

Chair Greenlick and members of the committee,

My name is Mark Thompson and I am speaking in support of HJR 203 as a small business owner in Beaverton Oregon. I founded my company, Forefront Economics, 25 years ago to provide economic analysis to energy utilities. After 25 years of navigating the market for health care insurance, I am convinced that recognizing the fundamental importance of access to affordable health care for all Oregonians is critical to the economic health and prosperity of our State.

It's important that small businesses are shielded from the vagaries of the cost imposed by the uninsured. When the State recognizes the importance of access to affordable health care for all its citizens, the health insurance markets operate more cost efficiently for all citizens, including small business owners.

Our cost of health care insurance has surged faster than any other cost in our budget. A stable market for health care where costs are rising at predictable and reasonable rates are important for a positive business environment. That is one important reason that I urge you to support HJR 203.

I'd like to also address the importance that HJR 203 would have on the entrepreneur spirit in our great State. Before I decided to leave a well paying job with excellent health care benefits to start my own company, I wrestled with the risk of exposing my wife and two young children to the risk of an expensive and uncertain health care future.

On a star filled summer night after backpacking in the Wallowa's and with my wife's encouragement I finally decided to take the risk. Today I can't help but wonder how many young entrepreneurs don't make that leap because of the extreme risk associated with health care. Passing HJR 203 would send the message that Oregon cares enough to have the backs of Oregon families by recognizing the fundamental importance of affordable access to health care. I am convinced that doing so would contribute to a better entrepreneur and overall business environment in our State.

The HOPE initiative guarantees that Oregon won't go back to a time when health care depended on your wealth or who you worked for and when health care costs were too often shifted to small businesses -- limiting economic profitability -- or individuals already struggling to get by. It's time we continue to advance and expand healthcare, not go back, which is why I urge your support of HJR 203.