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"Health Care Reform"

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Senator * or Department*: **BAUCUS**

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MONTH/YEAR of Records*: **January-2011**

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(1) Subject*: **Health Care Reform**

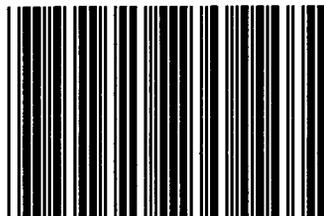
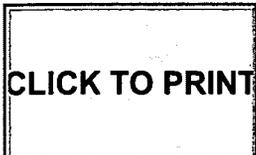
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(2) Subject* **none**

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(Example: 01/12/1966)

* "required information"



BAUCUS

Note: Ron Pollack of Families USA will introduce you.

Thank you so much, Ron, for that kind introduction. And thank you so much for your tireless work to pass health care reform. I know you poured so much of your heart and soul into that bill, as many of us did, and I just can't thank you enough for it. You are certainly a health care hero.

**Looking around the room today at all of you, I'm reminded of what Helen Keller once said:
"Alone we can do little; together we can do so much."**

When we started working toward reform, we all knew what our health care situation looked like.

One in six Americans was uninsured. Health care spending accounted for nearly 20 percent of our economy, and costs were rising.

I heard from countless Montanans and folks across the country about our broken system.

People like David Hutchins (HUTCH-ins) from Missoula. David's young son Elijah has leukemia and was born with down syndrome. David is in school, works part time, and doesn't have insurance from his employer.

Because of his pre-existing conditions, Elijah was left unable to get private coverage. And David had to worry every day if he would lose Medicaid coverage after graduation.

Problems like this existed all across our system. Too many families had to choose between saving for college and paying their health insurance premiums.

Too many small businesses had to drop coverage for employees because of rising costs.

And too many seniors with Medicare drug benefits had a gap in coverage that made prescriptions unaffordable.

But we knew the fight was going to be an uphill battle.

Health care reform has been a challenge since Teddy Roosevelt proposed it nearly a hundred years ago. Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Truman, Nixon and Clinton all tried and fell short.

And, frankly, there were so many times in the past two years that the goal before us felt impossible as well.

We worked hard in Washington. But without your tireless efforts, we never would have succeeded.

**You held rallies, you organized phone banks,
and you educated community members. You
worked tirelessly to dispel myths and spread
truth to your neighbors and friends.**

**This is truly one of the most important laws
of our lifetime. And it would not have been
possible without each of you.**

Thank you for your dedication.

The road to get here was certainly a long one. We started in the Finance Committee by hosting a series of more than a dozen hearings.

These hearings were designed to inform our committee about the issues. They were not partisan or ideological. They were simply informational.

We worked to remind everyone that we're all in this together. We came up with simple rules: suspend judgment and just keep listening to each other. Nothing was off the table.

We hosted a day-long health care summit at the Library of Congress. More than a dozen Senators and Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke attended. Many of my colleagues stayed all day. Senators of all stripes were engaged and listening.

In the fall of that year, just eight days after President Obama was elected to the White House, I released a white paper, outlining the key objectives of reform.

As we prepared the Finance Committee for comprehensive health reform, you prepared the American public to fight for a high quality health care system that would serve all Americans equally.

But the beginning of the 111th Congress presented other challenges. The economy was on the brink of the worst recession since the Great Depression, and needed immediate attention.

The Children's Health Insurance Program was about to expire. CHIP provides affordable health care coverage to millions of children. It needed to be reauthorized.

We passed a bipartisan bill in January that allowed the seven million kids already covered by CHIP – and four million more – to have access to affordable health care. That's coverage for eleven million children.

After trying so hard to reauthorize CHIP in 2007, it felt good to finally realize the goals of our bipartisan effort.

As soon as we completed work on CHIP, we moved on to economic recovery. In fact, the first day CHIP was being debated on the Senate floor, the Finance Committee convened a markup of the economic stimulus bill, which became known as American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The Recovery Act was tough to put together, and tough to get through the Senate.

And yet the hardest work of the 111th Congress had just begun.

As we got to work, I realized pretty quickly that this would be unlike any effort I'd ever been a part of before.

The Committee – and the entire Congress – faced huge issues to consider in reform.

Questions that had never been answered.

So we developed new ways to get information, to share information and to involve members and stakeholders in the process.

We held three roundtables. We invited a host of experts to come and share their ideas about reform.

One session analyzed innovations in how we deliver care to patients.

Another focused on how we make coverage more affordable and available.

And the third focused on ensuring reform would be fiscally responsible.

After investing time in the learning process, the Committee sat down to meet with staff and policy experts. We began walking through different options and making decisions.

These meetings gave Committee members an opportunity to learn about various proposals. They could talk openly about their priorities and concerns.

The Committee process was a lot of work, but it was important work. And while it was going on, the HELP Committee was hard at work convening its own markup.

