



Small Business on washingtonpost.com

By Sharon McLoone

Big Issues for Small Business

Workers at small firms translate into millions of U.S. voters and some are taking issues from the workplace to the voting booth.

It's been a testy race between **Sen. Hillary Clinton** (D-N.Y.) and **Sen. Barack Obama** (D-Ill.) to become the Democratic presidential nominee. While only one of their names will be on the ticket, it seemed worth a trip to Capitol Hill to find out who the Democratic heads of the House and Senate panels responsible for overseeing small business issues are supporting.

The answer is Clinton and Obama.

Democratic Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-N.Y.) has endorsed Clinton since her fellow New Yorker announced she was making a bid for the presidency. And Velázquez knows small business. This month she was recognized by Entrepreneur magazine as one of the "25 people, trends and events you can't afford to ignore." The story gave Velázquez kudos for seeing passage of 17 bills through the House in her first year as chairwoman and for taking the small business post - a job that's not considered very sexy on Capitol Hill.

"Senator Clinton is an experienced and thoughtful leader, who understands the challenges facing America's entrepreneurs," the chairwoman told the Small Business Blog. "I have no doubt she would make a fine president, and that she would help bring prosperity back to our small business economy."

A perusal of Clinton's positions listed on her Web site shows she's got an "innovation agenda." In it, she offers her views "on how innovation can be the key for creating new jobs, stimulating economic growth, and ensuring American leadership of 21st century industries." However, the agenda largely focuses on her nine-point plan to "renew the nation's commitment to research; help create the premier science, engineering, technology and mathematics workforce; and upgrade our innovation infrastructure." It does not specifically address general small business issues and is a tailored offering to the science and technology communities.

Her health plan -- a key issue for many small business owners -- would give tax credits to small businesses that provide health care to their workers to help defray their coverage costs. "This will make small businesses more competitive and help create good jobs with health benefits that will stay here in the United States," according to Clinton's campaign Web site.

I covered a speech she gave on Capitol Hill to small business owners in September, where she touted her health plan.

In [that post](#), I also noted that Washington Post business columnist **Steven Pearlstein** [wrote](#) that "Clinton is surely right that, in moving to universal coverage within an employer-based system, it is necessary to require all companies to participate financially, either by offering health insurance to their workers or paying into a pot of money to subsidize low-wage workers. And Clinton knows from experience that small business is likely to be bitterly opposed."

He continues: "But her solution -- to tempt businesses with fewer than 15 employees to offer insurance by offering some tax credits -- is likely to be expensive and distort competition. More to the point, it is unnecessary."

Last week, I outlined some of [Obama's positions](#) that might be of interest to small firms.

He has secured the support of **Sen. John Kerry** (D-Mass.), who heads the **Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee**. Kerry outlined his reasons why he believes Obama would be best for small business. Kerry, who was the 2004 Democratic presidential nominee, is certainly no slouch when it comes to understanding politics or small business. He also serves with Obama on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The [American Small Business League](#) recently endorsed Obama, saying it believes Obama would be the "best candidate to end dramatic abuses in federal small business contracting."

Some members of Washington's small business community are making efforts to rally their troops and give small business more of a voice during this campaign season. For example, the **National Small Business Association** recently kicked off a [campaign](#) to get its members involved, and the National Association for the Self-Employed offers an ["Election Watch" page](#) linking to candidates' positions on key issues such as health care.

The Kauffman Foundation, a \$2 billion initiative that aids entrepreneurs, offers a series of [interesting questions](#) that a voter might ask himself about how a presidential candidate plans to sustain America's economic productivity over the long term.

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