

Small business owners weigh in on health care reform

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SALT LAKE CITY -- As people express their concerns about health care and reform in town hall meetings across the country, local small business owners are weighing in on the dilemma.

One man has seen two sides of the puzzle: as a person with a pre-existing condition looking for health coverage and as a small business owner trying to afford a group policy.

Steve Hatch, born with dwarfism, owns Hatch Family Chocolates in the Avenues. He opened the store largely in an effort to secure a group policy with his then-girlfriend, now-wife. He'd failed in previous attempts to be insured alone.

"They probably would have covered the abortion if my mother had chosen to abort me, but because she didn't, and I was born with dwarfism, I was not covered on insurance," Hatch said.

His troubles didn't end with the opening of the store. He married his girlfriend, then learned that was the source of more trouble.

"It was time for the renewal for the insurance company," Hatch said. "We were informed that if we did not bring another employee on to our insurance plan, we would be booted from our insurance."

Hatch says the debate over health care reform has grown crazy in this country, especially when a plan has yet to be set in stone. He is hoping for reform, and also hopes the state cooperates with federal efforts.

The rising costs of health care coverage are a growing problem for "mom and pop" businesses in Utah and across the country.

A recent survey commissioned by the Utah Health Policy Project and conducted by Lake Research Partners found 79 percent of businesses say they are struggling to afford the cost of health coverage; 68 percent agree the state and federal government must be partners in reforming the health system.