



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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**BAUCUS WELCOMES PRESIDENT'S FOCUS ON U.S. COMPETITIVENESS,
URGES MORE COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH, SAVINGS PROPOSALS**
*Finance Committee's top Democrat calls for efforts to expand health coverage,
fix mistakes in Medicare drug benefit implementation;
favors wider efforts on fiscal responsibility*

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Ranking Member on Senate Finance Committee, tonight responded to health and entitlement proposals in the President's State of the Union address. Baucus, who recently announced an upcoming legislative agenda to advance American competitiveness, also welcomed the President's remarks on maintaining America's global economic leadership, and called for the White House's support of his competitiveness legislation.

“Six days ago, I unveiled plans for a comprehensive legislative effort to bolster U.S. competitiveness from education to savings to innovation and research. I was extremely gratified tonight to hear that the President shares my view that there is not a moment to waste: we have to take bold steps as a nation, now, to preserve America's economic leadership and assure jobs and prosperity for American generations to come. As I introduce bills in the coming weeks to offer free tuition for math and science education, to break the stranglehold of our energy dependence, and to multiply America's innovative strength, I hope the President will evidence tonight's commitments with his strong support. We must work together to keep America first in the world, to reject protectionism and isolation in favor of forward thinking, for the sake of future generations.

“I was not as encouraged by other initiatives tonight. We need a renewed focus on cutting health care costs, and on helping uninsured Americans get the health coverage they need. But in that regard, the President's health care remarks were a lot of hat and not much cattle. He offered additional options for some Americans, but as broad health care solutions, they may not do much to control costs or expand coverage. In fact, Americans who need health coverage the most could pay more out of pocket under Health Savings Accounts plans.

“The President also utterly ignored the health care elephant in the room: the problems our seniors are having with the new Medicare drug benefit. He needed to promise those who need medicine that they'll get their medicine. He needed to outline solutions to end confusion and cost changes.

“I do welcome President Bush's acknowledgement of the need to address mounting government costs and the growing budget deficit. But we should not focus solely on programs like Social Security and Medicare. It's time to explore every nook and cranny for opportunities to bring the deficit down – to look at corporate tax loopholes, and to close the annual \$300 billion tax gap as well. I will gladly work to help restore fiscal responsibility to our budget. Fiscal responsibility is essential to our nation's global competitiveness as well, and I'll continue working to restore that vital principle to Federal policy.”