrasting it to the process that Senators Baucus and Grassley have followed at the Finance Committee. There, both staffs worked together from the beginning to develop a bipartisan list of policy options, starting from a blank piece of paper. The Committee then spent several weeks holding roundtables and closed door walk-throughs, where Senators spent literally dozens of hours discussing these complex issues with a range of policy experts and developing potential policies.

I do not know whether the Finance Committee will ultimately be able to produce a bipartisan bill. There are certainly several provisions they are considering that I may disagree with. In spite of this, their process solicited input from every Member of the Committee and gave them a choice to air their concerns. That is the kind of process that allows Senators to explore different proposals, weigh the pros and cons and ultimately develop a truly bipartisan bill.

To date, we have not had similar opportunities at the HELP Committee. We certainly have no shortage of good bipartisan alternatives to discuss, including proposals developed by Senators Coburn, Burr, Gregg and Wyden. I hope this mark-up will finally provide an opportunity for Senators to discuss these ideas. With a bill that spends one trillion dollars and leaves 36 million Americans uninsured, I assume that we all agree that this bill provides plenty of room for improvement. That is why I intend to use the opportunity presented by this mark up to highlight the many mistakes in this bill and try my best to correct them.

In criticizing the HELP Committee process, I want to clarify that my comments do not reflect on the leadership of Senator Dodd. In recent weeks, he has assumed a greater role in leading this process, and his presence has dramatically improved the Committee process. It was under his leadership that the Committee finally held both a walk-through and roundtable discussion that helped to clarify and hopefully resolve a number of problems with the bill.

I believe that if we had more time, Senator Dodd and I could work together to resolve many of the open issues and possibly negotiate a truly bipartisan compromise. Unfortunately, we probably will not have time to resolve many of the more difficult issues in this mark-up, but if he is willing, I would like to continue to work with him as this bill moves to the Senate floor. I still hope that we can develop bipartisan health reform bill that this entire Committee can be proud of.

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