

WASHINGTON BUSINESS JOURNAL / SHUGOLL RESEARCH CEO PANEL RELEASE

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WASHINGTON BUSINESS LEADERS ACKNOWLEDGE NEED FOR HEALTH REFORM BUT SPLIT ON GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS INCLUDING PUBLIC OPTION

***** These data represent the first release from the *Washington Business Journal*/Shugoll Research poll of area business leaders. A total of 78 business leaders participated in the poll from September 9 to 14, 2009. The *Washington Business Journal*/Shugoll Research CEO Panel will regularly poll a select group of business leaders on issues important to the community.*****

Leaders Want Reform but Have Split Views on Current Proposals Including a Public Option

An overwhelming 92 percent of the panel's business leaders say the healthcare system in the US needs reform. But similar numbers strongly support (22%) and strongly oppose (26%) the reforms currently being considered by the Federal government. When including those who slightly support or oppose current proposals, business leaders are more likely to support the plans (44%) than oppose them (31%).

Attitudes towards a public insurance option are similarly split. Almost equal numbers strongly support a public option (29%) as oppose it (27%) with more favoring the concept at least somewhat (42%) than oppose it at least somewhat (32%).

"The business community's views on health reform mirror those expressed in polls by the general population: people are divided on the issue," said Mark Shugoll, CEO of Shugoll Research.

President's Speech Favorably Received

President Obama seems to have succeeded in influencing views on healthcare reform with his speech last week. A significant number of panel members watching (58%) said the speech made them more receptive to healthcare reform and over a quarter said it made them much more receptive (27%). Only 18 percent said the speech made them less receptive to healthcare reform while 23 percent indicated the speech didn't change their views. Almost six in ten business leaders in the panel (58%) watched the speech.

Controlling Healthcare Costs Is a Major Business Concern and Some Think Federal Plans Will Increase Their Costs

Over three quarters of businesses in the panel (77%) say that controlling healthcare costs is one of their top priorities. Many worry that healthcare reform will increase their company's health insurance costs (51%) and believe requiring businesses to provide health insurance coverage will limit their business's ability to grow (38%). In spite of these fears, almost half (48%) believe healthcare reform will have a positive effect on the nation's economy.

Over Half of Area Businesses Have Taken Action to Manage Their Health Insurance Expenses

Over half of businesses (58%) that offer healthcare benefits (95% of the businesses in the panel do) and contribute something to the cost of the plan (99% of those offering insurance to their employees do) have taken one of a variety of steps to control costs in the last 2 years. The largest numbers have raised the deductible for plan holders (39%) or reduced the share of the premium that the business pays (26%). Smaller numbers have reduced benefits covered under the plan (17%) or reduced the number of plan options such as only offering HMO coverage (11%). Forty-two percent of businesses in the poll have not resorted to any of these cost savings.

Panel Managers

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