



For Immediate Release

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***ENZI NOTES INCREASE IN AMERICANS WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE, CALLS FOR ACTION ON SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH PLANS***

**Washington, D.C.** – Citing an announcement from the Census Bureau stating that the number of Americans without health insurance has climbed to 46.6 million in 2005, and that fewer employers are offering coverage, U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, called on Congress to take action on Small Business Health Plan (SBHP) legislation to improve health care, lower costs, and expand coverage.

“Over the past few years, America’s economy has grown stronger, the unemployment rate has fallen to its lowest point in decades, and personal wages have increased dramatically,” Enzi said. “Yet many Americans are not seeing the benefits of this economic growth because of the dramatic increase in the cost of living, partly driven by the rising cost of health insurance.”

“Fewer employers can afford to cover the cost of health insurance for their employees, so those same employees now have to spend a greater share of their salaries on all or part of their health benefits. The new numbers released by the Census Bureau demonstrate the urgent need for Congress to take action this fall and pass SBHP legislation.”

According to the Census Bureau report, average premiums for workers increased from \$69 per month to \$76, and average premiums for families increased from \$273 to \$296

“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), will allow business and trade associations to band their members 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.

A report prepared by the independent firm of Mercer Oliver Wyman, Inc. found that the Enzi-Nelson bill would not only stop the trend of annual increases in health insurance costs, *it would actually reduce health insurance costs for small business by a net 12 percent, or about \$1,000 per employee.* It would also reduce the number of uninsured Americans by 8 percent - approximately 1 million people.

Small Business Health Plans (SBHP) are highly popular among the general public, enjoying broad, bipartisan support. A recent independent survey revealed that 93 percent of Republicans and 86 percent of Democrats support legislation to create SBHPs. Unfortunately, despite receiving 55 votes on the Senate floor in May, the Enzi-Nelson bill was blocked from receiving an up-or-down vote.

“As this session of Congress comes to a close, we have a rare opportunity to enact meaningful reform that will directly impact and improve the health and lives of millions of working Americans, at no cost to the taxpayer, by bringing this bill back to the floor of the Senate for an honest debate and a fair vote,” Enzi said. “We ask our colleagues who opposed to this bill to look to their constituents who are seeking relief from the burden of rising health costs. This is one issue that we can and must agree on this Congress.”

“We will continue to work with our colleagues on both sides of the aisle with a nonpartisan approach, and we hope they will welcome us in that same manner. This bill is too important, and enjoys too much bipartisan and popular support, to get caught in the web of partisan politics.”

The Bureau of Labor reported the following disturbing signs in 2005:

- The number of Americans without health insurance increased to 46.6 million;
- The percentage of the population living without insurance increased from 15.6% to 15.9%;
- The percentage of Americans with employer-based coverage decreased from 59.8% to 59.5%;
- 62% of employers, down from 63%, are offering coverage; and,
- Employers’ average share of premiums increased by approximately 5%.

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