

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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S.1955, BILL TO PROVIDE WORKING FAMILIES RELIEF FROM RISING HEALTH INSURANCE COSTS, MOVES CLOSER TO VOTE, ENZI SAYS

Washington, D.C. – The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee moved closer today to a vote on a bill to allow business and trade associations to band their members together and offer group health insurance to working families, defeating a Democratic alternative proposal, U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the HELP Committee said. The mark up will be continued next week on March 15th at 9 a.m.

The bipartisan bill, “The Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act,” (S.1955) which was introduced by Enzi and cosponsored by Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) and Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT), faced dozens of Democratic amendments in today’s mark up, but was not successfully amended. “Today, the Senate has taken its first major step in 15 years toward more affordable health insurance options for small business and working families,” Enzi said Wednesday.

“The defeat of the primary alternative offered to S.1955 tells the story: Our bill offers a light at the end of the tunnel. Hundred of small business organizations supporting this bill are clamoring for the kind relief from skyrocketing health insurance costs S.1955 is designed to provide - and its time the Senate responded.” The Democrat alternative was supported by only two small business groups while Chairman Enzi’s bill is sponsored by hundreds of small business groups.

Enzi said he was greatly encouraged by personal assurances he received from the HELP Committee's Ranking Member, Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) that Senators on the Democrat side of the aisles will convene to finish work and vote on the bill by Noon on March 15.

"Though we have our differences on how to address growing concerns about health insurance and health care costs, I deeply appreciate Senator Kennedy's commitment to putting this bill to a vote," Enzi said. "As Senator Kennedy and others have said today, this is constructive dialog that has been absent from the HELP Committee for too long."

The Enzi-Nelson bill, S.1955, got a boost just hours before today's mark up with the release of a study, prepared by the Milwaukee firm of Mercer Oliver Wyman, Inc. for the National Small Business Association. The report found that:

- S. 1955 would reduce health insurance costs for small business by 12 percent. In today's dollars - about \$1,000 per employee;
- S. 1955 would reduce the number of uninsured in working families by 8 percent - or approximately 1 million people.

Modeling by Mercer Oliver Wyman, which assumed passage and enactment of the bill into law, forecasts the plan "will alleviate some of the health insurance cost pressures faced by small employers." The report can be viewed by visiting their web site (http://ww.nsba.biz/docs/2006_mercer_report.pdf).

S.1955 responds to pleas from small business trade groups to be allowed to pool their members and provide group health insurance, called Small Business Health Plans (SBHPs) under the Enzi bill, but also includes safeguards to protect against adverse effects that could result if new group plans were given a blanket exemption from consumer protections available under state laws and regulations.

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