



For Immediate Release

Contact: Craig Orfield
(202) 224-6770

Thursday, November 1, 2007

ENZI CALLS ON SENATE TO PASS SCHIP RENEWAL THAT PUTS KIDS FIRST, THEN ENACT BROAD HEALTH CARE REFORM FOR ALL AMERICANS

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, today said Congress is losing sight of the original intent of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) by threatening to turn a sound health care plan for kids into a flawed program covering kids and adults with the so called “new” SCHIP bill, which the Senate approved today and which President Bush has said he will veto.

Enzi spoke on the Senate floor during today’s debate on the House passed SCHIP bill that is essentially the same bill vetoed two weeks ago by President Bush. He urged the Senate to pass an SCHIP bill that focuses on low-income children, and then begin work on broad health care reform legislation for all Americans.

“A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but this so-called ‘new’ SCHIP plan that’s essentially the same as the old one still stinks,” Enzi said. “Passing a bill that is as flawed as the last one is not what a legislative body listening to the people should be doing. Let’s put politics aside, put low-income children first, and get this chamber back on board with the original intention of the SCHIP program - helping children.”

Enzi chided what he called the “rush and whine” model of legislating that has stalled genuine health care reform in which Senators “rush out of meetings to hold a press conference so they can whine about a problem.”

“That approach generates a lot of noise but it doesn’t result in any action,” Enzi said. “We need to work together – majority and minority – to build a legacy our children and grandchildren will benefit from – a fair and effective health care system that will ensure more Americans have access to the care they need to lead full and productive lives.”

Enzi laid out his proposal to reduce health care costs and improve quality, “Ten Steps to Transform Healthcare in America, S. 1783. This bill would allow small businesses to band together to negotiate affordable health care plans, reform a flawed tax

code to help individuals purchase health insurance, advance health information technology, and promote medical justice reform.

“My bill is a 10-step approach that would bring clarity to our health insurance maze and put the focus where it belongs – on patients,” Enzi said. “Then we can create a system of health care – not sick care.”

“Those who were elected and are now in charge have refused to keep this debate focused on a substantive proposal that has a shot at working. There is already talk amongst top Democrats that next year will be ‘health care year.’ Election year politicking should not stand in the way of real reform for health care. We have an opportunity to do something now – to get legislation passed that will mean real solutions for our constituents.”

#####

SENATOR MICHAEL B. ENZI TEN STEPS TO TRANSFORM HEALTH CARE IN AMERICA

Building on Market-based Solutions and Strengthening Current Insurance Programs

1. Eliminates unfair tax treatment of health insurance for all Americans, thereby expanding choices, coverage, and control over your health care
2. Increases affordable options for working families to purchase health insurance through a standard tax deduction
3. Ensures affordable health insurance to low-income individuals through a refundable, advanceable, assignable tax-based subsidy
4. Provides cross-state pooling to reduce health care costs and increase accessibility for small business owners, unions, associations, and their workers, members, and families
5. Blends the individual and group market to extend important HIPAA portability protections to the individual market so that insurance security can better move with you from job to job

6. Emphasizes preventive benefits and helps individuals with chronic diseases so America will finally have health care and not sick care
7. Gives you the choice to convert the value of your Medicaid and SCHIP program benefits into private health insurance, putting you in control of your health care, not the Federal government
8. Saves lives and money by better coordinating health information technology to improve health care delivery
9. Increases access to primary care in rural and frontier areas by helping future providers and nurses pay for their education, and gives seniors more options to receive care in their homes and communities
10. Decreases the sky-rocketing cost of health care by restoring reliability in our medical justice system through State-based solutions

####

**Statement of Michael B. Enzi
Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

Mr. President, yesterday the Senate voted to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to H.R. 3963, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or what folks on Capitol Hill are calling S-CHIP.

I spoke on the floor last night about how this so-called "new" bill isn't new at all. It's just the same old flawed plan, only with new rhetoric. New sound-bites and political posturing aren't going ensure that low-income children have the health care they need.

