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Montana Health Care Forum

Max S. Baucus

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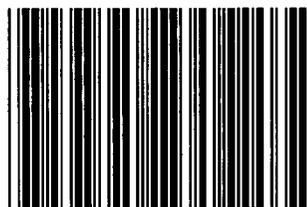
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BAUCUS

Montana Health Care Forum

Introduction

Hello everyone. This is Max.

I'd like to start with a big thanks for renewing my contract for the next six years. I still have 900,000 of the world's best bosses. It's an honor to continue representing our great state.

And it is a pleasure to speak to you today at the second Montana Health Care Forum. A lot of hard work has gone into organizing this conference.

In Montana and in Washington, there is growing consensus that our health care system needs fixing. You have all come together to consider ways to do this. I look forward to working with you on this tremendous project. I want to update you on some key goals, and what I've done so far.

Health Care Reform – Next Steps

Health care reform will involve tough choices. We all need to work together toward comprehensive, system wide reform. That means putting aside political differences and focusing on the big picture.

We must eliminate the problem of the uninsured. We must improve the quality of the care our people receive. And we must address the rising costs of health care so our businesses can compete.

The Senate Finance Committee has jurisdiction over a lot of the health care system. As Chairman, I have been doing a lot to prepare for health care reform.

First, last week, I unveiled my "Call to Action" – a Baucus plan for health care reform next year.

My plan addresses health coverage, cost and quality.

My plan will put our system on a better path. That means every Montanan and American who can't get health insurance today would be able to do so. It means we would pay for appropriate, quality care. And we would invest in prevention so fewer folks suffer from conditions like heart disease, cancer and diabetes. We'll spend all our country's health dollars more wisely and effectively.

This year, I've held nine Finance Committee hearings on health reform. Hearings are one of the best ways that I can educate Senators, staff, stakeholders, and myself on critical health issues. And on top of that, I hosted a day-long health summit in June.

I am also talking to my Colleagues — Democrats and Republicans — throughout the Senate and the House. I'm trying to get their thoughts on the issues that matter. One thing I've heard over and over is that they want everyone to work together. I agree.

What really matters to me is making sure that health care reform works for Montanans: my 900,000 bosses. You are always my top priority.

I have worked to bring your ideas and priorities for health care reform straight from Montana to Washington. And I will continue to do so.

In October, I held a Finance Committee Field Hearing at St. Pat's in Missoula to explore high health care costs and their impact on Montana businesses, health care providers, employees and families.

This year, I also held 12 listening sessions across the state to talk about topics like creating affordable health insurance options for small businesses. I heard from doctors and small rural hospitals that we need to change the way Medicare pays them.

I started that process in July with my successful Medicare bill, and overrode a Presidential veto to do it. But now we need to start thinking about bigger changes to improve our entire health care system.

My Call to Action on health care reform does just that. It provides good ideas of how to move forward. But there is a lot of work to do.

Getting this job done will take time. Everyone will need to come to the table: providers, insurers, employers, and consumers.

I hope you will join me in this effort. I look forward to receiving your input as we move ahead.

Together we can get the job done!