

1-11-2009

Commonwealth Fund Congressional Health Policy Conference

Max S. Baucus

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/baucus_speeches

Recommended Citation

Baucus, Max S., "Commonwealth Fund Congressional Health Policy Conference" (January 11, 2009). *Max S. Baucus Speeches*. 850. https://scholarworks.umt.edu/baucus_speeches/850

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives and Special Collections at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Max S. Baucus Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

Printing, Graphics & Direct Mail
Document Archiving
Indexing Form

Senator * or Department*: **BAUCUS**

Instructions:

Prepare one form for insertion at the beginning of each record series.

Prepare and insert additional forms at points that you want to index.

For example: at the beginning of a new folder, briefing book, topic, project, or date sequence.

Record Type*: **Speeches & Remarks**

MONTH/YEAR of Records*: **January-2009**

(Example: JANUARY-2003)

(1) Subject*: **Health**

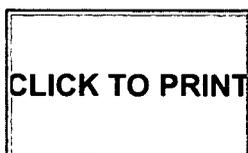
(select subject from controlled vocabulary, if your office has one)

(2) Subject*

DOCUMENT DATE*: **01/11/2009**

(Example: 01/12/1966)

* "required information"



Thank you for that kind introduction. And thanks to the Commonwealth Fund for all that you do. Thanks for making sure that the national debate on health care reform is informed. And thanks for making sure that health care stays at the top of the nation's agenda.

The 19th Century British philosopher Herbert Spencer wrote:

“The preservation of health is a duty.”

I believe that this Congress has a duty to reform health care.

The American people elected a new President and a newly empowered Congressional majority. We have a duty to deliver the change for which the people voted.

America is suffering from the most challenging economic crisis since the Great Depression. We have a duty to do all that we can to help rebuild the American economy.

Since the early 1990s, the ranks of the uninsured have grown by 7 million people. We have a duty to make sure that every American has coverage.

As Dartmouth's Jack Wennberg and others have demonstrated, survival, pain, and costs vary widely and irrationally from one place in America to another. We have a moral duty to ensure that every American can get quality health care.

In the last 8 years, average wages have increased only 20 percent. But the average cost of employer-sponsored health coverage has doubled. Premiums have tripled. Health spending has grown from 12 percent to 16 percent of the economy. We have a duty to control the growth of health care costs.

The cost of health care makes it harder for American companies to compete in the world. And the cost of health care makes it harder for small businesses to survive. We have a duty to help American businesses to deal with the health care challenge.

America spends more on health care than any other country. But by almost any measure, America's health care system provides worse care for patients than most other industrialized countries. We have a duty to make sure that we are getting our money's worth.

9 out of 10 people believe that the health system needs to be completely rebuilt or needs fundamental change. The opportunity is now. We have a duty to bring on that fundamental change. And we have a duty to enact it into law this year.

In the current economic crisis, our first duty is to pass legislation to spur economic recovery. And that legislation can take the first steps to address health care reform.

In this economic crisis, if states do not get additional Federal funding, they will cut Medicaid coverage. They will cut payments to providers, public health programs, and educational institutions. At least 17 states have made cuts that will affect low-income children's or families' eligibility for health insurance or reduce their access to health care services.

To help stave off more cuts, the economic recovery proposal that the Finance Committee will consider includes assistance to states through Medicaid.

The economic recovery package will also provide additional assistance for people struggling to maintain health care coverage through COBRA. And the economic recovery package will begin investing in health information technology and comparative effectiveness research.

Health care is a critical part of our economic recovery. By investing in health I.T. and comparative effectiveness research, we can create good new jobs, infuse dollars into our economy, and make a down-payment on health care reform.

Health I.T. and comparative effectiveness research are both essential to increasing the value that we get for our health care dollars. The sooner that we can invest in those priorities, the better it will be for the economy and for our health care reform effort.

Getting health care reform legislation enacted this year is my top priority. In preparation for this effort, the Finance Committee held 10 hearings on issues critical to the debate. We had a day-long health summit this past June.

**And I'm also spending time talking to my
Colleagues — Senators on the Finance Committee
and off the Committee, Democrats and
Republicans. I'm trying to get a sense of what's
important to them. And I'm trying to get their
thoughts on the issues that matter.**

**One thing I've heard over and over is the need
for a bipartisan effort. We've got to strive to get
80 votes for health reform in the Senate.**

**Our health care system is not sustainable in
its current form. Doing nothing is no longer an
option. Taking incremental steps in the face of so
many challenges no longer make sense.**

I'm going to need your help. I'm going to need your support to make the system better.

And so I am asking you to help me to create a "can-do" environment for health care reform. And I am asking you to evaluate every proposal based on whether it will make the system better, not worse.

Our collective focus should be on creating a high-quality health system in which every American has coverage. To accomplish that goal, everyone needs to evaluate proposals on whether the system as a whole will be better off. We cannot each evaluate proposals in our own little silos. The old ways will never achieve change.

Here are some of the bigger questions that we will face.

Should every American have health coverage — not merely access to coverage?

I believe very strongly that we must cover every American. I also believe that every American has a responsibility to be part of the system.

That brings me to the second big question. Should we hold every individual responsible for getting coverage?

I believe that it is impossible to get everyone covered without a requirement to obtain coverage. Before we can enact such a requirement, however, we have to give every American access to affordable, meaningful health coverage.

Making coverage affordable means taking a closer look at the individual insurance market. The individual insurance market does not work. I expect that the vast majority of folks in the room would agree with that statement.

I'm not naïve. I don't think that we'll get there overnight. Making our insurance markets work will take some time.

But we have a duty to try.

A third big question is: How do we reduce health care costs and health spending?

There are many ideas on the table. And they are interrelated.

I mentioned health I.T. and comparative effectiveness research. Other ideas include pay-for-performance, value-based purchasing, and chronic care management.

We need to make progress on all fronts.

These ideas have great potential to improve patient care, as well as to limit unnecessary or wasteful care.

Another big question we face is: Should we consider changes to the tax exclusion for employer-sponsored health benefits?

Our current tax code subsidizes employer-sponsored health coverage. Two-thirds of us receive health coverage through our job.

But there is no limit on how much coverage the government will subsidize. And the tax benefits accrue mostly to those who are better off.

I believe in maintaining the employer-based health system. So I don't favor eliminating the exclusion.

But we need to explore options that could limit the regressive nature of the current system. We should create incentives for more prudent purchasing of health care coverage. We should look for savings that we can use to help finance coverage for the uninsured. And we should try to do all of that at the same time.

These are just a few of the issues that we'll need to be address as part of a health care reform debate. We need to work together throughout the debate. We're all in this together.

My door is open. And I want to hear from you.

But come with a "can-do" spirit and an open mind.

I am privileged that the people of Montana have put me in a position to influence the debate on health reform. It is a road that we will all travel together.

It is our duty to do so. It is our moral obligation. And it may just turn out to be one of the most important things that we ever do. I will look forward to working with all of you in the coming months to see that it is.

And so, let us deliver the change for which the people voted. Let us do all that we can to help rebuild the American economy. And together, let us bring on fundamental change in health care in America.