



For Immediate Release  
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**Floor Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)  
Regarding Workforce Issues in Health Care Reform**

Mr. President, our next big objective is health care reform.

We have a unique opportunity to move forward on health reform this year. Now we must act. We simply cannot afford to wait any longer to fix our nation's health care system.

We must work together to reduce health care costs, improve quality, and make coverage affordable for all Americans.

In the Finance Committee, we have held 13 hearings to prepare for health reform. Last week, we held a hearing on our nation's health care workforce. The hearing examined ways to address our current workforce needs. The hearing considered ways to prepare our medical providers for health care reform.

At our hearing, four experts in the field testified about current health care workforce shortages, especially in primary care and nursing. And the witnesses told us that we must address these health workforce needs to meaningfully reform our health system.

Dr. David Goodman, the Director of the Center for Health Policy Research, said: "The workforce we train today will shape, for good or bad, tomorrow's health system."

Dr. Goodman continued, "It will be hard to improve access, achieve better health outcomes and decrease health care expenditure growth rates unless we get workforce policy right."

I could not agree more.

Our efforts on health care reform are only as strong as our nation's health care providers — the nurses, doctors, and other professionals — who are on the front lines caring for patients.

Investing in our health care workforce is critical as we work to expand health insurance coverage to millions of currently uninsured Americans.

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During our hearing, Dr. Allan Goroll, a primary care doctor and professor at Harvard University, told us about the Massachusetts experience following the enactment of state health reform. Dr. Goroll said that some newly-insured people in Massachusetts are waiting up to two months to get a doctor's appointment.

That is simply unacceptable.

For our health care reform efforts to succeed, we must directly address these health workforce challenges.

It starts with primary care. Our current system greatly undervalues primary care. As a result, fewer students are going into the field.

A recent study found that only one in 50 medical students plans a career in primary care internal medicine. That's down from more than one in five in the early 1990s.

This trend is especially troubling, because it's clear that a strong primary care system is a key determinant of high quality, efficient medical care.

During our hearing, we learned that areas of the country with a high proportion of primary care doctors spend less money on health care. And patients there have the same or better outcomes.

We need to invest in our nation's primary care providers to help improve the quality of our medical care and to bring down health care costs.

Our workforce challenges extend beyond primary care. Our nation's hospitals continue to face a nursing shortage. Recent news reports tell of shortages of general surgeons and dentists in rural areas. Many parts of the country need more mental health practitioners. And the list could go on.

We need to tackle these challenges head on. We need to place our nation's health care workforce on sound footing. And we need to meet the medical needs of all Americans.

This is going to require a renewed focus on the way that we pay for and deliver health care. We must ensure our payment systems reward high quality medical care and encourage medical students to go into critical fields like primary care.

And we're going to need to take a hard look at our national workforce policies to make sure that our health care providers have the right training and skills to deliver excellent care.

This effort is vital for our health reform efforts to succeed. So let's get to work now.

Let us work together to strengthen our nation's health care workforce. Let us build a health care system that delivers high-quality medical care for everyone. And let us act now. Keep the margins in line by not indenting each paragraph.

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