

United States Senate

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Contacts:

(Enzi) Craig Orfield
202-224-6770

(Kennedy) Laura Capps
202-224-2633

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***KENNEDY, ENZI CALL FOR CONGRESS TO ACT ON BILL
TO PREVENT GENETIC INFORMATION DISCRIMINATION;
HELP COMMITTEE VOTE SCHEDULED NEXT WEEK***

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA), Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, and U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Ranking Member of the HELP Committee, today called on Congress to act quickly on the “Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act,” a bill that will prohibit genetic discrimination by health insurers and employers who may attempt to use genetic information against persons with potential health problems.

Chairman Kennedy said: “Our bipartisan legislation is essential to fulfilling the promise of this century of the life sciences. Without strong protections against genetic discrimination, patients will not make full use of the extraordinary advances made possible by the sequencing of the DNA code.”

“This bill prohibits genetic discrimination in health insurance and the workplace by barring health insurers and employers from requesting or using genetic information to take any action that would affect an employee’s health or employment benefits,” Senator Enzi said. “This includes health insurance premiums, contribution amounts, and eligibility, as well as employment decisions like hiring, firing, job assignments, and promotions.”

President Bush and Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt called for passage of a genetic nondiscrimination bill during a visit Wednesday to the National Institutes of Health as Chairman Kennedy scheduled a Committee vote on the bill for Wednesday, Jan. 24.

“I want to thank Chairman Kennedy for scheduling a vote on this important bill next week, and I look forward to sending it to the full Senate for a vote,” Enzi said. “I also want to thank Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME), the bill’s original sponsor, who has served as the Senate’s compass to keep us focused on this far-reaching issue that, if not addressed, will have long-term, possibly life changing consequences for countless families and employers.”

Added Senator Kennedy: “I hope we can all agree that discrimination of the basis of a person’s genetic traits is as unacceptable as discrimination on the basis of race or religion. No American should be denied health insurance or fired from a job because of a genetic test.”

The Senate has approved the “Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act,” by wide margins twice before – by a vote of 98-0 (S.306) in 2005, and by 95-0 in 2003 (S. 1053).

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