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BAUCUS LOOKS TO PREPARE HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE FOR REFORM

Finance Chairman holds hearing to examine ideas for meeting health workforce needs

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today held a hearing to examine ways to address current needs in America's health care workforce and to prepare the industry for health care reform. Baucus and committee members heard testimony about current health care workforce shortages, particularly in primary care and nursing, and asked expert witnesses about the best way to address these needs. Baucus noted that training and federal payment systems would be two of the most important workforce issues to address in the context of reform.

"For health reform to succeed, we need a strong health care workforce. We must ensure that health care workers have the necessary training and skills to provide quality care," said Baucus. **"We need to take a hard look at the way that we pay health care providers. As part of that examination, we should ask: Do today's payment systems properly reward providers who offer high-quality care? Do these payment systems encourage medical students to choose careers in critical fields, like primary care? And do payment systems encourage medical residents to train in settings — like community clinics — where many patients are receiving care? Where the answer is no, we need to make a change. "**

The hearing addressed ideas for revising those payment systems, including increases in federal payments to primary care providers. Baucus also asked witnesses how federal funding for physician training programs, like the Graduate Medical Education (GME) program, could be altered to ensure the health care workforce is being adequately prepared for health reform. He stressed that training in areas like the use of health information technology and care coordination would be necessary to successfully lower health care costs, improve health outcomes, and create and manage a universally accessible health care system.

Baucus has made health care reform his number one priority this year and has called delivery system reform – changing the way health care providers deliver care to patients – a crucial aspect of health reform. In the "Call to Action" blueprint for reform that he released last November, Baucus indicated that the health care workforce, along with health information technology and comparative effectiveness research, would also be important areas to address as part of delivery system reform.

This is the third hearing Baucus had held on health reform in the Finance Committee this year. Last year, he held ten hearings and a day-long summit to prepare the Panel for health reform. He intends to mark-up health care reform legislation in the Finance Committee in June of this year.

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