

News from the

**U.S. Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

Michael B. Enzi (Wyoming), Chairman



For Immediate Release

Monday, April 24, 2006

Contact: Craig Orfield [ENZI] (202) 224-6770

***PETITION SHOWS WORKING FAMILIES OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT
SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH PLANS;
ENZI URGES SENATE TO PASS S.1955***

Washington, D.C. – A petition bearing over 450,000 signatures from working families in support of “The Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act,” S.1955, confirms growing support for the Senate to pass the landmark bipartisan bill, U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, said in a press conference today.

The petition, drafted by the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), comes on the heels of a recent survey that showed 93 percent of Republicans, 88 percent of Independents and 86 percent of Democrats favor a small business health purchasing plan.

“This petition goes to the heart of why the Senate should pass S.1955 now: working families, which make up the bedrock of our economy, have overwhelmingly issued a mandate for change,” Enzi said. “Our health care system is pushing too many into the ranks of the uninsured. The strain of that burden is being felt by millions, and millions want the kind of relief our bill offers – regardless of their party affiliation.”

The NFIB is the nation’s largest advocacy organization for small and independent businesses. It represents 600,000 members from all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

Members of NFIB employ four million American workers, from farmers to high-tech manufacturers to retailers.

“The 450,000 men and women who signed this petition come from all walks of life. They are Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. But they have one thing in common: they are demanding change,” Enzi added. “There are many more that have carried the flag into battle for SBHPs for almost a decade, including members of NFIB. All of these folks are committed to small business and working families – and we thank them.”

S.1955, which was introduced by Enzi and cosponsored by Senator Ben Nelson (D-NE) and Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT), will allow business and trade associations to band working families together and offer group health coverage on a national or regional basis in direct response to runaway costs that are driving far too many employers and families from comprehensive health insurance.

“We are nearing almost five years of double-digit growth in health insurance premiums – increases that have repeatedly exceeded more than five times the rate of inflation,” Enzi said. “This inflationary spiral is lowering the quality of life for countless families and hurting our economy. But those hardest hit are America’s working families outside of employer-provided insurance. Never before has there been a more urgent need to encourage market reforms like those proposed in this bill.”

Designed to enhance the market leverage of small groups as well as individual policy holders, “The Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act” will give associations a meaningful role on a level playing field with other group health plans; streamline the current hodgepodge of varying state regulation; preserve the primary role of the states in health insurance oversight and consumer protection; make lower-cost health plan options available; and achieve meaningful reform without a big price tag.

A report prepared by the Milwaukee firm of Mercer Oliver Wyman, Inc. for the National Small Business Association found that the Enzi-Nelson-Burns bill would reduce the cost of health insurance for small employers by 12 percent – or \$1,000 per employee. The bill would also cover more than one million currently uninsured Americans in working families – or one out of every 12 people who live in a family headed by someone who works for a small company.

“Our bill puts small business owners and working families in the driver’s seat,” Enzi said. “It gives them the power to negotiate together for the health benefits they want and need, at prices they can afford.”

The HELP Committee ended a decade long stalemate on health insurance reform by voting in favor of S. 1955 on March 15. The bill awaits consideration by the full Senate.

###