We took pains to put together the best possible legislation, and to get the votes we needed to pass this landmark law.

And across the country, supporters like you were working hard too. Each of you should feel proud to have been a critical part of legislation that will change the way Americans think about health care.

Because of this law, families like David Hutchins (HUTCH-ins) and his son Elijah will not be discriminated against or denied coverage.

Because of our shared success, health care coverage will no longer be something that too few families can afford.

Because of this law, health care decisions will be made by doctors and patients, instead of insurance executives. A system of fair rules will replace decades of insurance company abuses.

Because of your advocacy, health care coverage will no longer be valued and paid for by the quantity of care. Instead, health care providers will be rewarded for providing high quality care, and consumers will benefit from greater value.

As we moved the bill to the Senate floor, I knew we'd be in for a battle. There were so many false rumors about the legislation. So many ridiculous accusations. And of course, strong feelings on both sides.

I knew the days would be long and the debates contentious. It reminded me of running marathons. I knew I just had to keep going. One foot in front of the other, one amendment at a time, and we would get there.

I know you all felt the same way. With your advertising and education campaigns, grass roots advocacy, and rapid response efforts. You, too, were working around the clock. Without your support, we would not have been able to endure and survive that fight.

It took hard work from so many of us in Congress, including my colleagues Tom Harkin and Chris Dodd. And my hat goes off to the hard work of Leader Reid who kept his focus like a laser on moving forward. And the bill we finally passed achieves our goals.

It ends insurance company abuses. It reduces the cost of health care. It modernizes our system while improving quality. And it provides affordable coverage to tens of millions of Americans.

We were proud to have passed a bill in the Senate, but we still faced significant challenges. We had lost our dear friend and colleague Senator Ted Kennedy. His passing was a huge loss for the Senate and for the nation. I always felt Senator Kennedy was watching us. And I know he would be proud of us today.

But Scott Brown – a Republican who campaigned to stop health care reform – won Ted’s seat. Suddenly, we no longer had the 60 votes in the Senate we needed to finish our collective work.

That may have been the hardest time during our entire journey. We knew we were so close. So close to passing legislation that had eluded Congress for generations. But there were still questions about whether we could actually get there.

We all knew that there were no easy paths forward. But we agreed the House would pass the Senate bill. And the Senate would make some improvements using the Budget Reconciliation process. After those decisions were made, we could finally see the finish line.

Putting together the reconciliation bill was difficult. But hammering it out meant we were poised to finally achieve what had been unattainable for the last century.

As we look back at all we were able to accomplish in 2009 and 2010, we must also look forward at all the work that remains in the years to come.

The threats to health reform are real. And we cannot sit idly by while opponents of reform try to undo our accomplishments, like CHIP, the Recovery Act, and health care reform.

In Congress, I'll be watching the implementation process to make sure that our objectives are met.

I'll be holding hearings and conducting oversight during each step of the process.

We'll also be watching our colleagues on the other side of the Capitol.

As we saw with their repeal vote, I fully expect the House to pass bills that will mislead Americans about what health reform does, and try to unravel it bit by bit.

**They won't stop with the vote for full repeal.
And they won't stop with a vote to simply repeal
the responsibility for individuals to hold health
insurance either.**

**They will try to repeal the new consumer
protections, the more affordable coverage, and
the modernizations to our system.**

**We have to be prepared from every angle.
We must always be mindful that we simply
cannot allow health reform to be undone.**

I hope you've taken a break, gone on a vacation and spent some time relaxing with friends and family, because we're going to need you now more than ever.

We need Americans to know about all of the good things in the new law.

We need them to know about the new consumer protections that give control back to patients and doctors.

Protections that prevent insurance companies from limiting the care patients can receive in a year, or even in a lifetime.

Protections that prevent insurance companies from spending unlimited premium dollars on bonuses and bureaucracy, instead of patient care.

We need Americans to know about the new marketplaces where small businesses and people without coverage can pool together with others and get a group discount. And we need them to know about the tax credits available to make this coverage affordable.

We need Americans to know about the new benefits for seniors that focus on preventing sickness instead of just treating it.

Benefits like free screenings for cancer, heart disease and other preventable illnesses.

And, benefits like a 50 percent discount on medications for seniors in the Medicare prescription drug coverage gap.

We need Americans to know the risks of repeal. And the risks of unraveling the law bit by bit.

The Affordable Care Act is a historic law. It reduces health care costs for American families and businesses. It reduces the federal deficit by more than a trillion dollars. And it modernizes the way we deliver health care, which will vastly improve the quality of care in our system.

The Affordable Care Act is something we should all be proud of because it is something we all created together.

I'm so proud to have been part of an effort to protect all Americans from insurance company abuses, to make health care affordable, and to bring our health care system into the 21st century.

And I'm so proud to have worked on it with all of you.

Thank you.