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ENZI PAYS TRIBUTE TO SEN. GREGG, HAILS PASSAGE OF GENETIC NON-DISCRIMINATION BILL; PROVIDES GUIDANCE ON DISCLOSURE TO HEALTH INSURERS, EMPLOYERS

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee) today hailed passage of the "Genetic Nondiscrimination Act of 2005," a bill to prohibit discrimination in health insurance and employment, and paid tribute to Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), the former HELP Committee Chairman who helped lay a foundation for the bill's passage during the previous Congress.

"I am pleased to see this important bill approved, and congratulate Senator Gregg on his work to begin the process of bringing Senators together and educating our colleagues on this far reaching problem last year," Enzi said. "His work drafting the previous legislative package for this bill helped lead to its speedy passage this year."

Enzi called the bill "an important step in preventative medicine that will save lives and save health care costs down the road." As passed by the Senate, S.306 will establish clear guidance for health insurers, employers and consumers about the use and disclosure of genetic information.

Over half of the states currently have laws governing genetic information. However, they differ in terms of how genetic information is handled and used by insurers and employers. Enzi said both employers and insurers will be better served if federal law establishes clear and consistent rules regarding the disclosure and use of genetic information, as required under S.306.

"Advances in genetic science are transforming our fight against deadly inherited diseases. But fear of discrimination by health insurers and employers on the basis of predictive genetic information can deter individuals from taking advantage of these life-saving genetic tests and therapies," Enzi said.

"Questions about the current scope of genetic information protection invite, not discourage, litigation," Enzi said. "We are far better off setting clear, consistent rules now, rather than allowing courts to set them piecemeal through litigation. The time to save lives is now. The time to save future health care costs is now."

By fully protecting the privacy of genetic information and encouraging individuals to take full advantage of genetic screening, counseling and testing, new therapies will be developed, Enzi predicted.