



## Construction Industry Round Table

## Press Release

*A force for positive change in the design / construction industry*

### **Firms Likely to Drop Health Insurance Benefits If Lawsuits are Allowed Against Employers Exclusive CIRT Poll Finds**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—March 17, 2000—Nearly half (47%) of the respondents to an exclusive opinion poll released today by the Construction Industry Round Table (CIRT) of its top design and construction firm CEOs indicate that they are *somewhat or very inclined* "to drop the health insurance plan provided by their firm if the plan and their firm were subject to lawsuits by patients" under the House-passed version of the so-called "Patients Bill of Rights" legislation (H.R. 2990).

"It's clear from the strong response CIRT has received on this matter, that it is an issue that poses serious concerns to many of the leading firms in the design and construction industry. As such, CIRT will deliver a unified message to the Hill conferees on behalf of the entire industry that the House language will have a negative impact on our firms and their employees" stated CIRT Chairman, Kenneth E. Stinson (Chairman & CEO of Peter Kiewit Sons' Inc., Omaha, NE).

Release of the real-time poll coincides with the Round Table's official comments to the House and Senate Conference Committee members who are meeting to "iron-out" differences between the two chambers' bills. Based on the findings, which confirm other business surveys on the subject, CIRT contends that the House provision permitting lawsuits to include *employers*, "is a formula for disaster and should be removed in conference from the final version of the bill."

"It is not that the design/construction community leaders don't understand the desire and even the need to be able to appeal a decision of an HMO or other health provider. It's just that we don't believe the only way to achieve this goal is by manufacturing a lawsuit among the parties, as does the litigation industry and their friends on the Hill," stressed CIRT President, Mark A. Casso. "That's why we favor the Senate's version creating a rapid alternative dispute appeal system which we believe addresses the basic desire of patients to have an ability to question the findings of an HMO. Put another way, swift resolution is vastly superior to lengthy and expensive lawsuits that line the pockets of the trial lawyers," noted Mr. Casso.

The Construction Industry Round Table conducted the opinion poll during a two-week period March 3-15, 2000, among its nearly 100 CEOs of leading architectural, engineering, and construction companies, in preparation for CIRT's comments to the House/Senate conferees [to view the letter, [click here](#)]. In addition to the 47 percent finding noted above, the poll, which had a near 40 percent response rate, also found that:

An almost unanimous 97 percent of the CIRT firms responding provide some form of health insurance coverage for their employees as a benefit.

Only 20 percent of the respondents said they were not very inclined or were disinclined to drop their employee provided health insurance coverage vs. 47 percent who were inclined to do so. [The remaining third of the firms were not sure how they would react to a *possible* new law expanding liability exposure to them over health care complaints].

In what may be viewed as a strong commitment to their employees, an overwhelming majority of nearly 80 percent said they would likely provide an equivalent cash payment to their staffs to buy their own health insurance, *if* the firm should drop the company provided plans. Even so, this would mean an interim period where a great deal of confusion, increased costs, and possible displacements in health care coverage could occur as employees are left to find their own individual insurance.

The CIRT concludes that "[t]he truth is, expanding the right to sue employers is an open invitation for lawyers to bring such suits leading to the eventual reduction of employer provided insurance plans. Thus, in the name of improving health care coverage, the Congress will actually *reduce* its availability and affordability." For these reasons, Mr. Casso explained, "CIRT believes Congress should expand market-oriented approaches by *dropping the House language that manufactures a "right" to sue one's own employer*, rather than creating more lawsuits, regulations, and ultimately more uninsured."

For more information on the Construction Industry Round Table's "Health Care Coverage: [Patients Bill of Rights](#)" [views and Opinion Poll](#), [click here](#).