



For Immediate Release
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**Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding “Call to Action: Health Reform 2009”**

At this moment, 46 million Americans have no health insurance. If they get sick, one of three things happens: they pay out of pocket, they go to the emergency room, or they do without.

These days, more people are losing their jobs. That means they’re losing their health insurance, too.

25 million Americans have insurance, but its lousy insurance. A big illness can sink them financially. Health care spending and medical bills play a role in half of household bankruptcy cases.

Even for folks with good insurance, premiums are still out of control. For instance, between 2000 and 2007, health care premiums for Montana families increased by almost 89 percent — that’s five and a half times faster than wages.

And whether you have insurance or not, there’s no guarantee that you’ll get good quality care. Americans get the best recommended care only half the time.

We are spending twice as much as other countries for a health care system — but is our health care twice as good? No. We’re 19th out of 19 countries in preventable deaths.

The health care system is broken for individual Americans, and it’s killing our economy, too.

Let me be clear about one thing: There’s no way to really solve America’s economic troubles without fixing the health care system.

If you fix Wall Street, you fix the housing crisis, you change taxes, you fix everything else, and you don’t fix health care, then government spending will keep going up. Health care costs suck up more than 16 percent of our economy, and they’re growing. Deficits will continue to rise. And America will just have more economic troubles down the road.

Not only will we have an out-of-control health care system, but we’ll keep losing the chance to fund key priorities like education, infrastructure, and energy independence.

And our businesses will keep struggling to compete here at home and around the world. If we're going to have a 21st-century economy, on a 21st century playing field for American innovators and entrepreneurs and workers, then we'd better get a 21st century health system now.

Because without reform, none of these problems will get fixed.

The uninsured will stay uninsured. People with lousy insurance will face medical bankruptcy. Costs will keep going up. Quality won't be guaranteed. Our economy will get tighter. Our deficits will get bigger. Businesses will fall further behind. Ultimately, more American families will suffer.

To fix our system, we have to deal with access, quality, and cost. We need to get everyone under the tent for health coverage, improve the quality of the care that our people receive, and address the rising costs of health care so our businesses can compete.

But health care reform is a big project that will involve tough choices. We all need to work toward comprehensive, system-wide reform, together.

The plan contained in my "Call to Action" aims to do three things: Get everyone in America covered with decent health insurance. Reduce health care costs so that everyone can afford the care they need, even if their insurance is pretty basic. Make America healthier with better quality care and more preventive care.

Let me make something else clear: If you are happy with the coverage you have, you can keep it. Period.

But the system can work better and cost less for everyone.

This plan will cover the uninsured in several ways.

More Americans will be able to get private coverage through their employers right away. Many small businesses will get a tax credit to help cover costs.

If you're uninsured, or you lose your health care coverage, this plan will create a Health Insurance Exchange where you can get affordable coverage.

The Exchange will be a one-stop marketplace for good, affordable health coverage.

Americans will be able to compare plans easily and buy them with one simple form. Low-income Americans will get a subsidy to help pay their premiums. Insurance companies will not be able to deny coverage because of a pre-existing condition.

While we get the Exchange up and running, older Americans who can't get health insurance on their own will be able to buy into Medicare.

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And Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program will be available to more Americans who simply cannot afford private coverage at all.

Covering everyone is the right thing to do. But there are three more good reasons to do so.

When everyone is covered, premiums will be more affordable. That's because the insured will no longer have to foot the bill for the uninsured.

Insurance markets will work better because costs will be shared by more healthy Americans.

Prevention efforts will be more effective at reducing costs if everyone actually gets the care they need.

And we will build in quality care. More care is not always better care – but that's exactly what our health care system currently rewards. Providers get paid more money for ordering more tests and treatments, regardless of the effectiveness of those efforts.

Starting in Medicare, we can change payments to encourage the right care – the best care – for every single patient, rather than procedures they don't need.

That's a big step in improving quality and controlling costs. And my plan will help doctors and patients do both, by improving research on what treatments work best.

We can also improve quality by focusing on Americans' overall health. My plan will put more primary doctors in practice, watching over a patient's whole medical history and keeping them healthier all their lives. Again, that's a quality measure and a cost controller.

Chronic diseases are a struggle for too many Americans, and a strain on our health care budget. That's why primary care and prevention are so central to my plan.

It's all contained in this Call to Action.

I know you'll have a lot of questions.

You want to know what President-Elect Obama thinks. I can tell you that our staffs are talking a great deal, and I wrote him last week.

Much of what's here dovetails with the President-Elect's own health plan. Where we differ, I have committed to work with him to find consensus.

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You want to know how much it costs. When there's a bill, I'll have a CBO score. But right now, I can tell you that reform will require an initial investment bigger than the savings that we can generate in the short run with truly sound policy options.

This investment is appropriate. People are dying and going bankrupt. It's worth putting money up front to change that. And failing to act will cost even more.

You'll want to know if I'm writing a bill with Senator Kennedy.

I didn't write legislation now because I want to write a bill in early 2009 with the HELP Committee and with many colleagues — Democrats and Republicans, Senate and House. I'm meeting with the HELP leaders and Senator Grassley next week. I'll coordinate with the new administration, too.

It will take all of us working together, with open minds.

But I believe that we can do it.

I believe the policy ideas in this paper are the right way to start.

This is an exciting beginning. Americans can be free of the financial worry and unnecessary illnesses that spring from today's broken health care system.

Change is coming. This is where I believe we should start.

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