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BAUCUS TOUTS NEW MEDICARE PATIENT PROTECTIONS AT FINANCE HEARING

*Finance Chair holds hearing examining
ways health reform modernizes America's health care system*

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today applauded progress toward protecting patients and modernizing America's health care system at a hearing to examine the progress made by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) since Congress enacted the Affordable Care Act earlier this year. Baucus heard from CMS Administrator Don Berwick about the agency's efforts to protect the Medicare program from fraud, reduce duplicate care that wastes taxpayer dollars and ensure the life of the Medicare program is extended by more than a decade, a goal achieved by the Affordable Care Act. Dr. Berwick also discussed the new tools the law provides CMS to modernize America's health care system and provide better care, including policies to reduce preventable hospital readmissions and better coordinate care among doctors, particularly those working together to treat patients with chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

"Our new health care law provides the strongest patient protections in the history of the health care system," said Baucus. **"The law protects patients in Medicare from being readmitted to a hospital unnecessarily or from getting a preventable infection in a hospital. The law modernizes Medicare to improve efficiency and reduce waste, with advancements, such as electronic health records, that help doctors communicate and coordinate more effectively for their patients. Before health care reform, Medicare was set to go broke just six years from now, but with these new protections, the life of the program is extended for more than a decade longer. These improvements to the Medicare program are critical to protecting patients and I intend to continue a close review of their implementation to ensure it is successful."**

Baucus asked Berwick about CMS's progress toward making the Medicare and Medicaid programs safer for patients and saving taxpayer dollars. In addition to programs to reduce hospital readmissions and infections, the agency is using new tools from the Affordable Care Act to help doctors better coordinate and communicate, so they are better able to determine the best treatment for each patient. These new patient protections help reduce complications, illnesses and deaths that could be prevented. [A new study recently issued by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General](#) found that 27 percent of Medicare beneficiaries experienced adverse events in hospitals in 2008 that contributed to 180,000 deaths – almost half of which were preventable – and an estimated \$4.4 billion in wasteful spending.

Baucus received an update on new tools in the Affordable Care Act that help prevent and catch criminals committing Medicare fraud that wastes billions in taxpayer dollars each year. Berwick told Baucus and the Committee that the increased resources and new technology to fight fraud had already begun saving taxpayer dollars.

During the hearing, Baucus also discussed new benefits for seniors in health reform. He asked Berwick about the benefits of the new annual wellness visit that seniors will receive from Medicare. The visit ensures seniors have the opportunity to discuss concerns with their doctor, review tips for preventing illness and learn new ways to better manage chronic conditions like diabetes. Baucus also discussed new benefits for seniors in the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit, which provides coverage to help seniors afford their prescriptions. The Affordable Care Act eliminates a gap in that coverage during which seniors' medicines are not covered. Berwick told Baucus that two million seniors had already received checks to help cover the cost of their medicines this year alone. Next year, the cost of prescriptions in the coverage gap, often called the doughnut hole, will be reduced by 50 percent and that gap will close completely over the coming years. Baucus also discussed the new, free screenings seniors will receive as a result of the new law. Seniors will be able to receive preventive screenings like mammograms and colonoscopies without any co-pay, making it easier to catch illnesses before they become dangerous and costly to the system.

Baucus, who was a chief architect of the Affordable Care Act said, he would continue to keep a close eye on the implementation of the law to ensure it continues to protect seniors, reduce waste, lower costs and improve benefits for seniors.

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