



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 7, 2011

Contact: Communications Office
(202) 224-4515

Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding Drug Shortages
As prepared for delivery

The American inventor Charles Kettering once said, "A problem well stated is a problem half solved." We are here this morning to make sure we state the problem of drug shortages well, because doing so will help us find a solution.

In a recent study, nearly every hospital surveyed had experienced at least one drug shortage in the past six months. Nearly half of the hospitals experienced 21 or more shortages during that same time.

These shortages affect some of the sickest and most vulnerable Americans. As Dawn Grayson from Billings, Montana can tell you, when someone you love can't get the medicine they need, it can be terrifying.

This April, Dawn gave birth to a beautiful baby boy named Tanner. Tanner was born 11 weeks premature and developed a serious and sometimes fatal infection and had to have emergency surgery.

Because of his condition Tanner couldn't take a bottle like other babies. Instead he had to get all his nutrients, including calcium, through an I.V. mixture. But there was a national shortage on the type of calcium that Tanner needed.

Calcium is critical for muscle function and bone building, especially in young children, and he couldn't go without it. So, as is too often the case with shortages, the hospital had to give Tanner a substitute that caused complications.

In Tanner's case, the substitute caused chemical burns and permanent scarring on his arm and foot. Dawn is concerned it will affect Tanner's mobility as he gets older.

Dawn said, "My son has enough problems being premature, without adding chemical burns on top of an already difficult condition." She hopes that sharing her story will help us save other families from going through this same pain.

The number of patients like Tanner who are affected by drug shortages has grown over the past several years. More than half a million cancer patients were affected by drug shortages last year.

We have a responsibility to ensure that Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries – and all Americans – have access to the care they need. We need to fix this problem to make sure this doesn't happen to more

patients like Tanner. Drug shortages deserve more attention, so I am glad Senator Hatch and I were able to schedule this hearing.

We are pleased to see that this issue is receiving greater attention. Specifically, Senators Hatch, Tester and Klobuchar have worked hard on this issue, and I commend them for their leadership.

Drug shortages are not a new problem. But the number of drugs and patients affected over the past several years has grown at an alarming rate. There were shortages on 211 drugs last year. That's up from 58 shortages in 2004.

The types of patients affected by a drug shortage show the seriousness of the problem. We read heartbreaking stories of drug shortages forcing cancer patients to forgo critical treatment. We hear stories about emergency room providers forced to use makeshift drugs when conventional drugs are in short supply. This compromises care in a place where even a minute's delay can mean the difference between life and death.

Each drug shortage has its own story. The causes vary; they include quality control issues, delays in manufacturing, disruptions in the supply of raw materials and changes in the prices of drugs.

The variety of reasons that cause drug shortages makes it difficult to find one silver bullet solution, but we can't tackle this problem without fully understanding the root causes.

Medicare and Medicaid pay for over \$26 billion in prescription drugs each year. Both programs have a significant impact on the drug market. We look forward to hearing from our panelists where Medicare and Medicaid fit into this problem. We look forward to hearing how these programs can be a part of the solution. Are there things we can change? Will there be unintended consequences to these changes?

So as Mr. Kettering advised, let us work together today to state the problem well. Then let us find a solution. Let us help prevent cases like Tanner's from happening to others. Let us help patients like Tanner can get the care they need. And let us help moms like Dawn get the certainty they deserve.

###