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## **US Senate Finance Committee Convenes Historic National Health Care Reform Roundtable Discussions**

In a new phase of health policy development, on April 21, 2009 the Senate Finance Committee convened the first of a series of three “roundtable” discussions aimed at finalizing the general outlines of a national health care reform initiative.

In a statement on the purpose of the day’s discussions, which referenced an ambitious deadline for finishing major health reform legislation in June 2009, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) said:

“The Committee has spent a significant amount of time laying the groundwork for comprehensive health reform. In the past year, we’ve held a dozen hearings. We held a daylong health reform summit. Now, the time for action approaches. These roundtable discussions will preview many of the policies that the Committee will consider in its June markup.”

According to Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley, Ranking Republican on the Committee:

“A job this big and this important requires everyone to be working together. During the last year, the Finance Committee has held a series of hearings on health care reform. We have heard many witnesses tell us what’s wrong with the system and how they believe health care delivery could be improved. Indeed, some health care providers deliver higher quality care at a lower cost. We want to learn from people who are doing things well, take the best of the ideas, and apply them where we can. Each and every one of you plays an important role in the health care system. If we are to succeed in making real changes that benefit millions of Americans, all of us are going to have to listen and consider many ideas. Now is the time for innovation and reform. I urge you to roll up your sleeves and help us figure out how to make these proposals work. Everyone will have to be willing to recognize strengths, improve upon weaknesses, and find common ground.”

As Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Sen. Baucus presided over the April 21<sup>st</sup> roundtable, the first of three targeted discussions to address the major legislative challenges that health care reform will face. The roundtable was attended by the complete Finance Committee as well as 13 leaders from the health care industry.

“These roundtables are where the rubber meets the road,” Sen. Baucus said. “Our economy is in crisis, and health care reform is the only way we are going to get it back on track. What we hammer out at these roundtables is going to be the cornerstone of the legislation that we pass in coming months.”

The topic for the April 21st roundtable was cost and quality improvements. “Regrettably, the scheduled witnesses did not venture into major reform ideas, but spoke from the perspective of the current, failing system,” said Dr. Michael McLean, Co-Chair of ICA’s Legislative Committee. “We saw little sign of the bold, indeed, revolutionary changes that must be made if the system is to be saved.”

In a written statement submitted by ICA for the hearing record, ICA told Committee Members:

“Urgent but responsible action is needed to dramatically shift the course of healthcare in the United States. Such action will need to cut across many of the basic assumptions about health services, funding and what is and is not essential care. It is vital, however, that piecemeal, cosmetic steps that do not crack the fatal shortcomings of the current system not be taken as meaningful solutions. It is equally vital that all elements in the equation, from providers to patients to policy makers, all recognize that each segment will need to assume new responsibility and rise up to a profound new level of accountability.

- Reform must begin with a new emphasis on competition, patient choice and cost-effectiveness. Decision makers should seek to affirm and expand patient freedoms to allow for full direct access to the providers and health care pathways of their choice.
- Arbitrary anti-competitive barriers, such as those that have historically limited patient access to doctors of chiropractic and other care pathways, only serve to drive up costs, limit patient choice and erode the quality and timeliness of care by steering patients to more expensive hospital, surgical and pharmaceutical care.
- New information and educational efforts, patient choice and maximum disclosure on safety and effectiveness of providers, procedures, care pathways and institutions must characterize a reformed health care system.
- There must be a profound new commitment to patient safety and to both provider and patient accountability. Providers must be challenged to reduce the errors that currently cost the system upwards of 17 percent of total expenditures.
- At the same time, individuals and families must be mobilized, and both challenged and empowered to play a new and serious quality control function in health care delivery, prevention, healthy lifestyle choices and sound, informed health care decision-making.
- Public policies being pioneered by Medicare to refuse to pay for medical accidents, the so-called “never events” must be expanded and extended to all public health care funding and delivery programs.
- Fraud and criminal theft in health care must become a top law enforcement priority, in which all partners in health care are mobilized, including patients and their families.”

During the roundtable, Sen. Baucus also laid out his schedule for health care reform:

- May 5: Roundtable Discussion #2 on expanding health care to all Americans
- May 14: Roundtable Discussion #3 on financing health care reform
- June: Senate Finance Committee will begin to mark up legislation

“This new and aggressive timetable must be an urgent call to action to the entire chiropractic profession and the patients we serve. ICA is working with its United States membership, state associations and a united chiropractic profession through the Chiropractic Summit to build the strongest chiropractic advocacy effort,” Dr. McLean said. “There will be a great and historic opportunity for chiropractic at the Fifth Chiropractic Summit scheduled for Washington, DC on May 14, 2009. We look forward to exciting efforts at that day’s proceedings and beyond.”

ICA has pioneered a revolutionary grass-roots DC and patient mobilization program, <http://www.adjustthevote.org/>. “In this age of profound crisis in national health care, to stand on the sidelines is to accept defeat,” said Dr. McLean. “I urge all who are committed to a strong future for chiropractic to go on-line TODAY and sign up as an [AdjustTheVote](#) participant, volunteer as a Congressional District Director, and dedicate the coming days to making sure everyone you know does the same, as numbers can mean political power for chiropractic.

Watch ICA’s website at [www.chiropractic.org](http://www.chiropractic.org) for ongoing reports on vital national health reform activities and developments.

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