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***Gastroenterologists Applaud Kennedy-Hutchinson Bill’s Renewal of War on Cancer Strategies to Address Rare GI Cancers and Colorectal Screening Among Key Provisions***

**Bethesda, MD, March 26, 2009** – The American College of Gastroenterology and its more than 10,000 physician members congratulate Senator Edward Kennedy and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson today for the introduction of “21st Century Cancer ALERT (Access to Life-Saving Early detection, Research and Treatment) Act” and their vow to renew the war on cancer. The bill would help focus the national scientific agenda on tackling deadly rare and ultra-rare cancers, including pancreas and esophagus cancers, while bringing much-needed resources to the major public health challenge of colorectal cancer, the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States although highly preventable through proven screening strategies.

“As the physicians on the front line of diagnosing life-threatening malignancies of the GI tract and digestive organs, we know first hand the devastation of cancers of the digestive system, particularly colorectal, esophageal and pancreatic cancers. We recognize Senator Kennedy and Senator Hutchinson for their leadership against these cancers, but particularly commend their targeted approach to increase use of preventive colorectal screening tests among low-income, uninsured Americans,” said Eamonn Quigley, M.D., FACG, President of the American College of Gastroenterology.

Despite all the recent progress in raising public awareness of colorectal cancer prevention, significant barriers remain to utilization of screening tests, particularly for the uninsured. The Kennedy-Hutchinson cancer bill provides meaningful strategies to partner with states through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention with the aim of increasing use of colorectal cancer screening tests.

“This bill supports grants to states which screen patients for colorectal cancer by providing financial assistance to states under Medicaid for patient treatment if colorectal cancer is detected. We believe spending for screening is money well-spent because we know that every dollar spent on screening tests saves about \$3 in long-term medical costs,” added Dr. Quigley. Moreover, the Kennedy-Hutchinson bill provides for public education around colorectal cancer screening.

“Colon cancer is an equal opportunity killer, which claims approximately 50,000 lives every year, but is highly curable if detected at an early stage. The relative 5-year survival rate for colorectal cancer, when diagnosed at an early stage before it has spread, is about 90 percent. That means when screening procedures detect colon cancer early, 9 of 10 patients beat the disease. But fewer than 4 in 10 colorectal cancers are found at this early stage according the American Cancer Society. Those are starkly different outcomes that we have the power to change, and the Kennedy-Hutchinson bill offers a meaningful start,” added Dr. Quigley.

In addition to helping defeat early cancers, colorectal screening by colonoscopy enables some patients to avoid colon cancer altogether by getting rid of precancerous cells before they turn into cancer. Colonoscopy is among the most powerful tools in use in clinical medicine, because of its extraordinary potential to identify and remove colorectal polyps and thereby prevent cancer.

**About the American College of Gastroenterology**

Founded in 1932, the American College of Gastroenterology (ACG) is an organization with an international membership of more than 10,000 individuals from 80 countries. The College is committed to serving the clinically oriented digestive disease specialist through its emphasis on scholarly practice, teaching and research. The mission of the College is to serve the evolving needs of physicians in the delivery of high quality, scientifically sound, humanistic, ethical, and cost-effective health care to gastroenterology patients. To learn more, visit [www.acg.gi.org](http://www.acg.gi.org).

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