We owe it to these children to work with the President to reauthorize this critical program in a way that gets every single low-income child who needs insurance insured. This body hasn't been able to do that and we have been working on this bill for many months. Mr. President, I know that if it weren't for politics, this bill would have been done weeks ago. Actually, it would have been done months ago. The longer we work on this issue, the more political it becomes.

I worry that some members in this chamber have lost sight of the goal—making sure all the low-income children in this country have health care. The press has been reporting and some members of this body have claimed that all the concerns were addressed in the

last version of the bill the House voted on last week. Mr. President, that's not correct. The concerns weren't addressed. We have to put low income kids first, and this bill just doesn't do that. I detailed in my speech last night the concerns I have with this bill. I also mentioned that I am a cosponsor of the Kids First Act, S. 2152. The bill would provide federal funding for children in need and require that the money actually be spent on children from families with lower incomes. This bill is a good step in the direction of compromise, and I hope the majority will see that and start working with the minority to pass something the President can sign, rather than continuing to play politics.

Mr. President as important as the SCHIP issue is – and I want to be crystal clear about my position – I support the SCHIP program 1,000 percent! – it is also important that this body think bigger. We need to think bigger about fixing the entire health care system and helping all Americans. Mr. President, I have a bill that does just that. For the next few minutes I would like to explain my plan to this body.

When our constituents look off into the distance they see the dark clouds of an explosion of health care costs that are rapidly drifting across the country. In response, too many of our constituents are going to jobs every day that they don't like because they are afraid that a change in their employment will mean their loved ones will lose their health insurance and they will face the future without the protection a good policy affords.

How do I know these things are happening? I know because I go home and talk to my constituents at Town Meetings. I read their letters. I listen to them when I am back home at all kinds of events. I also know if they are telling me these things, they are surely telling you the same things. Why aren't we listening? Why are we taking so much time to finally do something about it?

When we are home, one thing we all like to do is visit our local video store. They have a lot of different movies to choose from that we can watch in the quiet and comfort of our own homes. There are different sections for each category and we can help ourselves to the latest in action, drama or comedy.

If health care was a new release and we wanted to check it out at our local video store, you surely wouldn't find it under Action – because there hasn't been any. You wouldn't find it under comedy either, because it's more of a tragedy than a comedy. Most likely you would find it under horror, science fiction, or fantasy.

Unfortunately, I'm not talking about movies and the land of make believe. I'm talking about real life and the need for real action to solve real problems.

Take the fact that health care is one of the biggest concerns of every American. Combine that with the fact that those who were elected and are now in charge have refused to put forth for debate a substantive proposal that has a real shot at working. There is already talk amongst top Democrats that next year will be healthcare year. Funny how it always seems to be that when Congress is faced with a heavy lift it starts talking about "next year" like it's the present tense. What do you have? You have the answer to why

Congress's approval rating is so low. The solution is clear – the best way to solve sagging poll numbers is to actually do something. Stop playing around on the fringe of the issue and get right to the heart of the matter. Our friends on the other side of the aisle know what they should do – but what are they waiting for? We need to do what the American people say they most want us to do – work together and avoid the partisan fear that we might have to share the credit. I have always believed that you can get anything done if you don't care who gets the credit and that's the path we ought to be taking.

We have a real opportunity to do something now – to get legislation passed that will mean real solutions for our constituents. I have a plan. Over the next few months I will share each step with my colleagues. The longest journey in the world begins with a single step – and I'm willing to take the first ones. If anyone has a better idea, I'm more than willing to put our ideas together until we have something we can all accept.

I bet we find there is a lot of common ground between us. I have always believed that 80 percent of every issue we take up we agree on – it's that pesky 20 percent that always proves to be a problem. But by solving that 20 percent we can get something done right away to make our health care system better, safer, more efficient, and less expensive. We owe it to our mothers, fathers, sisters and children everywhere to take those steps – one by one until we get where we need to go.

