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Wisconsin Small Business Owners Eager for Healthcare Reform

**Research Shows Small Business Owners Willing to be Part of a Solution that Makes High Quality
Healthcare Affordable and Available to All**

Milwaukee, WI, July 13, 2009 – Recent research shows a strong majority of Wisconsin small business owners believe healthcare reform is necessary, and are willing to be part of a solution that controls costs and guarantees coverage for everyone. A report with new polling of Wisconsin small businesses owners was released on a media call Monday co-sponsored by Citizen Action of Wisconsin and Small Business Majority.

The full report can be downloaded at www.citizenactionwi.org or at <http://www.smallbusinessmajority.org/>

The state-wide survey of small business owners conducted by Small Business Majority, a leading national small business advocacy organization focused on healthcare reform, found that affordability is the primary obstacle to small business owners obtaining health insurance. Eighty-four percent of small businesses not offering health insurance say they can't afford to, while 70 percent of those who do are struggling to provide it. Small business owners also see the cost of health insurance as a significant barrier to entrepreneurship and say reform is important in helping the economy recover.

"Small business owners aren't shirking their responsibility where healthcare is concerned," said John Arensmeyer, founder and chief executive officer of Small Business Majority. "They feel a responsibility to provide healthcare for their employees and are willing to do their part in fixing our broken system."

The report found 75 percent of small business owners support having the option of a private or public health insurance plan as part of healthcare reform. They also believe individuals, employers, insurers, the government and healthcare providers should share the responsibility for making coverage more affordable.

"The findings in the Small Business Majority poll of Wisconsin small business owners parallel what we have been hearing all over the state," said Robert Kraig, Program Director for Citizen Action of Wisconsin. "Skyrocketing healthcare costs are a tremendous burden on Wisconsin small businesses, and small business owners strongly support fundamental reform."

State Representative Steve Hilgenberg (Dodgeville), who owned a small printing company for many years, was not surprised by the poll results. Based on his experience struggling to afford healthcare coverage for his own employees, and his contacts with business owners and farmers throughout his district, Representative Hilgenberg concluded that getting healthcare costs under control is "one of the biggest economic incentives we can provide to promote economic recovery in a rural district."

“Because of the cost of healthcare, which goes up double digits every year—as much as 40% in one year--we have been unable to be as strong a community member as possible,” said Greg Bass of Park Printing in Verona, WI, a family business which has been in operation for over 60 years. “It is really discouraging to try and maintain a business that is good for the community because of the cost of healthcare coverage. We can’t keep our employees healthy, and our workers are basically playing roulette with their healthcare plans.”

The report also found that 62 percent of small business owners believe the federal government should have a role in achieving reform. Forty-one percent say they want to reform the current system by holding employers, individuals and the government responsible for making healthcare more affordable. In contrast, 21 percent want to replace the current system with government-provided healthcare and only 31 percent want to leave things as they are with no government involvement.

Additional findings in the report include:

- 72% say healthcare reform is important to getting the economy back on track.
- 55% believe their company has a responsibility to provide health coverage for its employees.
- 84% of small businesses support establishing a health insurance pool to create a marketplace where small businesses and individuals choose their coverage.
- 85% of small businesses want to eliminate preexisting condition rules, and 75% see these rules as a barrier to starting a business.
- 53% believe that businesses that don’t offer health insurance should be required to pay something to cover their employees.

“We have been a small family business for 26 years,” said Lani Madis, the owner of Greater Midwest Mercantile, a small business in Eau Claire. “Our health insurance rates went up 18% in 2006, 26% in 2007, and 40% in 2008: this is unconscionable. How do we hold health insurance companies responsible for anything? What kind of game is the health insurance industry playing with small businesses?”

Keith Schmitz, the owner of a small public relations firm in Shorewood for the last 17 years, commented on how expensive health insurance is for many of his business clients, and especially new businesses. “Many of the start-up businesses that I work with in my area are forced to go without health insurance coverage, exposing them to tremendous financial risk.”

About Small Business Majority

Small Business Majority conducts extensive scientific polling and research to determine small business owners’ perspectives on healthcare reform and brings a nonpartisan voice to policy discussions nationwide. Based in Sausalito, CA with offices in Washington, DC and New York City, the organization works with small business owners, healthcare policy experts and elected officials nationwide. <http://smallbusinessmajority.org/>

About Citizen Action of Wisconsin

Citizen Action of Wisconsin, which has 90,000 members state-wide, is the premier grassroots organization in Wisconsin working on comprehensive health care reform. Over the past 18 months, Citizen Action of Wisconsin has won 3 major national awards for its health care reform campaign. Citizen Action of Wisconsin regularly produced and releases research reports on various aspects of the Wisconsin health care crisis. www.citizenactionwi.org

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