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BAUCUS CALLS ON TAVENNER TO FOCUS ON STRENGTHENING MEDICARE AND INSURANCE MARKETPLACES AS CMS ADMINISTRATOR

Bipartisan Group Supports Tavenner's Nomination to Head Up Medicare and Medicaid

WASHINGTON – At a Senate Finance Committee hearing today to consider Marilyn Tavenner's nomination to be the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) said that as administrator, Tavenner must work to strengthen Medicare and Medicaid for the future, combat fraud to protect taxpayer dollars, and have the new health insurance marketplaces ready to launch this fall. Tavenner, introduced today by House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) and Senators Tim Kaine (D-Va.) and Mark Warner (D-Va.), has broad support in both parties.

"I was home in Montana the past two weeks and heard from small businesses that they need more clarity about the health care law. They need more information and transparency. I will be holding the administration's feet to the fire to ensure this is all done correctly," Senator Baucus said. **"Medicare and Medicaid have to be run efficiently – there can be no wasted dollars, time or effort. The head of CMS has a great responsibility to make sure the health care safety net is strong. Marilyn Tavenner is a pragmatist with a thorough understanding of the ins and outs of health care administration, and her experience makes her the right choice to be administrator."**

Senator Baucus noted that the CMS administrator plays a central role in managing the federal health care system. The agency has 50 million Medicare patients, 56 million Medicaid patients and 5.5 million children enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program under its jurisdiction. CMS administers health coverage to roughly one in three Americans.

Senator Baucus said the next CMS administrator must work to preserve the nation's safety net programs with the baby boomer generation entering retirement and millions of Americans gaining Medicaid coverage under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). He added that CMS has to have the health insurance marketplaces and other key ACA provisions ready on day one and that the administration must implement the law as intended.

Senator Baucus also said that Tavenner, if confirmed, must continue CMS' efforts to provide services efficiently – its operating costs made up just one-half of one percent of its budget in fiscal year 2012 – and must keep fighting waste, fraud and abuse in Medicare and Medicaid. Protecting taxpayer dollars from fraud, Senator Baucus added, is one of his and the committee's highest priorities. The ACA created new tools to combat fraud that have already produced significant returns on investment, repeatedly setting new records for taxpayer dollars recovered in fraud busts.

Senator Baucus also got a commitment from Tavenner to expedite assistance to the people of Libby, Montana, which was declared the site of a public health emergency in 2008. Libby is one of the largest superfund sites in the country, and its residents suffer from extreme rates of asbestos exposure-related diseases, such as mesothelioma. Certain Libby residents are eligible for Medicare benefits, and when these beneficiaries are involved in legal settlements related to asbestos exposure, they fall under the Medicare Secondary Payer rules. However, CMS' processing delays have created a backlog and left many people waiting for months to finalize their settlements. Tavenner told Senator Baucus she would keep working to reduce the backlogs and ensure Libby residents get the justice they deserve.

Tavenner began her career in health care as a nurse in 1981, steadily rose through the private sector in hospital administration, and served the Commonwealth of Virginia as secretary of health and human resources for four years under then-Governor Tim Kaine. She joined CMS in 2010 as principal deputy administrator – CMS' second-ranking official – and oversaw policy development and implementation. Tavenner became acting administrator of CMS in 2011 and was re-nominated for the same position this year.

The Finance Committee will next vote on Tavenner's nomination, and if approved, it will then go to the full Senate for consideration.

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