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KLOBUCHAR, PAULSEN LAUNCH CONGRESSIONAL WELLNESS CAUCUS

*Bipartisan, bicameral caucus to shed light on the
cost reduction and productivity enhancing benefits of workplace wellness*

BLOOMINGTON, MN – Senator Amy Klobuchar and Representative Erik Paulsen (MN-03) today announced the creation of the Congressional Wellness Caucus. This bipartisan, bicameral caucus will investigate and share the best practices, resources and research to help employers find the most effective ways to support employee health and wellness.

The caucus will be co-chaired by Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-Minnesota), Senator John Thune (R-South Dakota) Congressman Erik Paulsen (R-Minnesota) and Congressman Ron Kind (D-Wisconsin).

"It's great to see Minnesota businesses leading the way nationally to support employees living healthy lives," says Senator Klobuchar.

"Employers in my district understand the importance of healthy employees. By supporting proactive and preventative care, we can help curb healthcare costs and improve the lives of employees," says Rep. Paulsen. "I am honored to help lead the bipartisan, bicameral efforts of the Congressional Wellness Caucus in such a cause. I would also like to commend the hard work of the Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota for their work in driving the dialogue of workplace health and wellness among Minnesota businesses of all sizes."

The issue of individual health has a significant impact on employer costs, but efforts to support health and wellness can make a positive difference. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report shows that 75 percent of employers' health care costs are related to employee lifestyle choices.

"Workplace wellness makes sense for employee's health and for the bottom line," says Chief Prevention Officer Doctor Marc Manley of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. "Many of the diseases that are making people sick are preventable, and we know employers can have a real impact by promoting healthy workplaces and strong wellness programs."

The Minnesota Department of Health reports that on average, employers with workplace wellness programs experience a 25 percent reduction in sick leave, health plan costs, workers compensation and disability costs. The CDC also says companies that sponsor health and wellness programs get a return on their investment of between \$3-\$6 for every dollar they spend over a two- to five-year period.

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“We’ve heard from employers throughout the state that their rising health care costs are unsustainable and they want to do something about it,” says Tom Mason, president of the Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota. “It’s exciting to see congressional leaders taking on this issue in a way that will use the market to help reform health care.”

With the Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota and Dr. Manley, the announcement was made at Apogee Enterprises, an architectural glass company based in Bloomington. Apogee, with around 20 worksites across 11 states and a total of 3,300 employees nationwide, began implementing workplace health initiatives in 2008. The company’s current wellness activities include a health assessment, on-site biometric screenings, weight loss contests and physical activity challenges with incentives and healthy nutrition choices in and around the office. Another key to Apogee’s success has been active, visible support from senior leadership.

“I’m proud of our staff for their work to support a healthier workplace culture at Apogee,” says Russ Huffer, Apogee CEO. “We have growing participation among employees in our wellness initiatives, leading to a healthier workforce and helping us to better manage healthcare costs.”

With employers like Apogee and a growing body of research supporting the value of workplace wellness programs, employers throughout Minnesota are paying attention to the health and wellness of their employees and doing what they can to make it easier for employees to make healthy choices on the job.

More than 369 Minnesota employers, with a total of more than 138,000 employees are already leading workplace wellness initiatives thanks to resources and assistance from the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). SHIP is designed to help Minnesotans live longer, healthier lives by preventing the leading causes of chronic disease: tobacco and obesity. These efforts are setting the stage to reduce obesity and tobacco use, improve productivity and help contain healthcare costs by establishing policies and environments that help make the healthy choice the easy choice at work. SHIP was launched as part of Minnesota’s Vision for a Better State of Health, the bipartisan state health reform package enacted in 2008.

This spring, 22,000 Minnesotans lost 76,048 pounds in the Biggest Loser Minnesota Challenge, a free 12-week wellness competition sponsored by the Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota where participants earned points for exercise, nutrition and weight loss. A majority of participants joined the Minnesota Challenge with their coworkers. Nearly 7,500 came from Chambers of Commerce and small- and medium-sized businesses throughout the state. Five thousand Minnesota Challenge participants came from Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota member companies.

About the Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota

The Alliance for a Healthier Minnesota is a public-private partnership that includes a group of Minnesota companies joined together to create fun, engaging and informative events and competitions to help Minnesotans get and stay healthy. Alliance member companies include Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Cargill, General Mills, Medica, Medtronic, The Midwest Dairy Association, Target and UnitedHealth Group, along with the Minnesota Department of Health’s Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). Learn more at MNAlliance.org.