



News Release

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National Women's Business Council Announces Support for Association Health Plans

Washington, DC – The National Women's Business Council voted unanimously to support Association Health Plans (AHPs) at their Council meeting on February 11, 2003. The Council agreed that AHPs will increase access to and reduce the costs of health care for small businesses.

“One of the most critical issues facing women business owners today is providing affordable health care to their employees,” said Marilyn Carlson Nelson, Chair and CEO of Carlson Companies, and Chair of the National Women's Business Council. “It is estimated that 60% of the 41 million uninsured Americans reside in families employed by small business. We estimate that as many as 7.3 million of the uninsured are employed by the more than 9.1 million women-owned firms in the United States.”

AHPs would allow trade and professional associations to band together across state lines to purchase health insurance coverage for their members. In this way, the small businesses that belong to these organizations would enjoy the same “pooling” benefits that larger employers enjoy, enabling them to offer health care coverage at lower rates.

President Bush has voiced support for AHPs, as have Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao, Senator Olympia Snowe, Chair of the Senate Small Business Committee, and SBA Administrator Hector Barreto. Chao and Barreto participated in a recent news conference announcing the introduction of new AHP legislation. The Small Business Health Fairness Act (H.R. 660) was introduced February 11th with more than 70 co-sponsors and strong bi-partisan support.

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“Affordable health care is the number one concern of small business owners,” continued Carlson Nelson. “We can't continue to tell the millions of uninsured to wait until the entire health care system is overhauled to address this problem. AHPs would be a long-awaited step in the right direction.”

To further expand the dialogue on the effect that the current state of health insurance costs has on women-owned businesses, the Council will convene a roundtable discussion on February 27, 2003. The roundtable will address the issue of affordable health care for businesses and their employees and will bring together women business owners, business association leaders, issue experts, and public policy makers to discuss the concerns involved in providing affordable health care and to help begin building viable solutions. The discussion will be led by NWBC Chair Marilyn Carlson Nelson, Chairman and CEO of Carlson Companies, Inc. Expected speakers include:

- Senator Olympia Snowe, Chair of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship;
- Representative Donald Manzullo, Chair of the House Committee on Small Business;
- Representative Nydia Velazquez, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Small Business;
- Elaine Chao, Secretary of Labor;
- Hector Barreto, Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration;
- Representatives from women's business organizations, other associations and institutes focused on health care issues, including: Women Entrepreneurs, Inc.; Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP); the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; and the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB); and
- Individual women business owners from a variety of industries and regions.

The National Women's Business Council's Roundtable on Affordable Health Care will be held from 9:30 a.m. to noon on February 27, 2003 at the Cannon House Office Building, Room 311, Washington, DC. For additional information about the roundtable, visit the Council's Web site at www.nwbc.gov.

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The National Women's Business Council is a bi-partisan Federal government council created to serve as an independent source of advice and counsel to the President, Congress, and the U.S. Small Business Administration on economic issues of importance to women business owners. Members of the Council are prominent women business owners and leaders of women's business organizations. The National Women's Business Council is committed to conducting research on issues of importance to women business owners and their organizations; to communicating these findings widely; to connecting the women's business community to public policy makers; and to providing programs and platforms for change in order to expand and improve opportunities for women business owners and their enterprises. For more information about the Council, its mission and activities, contact: National Women's Business Council, 409 3rd Street, SW, Suite 210, Washington, DC 20024; phone: 202-205-3850; fax: 202-205-6825, e-mail: nwbc@sba.gov