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**BAUCUS COMMENTS ON GAO REPORT:
EMERGENCY ROOM CROWDING WORSENS, PATIENT CARE SUFFERS**
*Finance leader says overcrowded emergency rooms illustrate system-wide crisis,
reiterates need for comprehensive health care reform*

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) commented today after the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released new findings that overcrowding in hospital emergency rooms continues, resulting in longer, sometimes dangerous wait times for patients and forcing ambulances to divert patients to other facilities. The GAO report is an update to findings Chairman Baucus originally requested in 2003. Comprehensive health care reform is Chairman Baucus's top priority this year and the Finance Committee is on track to mark-up a bill in June.

"Emergency rooms are a critical component of our nation's health care safety net. These findings are unacceptable," Baucus said. **"But emergency room overcrowding is only one symptom. The entire health care system is sick. And Americans cannot wait any longer for a cure. We must pass comprehensive health care reform that brings quality, affordable health care to every American."**

GAO found that patients in need of immediate care (1 to 14 minutes) waited an average of 28 minutes and exceeded the recommended wait almost 75 percent of the time. The report cited a lack of inpatient beds as the largest contributor to overcrowded emergency rooms, caused in part by competition for beds with more profitable, elective-surgery patients. Inadequate access to primary care also contributed. Chairman Baucus has proposed ideas to address both factors by increasing primary care access and reorienting incentives to encourage quality care.

View the full GAO report, "Hospital Emergency Departments: Crowding Continues to Occur, and Some Patients Wait Longer than Recommended Time Frames," at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09347.pdf>.

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