



For Immediate Release
February 25, 2009

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Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Scoring Health Reform: CBO Budget Options

General George C. Marshall once said, "When a thing is done, it's done. . . . Look forward to your next objective."

In the last few weeks, the Finance Committee has done a lot. We helped to pass the CHIP bill, bringing health care to millions of low-income children. And we helped to pass the economic recovery bill, helping to bolster our nation's economy.

Now it's time to look forward to our next objective. And our next big objective is health care reform.

As President Obama said on Monday, "the rising cost of health care . . . is the single most pressing fiscal challenge we face, by far."

As OMB Director Orszag said on Monday, "The path to fiscal responsibility must run directly through health care."

And as President Obama said yesterday, health care reform "cannot wait, it must not wait, and it will not wait another year."

Comprehensive health reform is no longer simply an option. It's an imperative.

We cannot afford to delay health care reform. Delay will make the problems that we face today even worse. If we delay, millions more Americans will lose coverage. If we delay, premiums will grow even farther out of reach. And if we delay, federal health spending will absorb an even greater share of the nation's economy.

Delay will also make it harder to fix the problems. Problems that exist today will continue to grow. And it will cost more to fix them.

Health care reform means making coverage affordable over the long run. It means improving the quality of the care. And it means expanding health insurance to cover all Americans.

We need fundamental reform in cost, quality, and coverage. We need to address all three objectives at the same time. They are interconnected.

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Cost growth is unchecked, because the system still pays for volume, not quality. Quality indicators like lifespan and infant mortality will remain low, because too many Americans are left out of the system. Families don't have coverage because health costs grow faster than wages.

Each problem feeds on the other problems. We need a comprehensive response.

To prepare for this effort, the Finance Committee has held ten health care hearings. Last June, we held a day-long health summit. And in November, I released my white paper on health reform to advance dialog and present a path forward.

Meanwhile, the Congressional Budget Office has also worked diligently to prepare two major health care reports. One volume contains more than 100 budget options for changing federal health care spending and the nation's health insurance system.

The other volume analyzes the key issues that Congress should consider in designing major health reform proposals. And it describes the key assumptions that CBO would use in estimating the effects of those proposals.

These reports are intense efforts by CBO to assist Congress up front in developing health reform legislation. In keeping with CBO's nonpartisan role, they do not offer recommendations for any specific policy option. Deciding what path to take is our job, working together with the new President.

We are grateful to CBO for the hard work that went into these volumes. And we thank them in advance for the enormous effort that will go into analyzing the health reform legislation that will come from this Committee this year.

As our friends at CBO know, our consideration of health care reform will not be just business as usual for this committee, or for CBO. CBO's work will make or break this enterprise.

We need CBO to work with us to find a pathway to health reform. CBO has the expertise to help design a bill that we can pass and President Obama can sign into law this year. I call on CBO to help us find a way to make health reform work.

It's a pleasure to welcome CBO's new Director, Doug Elmendorf, to the committee. We hope that this will be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

So let us look forward to our next objective. Let us learn more about the costs and savings of the health care options. And let us begin in earnest the job of comprehensive health care reform.

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