

News from the
Committee on Small Business
Subcommittee on Rural & Urban Entrepreneurship
Heath Shuler, Chairman



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Shuler Chairs Congressional Hearing on How North Carolina's Small Businesses Can Help Employees Access Healthcare

ASHEVILLE, NC – One of the biggest challenges currently facing entrepreneurs is a lack of health care coverage. Today, Representative Heath Shuler, Chairman of the House Small Business Subcommittee on Rural and Urban Entrepreneurship, brought together local business owners to discuss ways that entrepreneurs can help make healthcare more affordable and accessible for their employees.

“Finding a solution to the healthcare crisis is crucial to continuing to grow Western North Carolina’s economy,” said Chairman Shuler. “The Small Business Committee and the entire Congress needs to hear directly from small business owners about the challenges they are facing. Securing our small businesses must be a cornerstone of any comprehensive healthcare reform. No entrepreneur should have to face the decision of offering health insurance to their employees or keeping their company open.”

Entrepreneurs have been among the hardest hit when it comes to rising healthcare costs. Over the last seven years, small firms have seen premiums rise by nearly 80 percent on average. While small businesses represent the majority of employers in this nation, it is clear they are having extreme difficulty in providing their employees with health care coverage. Nearly all businesses with more than 200 employees offer coverage, but only 48 percent of the smallest firms do. This is an issue that is impacting North Carolina firms in particular, where employer sponsored insurance is the primary source of coverage for the non-elderly. Over half of all the uninsured workers in North Carolina are employed by businesses with less than 25 employees. Small businesses both locally and nationally continue to struggle to provide coverage to their employees due to the rising premium costs.

“With so many of our residents relying on their small employers for healthcare coverage, it is clear that this must be a top priority in Congress to develop reform that will help entrepreneurs provide this for their employees,” Chairman Shuler said. “This is something that the House Small Business Committee will continue to push as we return after Labor Day – to ensure small businesses are a central component of any healthcare reform.”

In the first half of the 110th Congress, the House Small Business Committee has passed the Affordable Healthcare Initiative, a grant program that would allow Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) to assist business owners with identifying affordable health insurance options for their employees. A bill was also passed out of the committee that makes low cost loans available to healthcare providers that serve low-income and underserved areas. While steps are being taken, today’s discussion made it clear that more needs to be done to help small firms access affordable healthcare. North Carolina business owners described a number of possible solutions to the unique problems small businesses face with rising healthcare premiums. Some of the ideas focused on the need to utilize the perspective of small businesses, healthcare providers and insurance brokers in order to develop a solution that will meet the current needs of small business employees.

“Hearing directly from small business owners is vital to formulating a solution that will address all of their healthcare needs,” Chairman Shuler said. “The concerns of North Carolina businesses in providing affordable healthcare coverage are echoed by entrepreneurs nationwide. This committee will be working to ensure small businesses are at the center of both the debate and the reform.”