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BAUCUS PRAISES PROVISIONS BOOSTING HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICAN INDIANS

Provisions authored by Finance Chairman will help Native Americans afford health care

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today hailed the inclusion of provisions to improve health care in Native American communities as part of the “American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009” (ARRA). This bipartisan legislation includes multiple measures aimed at improving health care for the American Indian population by making permanent some of the key provisions in the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) Amendments of 2008. Provisions in the recovery and reinvestment plan will, among other things, eliminate the cost-sharing imposed on Indian Medicaid beneficiaries, immediately allowing more low-income Natives to bypass expensive medical copayments and see doctors on a regular basis. The legislation provides \$153 million dollars to strengthen Indian health policies, and makes programs more affordable and accessible to Native Americans.

“Native Americans in Montana and across the country won a huge victory this week,” said Baucus. **“The health care policies we will send to the President’s desk will help to fulfill this country’s responsibility to American Indians. This bill acknowledges the common-sense ideas introduced in IHCIA, and makes a solemn commitment to enacting these much needed measures. This bill will help more Native Americans see doctors, provide health coverage for more Native children, ensure more timely reimbursement for doctors in Native communities, and bring the promise of a healthier life to thousands of folks all across Indian Country. I am glad the bill prioritizes these issues, which have been a passion of mine for many years, and invests in the future of our fellow Americans.”**

The ARRA includes three measures that directly affect the lives of American Indians, providing more Native Americans with health care and giving the Native community a louder voice when negotiating what doctors and policies are best for themselves and their families. The provisions are as follows:

- The elimination of cost-sharing for Indians in Medicaid, which will allow more Indians to enroll in the program and provide the states with much needed fiscal relief. Currently, states are forced to absorb the loss when an American Indian does not pay cost-sharing.
- Improving Indian access to Medicaid managed care entities by allowing an Indian enrolling in Medicaid and CHIP to select an Indian health care provider as the primary care provider.

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- The codification of an advisory panel to involve American Indians in decisions made by the Department of Health and Human Services regarding relevant federal health programs. To accomplish this, there will be a Tribal Technical Advisory Group within the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that will include a representative of a national urban Indian health organization.
- The protection of Indian property from resource limitations for purposes of Medicaid and CHIP enrollment.

Senator Baucus has long been an advocate of Native American rights and has dedicated himself to improving quality of life for these Americans. In September 2007, Baucus led the Finance Committee in an attempt to bolster Indian health policies by sponsoring the “Medicare, Medicaid, and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Indian Health Care Improvement Act of 2007.” In early 2008, Baucus cosponsored the “Indian Health Care Improvement Act Amendments of 2008.”

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