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**Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)  
Regarding Rising Costs, Low Quality in Health Care: The Necessity for Reform**

People generally — but perhaps mistakenly — attribute to Mark Twain the saying:

“Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.”

Health care reform is like that, too. People talk about it often in Washington, D.C., and across the country. But for some time now, nobody has accomplished anything about it.

I hope and intend that the Finance Committee will prove the old saying wrong — at least when it comes to health care. I hope and intend that we can seize the opportunity to achieve what previous Congresses and Presidents were unable to do. We must find a way for all Americans to have access to affordable, high-quality health care.

Today’s hearing will take stock of the current health system. We will look at the current system so that we can craft the right reforms and make the right changes. We thereby hope to yield the desired result — affordable, high-quality health care for all Americans.

Today, we will hear about some of the major problems in the current system. We will hear about the difficulties that employers face providing health coverage to their employees and retirees. We will hear about hardships that employees have paying for their insurance and for health care that is not covered. And we will hear how the current system impedes American business in competing in the global market.

We will also look at the value of the health care that Americans buy. American health care is technologically advanced and sophisticated. But it is costly. And it lacks focus on prevention, wellness, disease-management, and other basic efforts to increase efficiency. We will hear how we could stretch our health care dollars further.

America spends more than \$2 trillion a year on health care. But 47 million Americans are uninsured. That means that one out of every six Americans does not have access to health care, except in overcrowded emergency rooms. So one out of every six Americans has to worry about every snuffle and every cough turning into something serious.

In some parts of the country, the share without insurance is even greater. In my home state of Montana, one in five people lack health insurance. And in Texas, one in four is uninsured. This is unacceptable.

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And the trends are heading in the wrong direction. The number of uninsured Americans increases every year. The cost of insurance continues to increase faster than the economy and faster than wages. Fewer employers offer coverage to their employees. And fewer employees are able to afford it.

Benefits have been scaled back. Co-pays have been expanded. People are paying more and getting less. And the quality of care being provided is not as high as it should be.

We can do better. We can increase the number of Americans who have health coverage. We can lower the cost of insurance to help both employers and employees. And we can improve the quality of care to help everyone lead longer, happier, and more productive lives.

We can make American businesses of all sizes more competitive by helping them to provide health coverage to their employees. By providing all Americans with affordable, high-quality health care, America can remain an attractive option for new job growth.

We should not just talk about jobs leaving our shores because other destinations have health coverage that is less expensive. We need to do something about it.

Our efforts at reform need to include ways to control costs. America simply cannot sustain its current rate of growth in health care spending over the long run. We must find ways to bend the cost curve. Otherwise, health spending will consume our entire economy.

Our efforts at reform must also include ways to improve the quality of care. America trains the world's best doctors, operates some of the best hospitals, and develops the most advanced medical technology. But our health outcomes lag behind those of other industrialized countries. We must demand better health outcomes from our health system.

And our efforts at reform must include a new focus on prevention, wellness, and chronic disease. Health care should be about fostering good health, not just treating illness. We are gaining knowledge about how to prevent and manage diseases. If we expand and apply that knowledge, we can improve health outcomes and decrease the cost of health care.

Our current system leaves too many people without coverage. It hinders employers. It leaves employees exposed. Our current system is in need of reform. But we must do it right. In order to do it right, we need to ask experts for help.

Today we have a panel of such experts to help us. This is the second in the series of hearings on health care reform that the Finance Committee will hold this year.

These four witnesses can help us to understand the major issues in our current system and why we need reform. Their diverse perspectives will help us to focus reform so that we reach our goal of having affordable, high-quality health care for all Americans.

So today let us talk again about health care reform. Let us hear from the experts about how to do it right. And let us plan, next year, to actually doing something about it.

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