

SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE

KENT CONRAD, CHAIRMAN

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STATEMENT BY SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN KENT CONRAD (D-ND) ON PASSAGE OF RECONCILIATION HEALTH CARE “FIXER” BILL

“The reconciliation ‘fixer’ bill that has now passed the Senate will add further deficit reduction to the comprehensive health care reform President Obama signed into law earlier this week. The combined effect of health reform and the reconciliation bill will be to reduce the deficit by \$143 billion over the first ten years and by about \$1.3 trillion over the second ten years. And the two measures are expected to continue reducing the deficit on into the future.

“This reconciliation bill also improves the affordability of health care, closes the gap in Medicare drug coverage known as the ‘donut hole,’ and takes additional steps to crack down on waste, fraud, and abuse in health care. The minor education-related provisions that were struck from the bill for parliamentary reasons do not change the measure in any substantive way. And the House is expected to pass the bill again shortly and send it to the President’s desk.

“Health care reform will help millions of American workers and businesses. It will mean insurers will no longer be able to deny coverage because of pre-existing conditions. Small businesses will get tax credits to help buy coverage for their workers. Young people will be able to stay on their parents’ health insurance until age 26. Workers will be able to change jobs without fear of losing health coverage. Seniors will get preventive services without co-payments. And it will mean premiums for the same level of coverage will be lower than they would have been without reform.

“Despite what some contend, health care reform was hardly a partisan effort. The truth is the final legislation includes many Republican ideas. The basic structure of the plan, which builds off the existing employer-based system, emerged from the so-called Group of Six bipartisan meetings, which I took part in last year. That group met more than 60 times. It was a good faith effort to reach a bipartisan agreement, and most of the ideas from that group have been incorporated into the health reform that is now law. Other Republican proposals were added during consideration in Committee and on the floor. Some health care experts have noted that the legislation actually resembles the Republican alternative to the Clinton health reform plan offered in the early 1990’s.

“This is not the end of the story for health care reform. We will need to do more to bring down health costs and make further changes over time. But this health reform effort represents a critical step in the right direction. It will make an important contribution to improving the nation’s fiscal condition and improving our health care system.”

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