I think we have all had enough of the “rush and whine” model of legislating -- the ones who rush out of a meeting to hold a press conference so they can whine about a problem. That approach generates a lot of noise but it doesn't result in any action.

We need to work together – majority and minority – to build a legacy our children and grandchildren will benefit from – a fair and effective health care system that will ensure more Americans have access to the care they need to lead full and productive lives.

Forget there is an election coming up for just a few seconds. That should be our incentive – not a road block. But, for some of us, it is a barrier to progress. Let's not let it be that way. There is plenty of room for agreement. We don't need a massive bill – just a genuine effort to work together.

We don't need a new big government bureaucracy. We don't need to bankrupt the country.

It's not rocket science. We can do it a single step at a time. I am discouraged that those in charge have not put a single step into play, but I am hopeful that this call to arms – actually it's a call to work together as comrades-in-arms – will remind us all that we need to do something about this issue now!

Election year politicking should not stand in the way of real reform for health care. There are things we can do today that will give people the confidence they need to have in their ability to face the challenges of tomorrow. What we do right now can help people improve their health coverage for themselves and their families.

All I ask is that you walk with me as we take the steps that are needed to solve this problem. I call it a 10-step approach and it would bring clarity to our health insurance maze and put the focus where it belongs – on patients. Enacting even one of the ten steps would keep our health insurance system strong and off life support for a while.

The first step gives small businesses greater purchasing power to reduce the cost of insurance plans. Those of you who know me well recognize how central this would be to any health care reform proposal of mine.

The second step focuses our investment on health information technology to cut costs and save lives. One hundred thousand Americans die every year because of medical errors that result from messy handwriting, and mix-ups with drugs and treatment. The Senate needs real leadership to bring the health industry into the 21st century. Electronic access to health care records could save billions of dollars and thousands of lives. People's health records should travel with them so they can share them with their doctors. Informed decisions are better decisions, and with patient access to their records they can help their doctors do a better job of making sure the patient gets the care they need without duplicate testing. An electronic record would go a long way toward eliminating the problems caused by a prescription that can't be read or a drug interaction that could be dangerous.

The next step would correct a flawed tax code to make it easier for working Americans to buy health insurance. Jobs don't need health insurance – people do. American families who aren't insured through their employers should have the same access to care. We want health care tax fairness, even if you don't work for a big company.

Other steps will fix the medical justice system to cut down on junk lawsuits that are driving up health care costs. The medical liability system in this country doesn't work the way it should. My 10 Steps bill would promote real medical justice reform that will focus on helping both patients and doctors – not trial lawyers. We want medical justice so those who are injured get paid quickly and fairly - so we aren't spending more on preventing lawsuits than we are on preventing illnesses.

Americans shouldn't have to live in fear that if they change jobs, they will lose their health insurance. My bill will give them security in their health insurance. When you change jobs you will be able to take your health care with you. You won't have to worry that your insurance won't apply because of a surprise discovery of a previous ailment.

The system we have today isn't about patients and making them healthy. We need to put the focus back on "health" care and not "sick" care. We also need to set our sights on prevention. Ben Franklin said it best, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Those are a few of the things that we can do now, I encourage others to bring their ideas out for discussion, too, so that we can work on a solution together. Our constituents are not asking for more politicking. They have real problems. They want real answers.

Then we can bring the focus back to “health care” – and not “sick care”. We all know what we should be doing in our own lives to help prevent chronic illnesses so we can stay strong and healthy.

When it comes to health care, it’s clear that there are a lot of things that “should” be happening – but aren’t. We need to replace those should’s with a simple word – will. We need to replace the call to do something “next year” with the need to do it now! Those changes should happen and we will make them happen. It’s a simple thing. All we need is the will to do it.

I know we can agree on these things and I ask my colleagues who set the agenda to make health care the priority that it should be and to do this not by taking more time, but by finally taking action.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

####