



For Immediate Release
May 5, 2009

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**BAUCUS HOLDS ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION
ON EXPANDING HEALTH CARE COVERAGE**

*Finance Chairman invites policy, industry experts to second in
Committee series on comprehensive health care reform*

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today held a roundtable discussion on expanding health care coverage as part of the panel’s dialogue on comprehensive health care reform. Policy and industry experts addressed the question of how to extend coverage to the 46 million currently uninsured Americans and to lower health care costs for Americans who are insured today. Stakeholders discussed proposals to strengthen public health care programs like Medicaid and to create subsidies for low income Americans to get health coverage. The discussion examined ways to help small businesses to afford insurance for their employees and to reform the individual and small group health insurance markets. It also explored options that would make it easier for individuals and small businesses to shop for and find affordable coverage. Baucus said that expanding health care coverage to uninsured Americans will reduce costs for everyone in the system.

“The uninsured affect those who have insurance. When the uninsured cannot pay, health care providers shift those costs to those who can — those who have insurance. This cost-shift accounts for roughly eight percent of the average health insurance premium. That’s \$1,100 per family. That’s \$410 per individual, in 2009,” said Baucus. **“We have an opportunity here to make sure that all Americans have a fair chance at good health. To make sure that no family goes bankrupt due to medical costs. And to make sure that the insured no longer have to bear the cost of the uninsured.”**

Senators also discussed overhauling regulation of the insurance market so health plans would not be able to deny coverage to or discriminate against patients with pre-existing conditions. And they talked about creating an option for Americans to purchase a public health insurance plan and various ways to structure that plan. Baucus said the Committee would discuss these and other coverage options further during a Members meeting next week to “walk through” specific policy options.

Baucus has made comprehensive health care reform his top priority this year. He has held over a dozen hearings on the topic and released a blueprint for reform last year. This is the second roundtable in the panel’s series. The first, which focused on lowering costs and improving patient care in the health care delivery system, was held on April 29. The third meeting will be held on May 12 and will focus on financing comprehensive health care reform. Baucus has said he intends to mark-up health care reform legislation in the Finance Committee in June.

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