



For Immediate Release
March 10, 2009

Contact: Dan Virkstis
202-224-4515

**Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
Regarding The President's Fiscal Year 2010 Health Care Proposals**

On February 24, President Obama said, “[N]early a century after Teddy Roosevelt first called for reform, the cost of our health care has weighed down our economy and the conscience of our nation long enough. So let there be no doubt: Health care reform cannot wait, it must not wait, and it will not wait another year.”

I could not agree more with our President. Our next big objective is health care reform.

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

If we delayed, the problems that we face today would grow even worse.

If we delayed, millions more Americans would lose their coverage. If we delayed, premiums would rise even further out of reach. And if we delayed, Federal health care spending would soak up an even greater share of our nation’s income.

We must move forward.

Senator Grassley and I have laid out a schedule to do just that. Our schedule calls for this committee to mark up a comprehensive health care reform bill in June. We should put a health care bill on the President’s desk by July 4.

The President’s budget makes a historic down payment on health care reform. Over the next ten years, the President’s budget invests \$634 billion to reform our health care system.

Reforming health care 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. If you do not address them together, you will never really address any of them alone.

--more--

Costs grow too rapidly, because the system pays for volume, not quality. Quality indicators like lifespan and infant mortality remain low, because too many are left out of the system. Families don't get coverage, because health costs grow faster than wages. And without coverage, health insurance costs increase, because providers shift the cost of uncompensated care to their paying customers.

It's a vicious cycle. Each problem feeds on the others.

We need a comprehensive response.

Today, it's my pleasure to welcome the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Peter Orszag, to discuss the health care proposals in the President's Budget. Peter and I have met many times to talk about health care reform. He is one of the brightest and hardest-working folks in the administration.

Today, we will explore the President's proposals to help offset the cost of health care reform. And today, we will also explore any feasible proposals that the administration has left out.

Our goal is to offset the cost of health care reform. So we need to think creatively about proposals that will both improve quality and reduce the growth of health care costs in the ten-year budget window.

As Dr. Orszag has said: "The path to fiscal responsibility must run directly through health care." Our country's economic sustainability depends on health care reform. I look forward to working with the administration toward that goal.

So let us, at long last, deliver on the dream of reform that Teddy Roosevelt called for, nearly a century ago. Let us, at long last, lift the burden of health care costs on our economy and on the conscience of our nation. And let us, at long last, enact health care reform this year.

###