

# ROLL CALL

## **E-Records a Vital Step in Streamlining Health Care**

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*By Sen. Mike Enzi,  
Special to Roll Call*

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With health care costs skyrocketing and the number of uninsured climbing higher and higher, it is no surprise that, in poll after poll, Americans cite health care as one of their top concerns. This Congress has an obligation to the American people to take action and do something to reduce health care costs and expand access to affordable care.

I truly hope this is the year that we stop talking about health care

and start doing something about it, because Americans can't wait another year. They don't want to wait for an election to see some changes. They certainly don't want to wait another year to stop their health care costs from going up and up and up. They want to see change and they want to see change now. Our small-business owners, working families and millions of uninsured cannot afford to wait.

I have introduced the Ten Steps to Transform Health Care in America Act, which would go a long way in making sure every American has a health insurance card in his or her wallet.

While I do not have space in this forum to go into detail about each of the 10 steps, I would encourage everyone to go to my Web site ([enzi.senate.gov](http://enzi.senate.gov)) and check out my plan.

We could enact any one of these sensible proposals included in the bill today and produce results tomorrow. One step that Congress has come close to passing in years past is a bipartisan plan to encourage the adoption of cutting-edge information technologies in health care to improve patient care, reduce medical errors and cut health care costs.

A very practical example of the revolutionary power of health information technology lies in the routine writing of prescriptions. The Institute of Medicine estimates that messy handwriting and prescription mix-ups kill nearly 100,000 people each year. If passing this bill saves even one of those lives, then that says to me that it's worth our time to pass it.

Doctors, hospitals, health care advocates and the business community — including small business — are clamoring for Congress to take action and establish uniform standards for

health IT. Time is of the essence — if we do not act, our health care system will move forward in a highly inefficient way. That is why Congress must take steps to establish an interconnected, nationwide health technology system to improve the quality of care in this country.

Clearly, this is an issue that is of such great concern to the American people that it transcends politics as usual. That will give us an opening to get something done that really will help patients and their doctors by using my 80 percent rule. By focusing on the 80 percent of this issue that we all can agree on, we can get something done. If we continue to let that 20 percent we disagree on serve as a roadblock, we'll let this great opportunity pass — something we can't afford to let happen — again!

In fact, in the previous Congress, the Senate unanimously approved a bill to enhance health IT. This Congress, we improved upon that legislation and unanimously reported the Wired for Health Care Quality Act (S. 1693) out of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. Clearly, we are on a path toward progress, and I hope we continue on that path.

Our bill, which I co-sponsored with Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Chairman Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Sens. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), will lay the foundation for life- saving technology and information-sharing among doctors, hospitals and insurers to ensure that patient data and medical histories are available wherever and whenever treatment is needed. A Rand Corp. study projected a potential savings of \$162 billion a year for the health care industry under the initiative — in addition to the priceless reduction of patient injury and loss of life.

Some are concerned about the impact of health IT and electronic health records on the security of personal data. Let me assure you, protecting patient information is a very high priority of mine and nearly every section of this bill demonstrates that. The health IT bill does a lot to build upon the protections we already have in place. The bill establishes the American Health Information Community, which is made up of experts representing a complete cross section of the health care, consumer and technology communities. AHIC is charged with providing the secretary of Health and Human Services recommendations concerning national policies for adoption by the federal government to ensure that patient data remains secure. For example, the bill requires AHIC to make recommendations on policies concerning the individual's ability to control the acquisition, uses and disclosures of individually identifiable health information.

Information is power, and health IT legislation is needed to put that power in the hands of patients, doctors and health professionals. Improved health IT will eliminate duplicative tests and reduce medical errors. Moving from a paper-based health care system to secure electronic medical records will save lives and reduce skyrocketing health care costs.

We need to get a health IT bill done, and we need to get it done this year.

**Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) is ranking member on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.**