



For Immediate Release
May 5, 2009

Contact: Erin Shields
202-224-4515

**Opening Remarks of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding Health Care Coverage**

Today, the Finance Committee hosts the second of three roundtable discussions on health care in America.

The Committee has spent a significant amount of time laying the groundwork for comprehensive health reform. Now, the time for action approaches. This roundtable discussion will preview many of the policies that the Committee will consider at a walkthrough session next week and — depending on input from Senators on the Committee — in a markup in June.

The week before last, we had a roundtable on delivery system reform. Today, we are here to discuss how to provide health coverage to all Americans. Next week, we will hold our third and final roundtable on financing health care reform.

As we discuss policy options for coverage, it's important to keep the facts in mind. First, the U.S. is the only developed country without health coverage for all of its citizens. Approximately 87 million people — one in three Americans — went without health insurance for some period during 2007 and 2008. And the situation is only getting worse.

Second, the economic climate has caused even more people to become uninsured. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, for every one percent increase in the unemployment rate, Medicaid and CHIP enrollment increases by one million. And the number of uninsured Americans increases by one point one million.

In today's economy, that means a lot of folks are affected. In March 2009, the unemployment rate rose to eight point one percent. According to the Center for American Progress, 14,000 more people lose their health insurance coverage every day.

Third, why is covering all Americans so critical? It is because people without health coverage generally experience poorer health and worse health outcomes than those who are insured. The Urban Institute reports that 22,000 uninsured adults die prematurely every year because they lack access to care.

--more--

In addition to the uninsured, another 25 million Americans are “underinsured.” They don’t have enough coverage to keep their medical bills manageable. Despite their insurance coverage, medical debt keeps these Americans from feeding their families, paying their rent, or heating their homes.

And finally, the uninsured affect those who have insurance. When the uninsured cannot pay, health care providers shift those costs to those who can — those who have insurance. This cost-shift accounts for roughly eight percent of the average health insurance premium. That’s \$1,100 per family. That’s \$410 per individual, in 2009.

We have an opportunity to make sure that all Americans have a fair chance at good health. To make sure that no family goes bankrupt due to medical costs. And to make sure that the insured no longer have to bear the cost of the uninsured.

The cost of inaction is too high. It’s too high for individuals, families, businesses, and state and federal governments.

Each of our participants today brings an important voice to the discussion. They are experts, stakeholders, or both.

Among our guests are folks from the insurance and business communities. We have labor and consumer representatives. And we have experts in insurance markets and public programs.

As we proceed with today’s discussion, I urge everyone to keep in mind that coverage is one part of health reform. We must also address rising health care costs. And we must find responsible and sustainable ways to finance reform.

Forgive me for not taking the time to introduce each person here today. We have distributed a biographical sketch and a brief statement for each participant.

Before today’s session, we gave each participant and Senator on the Committee some questions that will help to start our dialog. And beyond that, I anticipate a fruitful discussion.

So, let’s get started with our discussion.

###