

News from the

**U.S. Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

Michael B. Enzi (Wyoming), Chairman



**For Immediate Release
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Enzi, Kennedy Offer Health Care Relief Extending Private Health Insurance to Katrina Victims

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee and Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), the Committee's Ranking Member, today introduced a comprehensive health care initiative to aid victims of Hurricane Katrina, which includes an emergency extension of private health insurance for families and small businesses affected by the disaster.

The bill, the "Public Health and Health Insurance Emergency Response Act of 2005," includes components to deal with ongoing public health and mental health, personal health care needs of Hurricane victims while also providing federal assistance to cover health insurance premiums for displaced people and disrupted businesses over a period of three months. Additionally, it contains initiatives to cut red tape that could slow federal agency relief efforts during a public health emergency by giving the federal government the authority it needs to respond to the local and state health needs after a natural disaster.

"One of the most important things Congress can do is to assure mothers and fathers that the health care needs of their families will be met - and that their children will not have to go without or navigate through a complex bureaucracy to get the care they need," Enzi said. "This legislation will provide immediate financial relief and some piece of mind for folks struggling to rebuild their lives

after Katrina.”

Because thousands of businesses literally have been washed or blown away, the Enzi –Kennedy bill authorizes a pool of money through which the Department of Health and Human Services to work with state insurance commissioners provide three months of temporary health insurance premium relief to individuals and businesses of 50 or fewer employees. To decrease financial burden on individuals and businesses affected by Katrina, insurers are prohibited from canceling policies or raising rates during the three-month emergency period.

The bill is cosponsored by Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT), Senator Richard Burr (R-NC), Senator Mike DeWine (R-OH), Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY).

Highlights: “Public Health and Health Insurance Emergency Response Act of 2005”

Helps survivors maintain and afford their health insurance coverage by:

- Providing three months of temporary health insurance premium relief to individuals and small businesses that have suffered as a result of Hurricane Katrina;
- Prohibiting insurers from canceling policies or raising rates during the three-month emergency period;
- Ensuring automatic enrollment into the program, and waiving requirements for victims to file a formal application to receive benefits.

Ensures a comprehensive public health response in the months ahead by:

- Increasing the number of sites at which people displaced by Hurricane Katrina can receive primary and preventive health care;
- Ensuring immediate availability of mental health funding in event of major disasters;
- Directing special emergency mental health funding to areas affected by major disasters;
- Collecting and analyzing data for use in the response to Katrina and future responses to major disasters.

Cuts red tape in a public health emergency by:

- Recognizing that recovery from the public health impact of Katrina will take more than 90 days;
- Strengthening authority to waive laws and regulations that hinder the fullest possible response to a major disaster including: vaccination eligibility laws; matching funds; health professional shortage area designation process.

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