



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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Baucus Works to Increase Access to Health Care for High-Risk Groups *Sens. Baucus and Gregg Introduce Legislation to Extend Health Insurance Funding*

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senators Max Baucus and Judd Gregg have introduced legislation to direct more funding toward health care insurance assistance for people who could otherwise be forced to live without coverage. "The State High Risk Pool Funding Extension Act" would extend funding for existing high-risk pools and would reauthorize unspent start-up funds for states that have yet to create high-risk pools.

"For people who are self-employed or their employers don't offer health coverage, the individual insurance market can be out of reach," Baucus said. "A couple years back I was proud to play a leading role in creating the high-risk pool grant program that has helped thousands of people. Now I'm working to extend this program and see that even more people get the help they need."

The original high-risk pool grant program, which is set to expire at the end of FY 2004, was created under the Trade Assistance Act of 2002 and established two federal grant programs for high risk pools – one to help states initiate new pools, and one for the maintenance of existing pools. Under the Baucus-Gregg high-risk bill, \$15 million will be reauthorized for FY 2004 and 2005 to allow more states to establish new high risk pools. The bill also authorizes \$75 million for each of FY 2005-2009 to allow states to continue to operate programs already in effect. In order to receive this grant funding, state high-risk pools must meet minimum standards, including a limit on the premiums charged.

Health insurance pools for high-risk individuals currently exist in 30 states in the nation and are often the insurer of last resort for more than 172,000 people in those states. Without the existence of high risk pools, individuals would either have to live without health insurance or depend on public assistance. Baucus is committed to seeing assistance being extended throughout all 50 states.

"We found that a number of states needed a bit more time in order to start up a high-risk pool program and I'm pleased that the bill we've introduced will provide them with the time and funding they need to see that their state's population has increased access to affordable health insurance," Baucus. "And for those states that have successfully created a high-risk program, they've reported that extended funding will allow them to continue to help the people in the pool, as well as allow them to look at options such as lowering premiums and expanding enrollment. Access to affordable health insurance and high quality health care continues to be a top priority of mine and I look forward to moving our bill toward passage."

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