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BAUCUS EXAMINES TANF PROGRAM AHEAD OF REAUTHORIZATION, CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN POVERTY

Finance Chairman Explores TANF Program's Effectiveness, Ways to Reduce Poverty in the U.S.

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) examined the effectiveness of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in addressing the growing challenges facing women in poverty during a Finance Committee hearing today and questioned experts on options for improving the program as the Committee considers reauthorization of TANF, which expires on September 30, 2010. The TANF program, formerly known as welfare, provides sustainable employment and safety net assistance to American families with dependent children.

"The assistance that the TANF program offers has the potential to transform lives by giving parents the training, support and work opportunities they need to prosper," said Baucus. **"In these tough economic times, we are reminded of just how crucial this program is. The TANF program must be extended and reauthorized and I look forward to working with my colleagues to improve the program as part of that effort. We need to make sure the program is successful in both tough and prosperous economic times. Without this aid, single mothers and families simply would not reach the level of financial security and independence they need to make ends meet. This program is a key part of America's social safety net and is so important to maintaining the well-being of those children and families in need and facing dire economic circumstances."**

The first in a series of hearings on reauthorization of the TANF program, today's hearing focused on the needs of women and children. Baucus heard from witnesses about the unique needs of women, which is particularly significant given that single mothers comprise 85 percent of families receiving TANF assistance.

At the hearing, Baucus examined ways to promote the program's effectiveness in reducing poverty. He questioned the witnesses about how work participation requirements can be improved to better fit the needs of those in the program. He also looked at ways to eliminate hurdles preventing those who are eligible from receiving TANF benefits. With more than one in three single mothers living in poverty, Baucus urged that now was not the time to allow these benefits to expire.

Baucus also discussed the TANF Emergency Contingency Fund, which he helped create in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. That fund has been successful in helping Americans secure good-paying jobs in the tough economy. Baucus emphasized the importance of wage assistance and transitional jobs, which are supported by the Emergency Contingency Fund, in helping both TANF recipients and small businesses to realize financial stability.

Baucus also stressed the importance of education requirements and job training that prepares recipients for work opportunities and a future of self-sufficiency. Baucus explored the role of States'

welfare-to-work program innovations and called for increased data collection that would help lawmakers measure the program's results. Baucus said that as he looks toward reauthorization of the program, he would remain committed to developing policies that will promote work opportunities and encourage upward economic mobility for families facing extreme financial circumstances.

Watch today's hearing and view witness testimony at:

<http://finance.senate.gov/hearings/hearing/?id=b513a1ea-5056-a032-526d-a297b714227a>.

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