

**Transcript of Closing Remarks by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND)
at Senate Finance Committee Markup of Baucus Health Reform Plan
October 13, 2009**

First of all, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your extraordinary leadership and dedication for well over a year on the question of health care reform. In my 23 years in the Senate, no chairman has made a more concerted effort to address the policy concerns of the nation or to make a more determined effort to be fully bipartisan in the deliberations. I think members on both sides of the aisle, even those that disagree with the outcome, would have to say, Mr. Chairman, you have been extraordinarily fair, and I thank you for it.

We are in a circumstance as a country where doing nothing is not an option. We are already spending one in every six dollars in this economy on health care. If we fail to act, very quickly, we will be spending one in every three dollars in this economy on health care. That is completely unsustainable.

As a nation, we are also faced with a federal debt that is growing out of control. Again, if we fail and do nothing, if we stay on the current trend line, we will reach a debt in 2050 of approximately 400 percent of our gross domestic product. No one believes that that is a sustainable course.

In addition, we see 46 million people uninsured today. If we fail to act, in the next decade, there will be 54 million people uninsured, and tens of millions more that will lack quality health care coverage.

If we look at this plan and the Congressional Budget Office scoring, which is our objective, independent score keeper, they tell us that this bill, over the first ten years, will reduce the deficit by \$81 billion.

And over the longer term, the Congressional Budget Office has said this: "CBO expects that the proposal, if enacted, would reduce federal budget deficits over the ensuing decade [beyond 2019] relative to those projected under current law – with a total effect during that decade that is in a broad range between one-quarter and one-half percent of GDP."

GDP during that period is forecasted to be \$260 trillion. So a reduction of one-quarter to one-half of one percent over that period would be \$650 billion to \$1.3 trillion.

Further, the Finance Committee plan meets key health reform benchmarks. As I have indicated, it is fully paid for. It bends the long-term cost curve in the right way. It expands coverage to 94 percent of the American people. It contains major insurance market reforms. And it contains important delivery system reforms.

It promotes choice in competition. This measure, if enacted, would prohibit insurers from denying or rescinding coverage on the basis of pre-existing conditions. It bans insurers from annual or lifetime caps on health benefits. It prevents insurers from charging more based on health status. It creates non-profit cooperatives to compete with for-profit insurance companies.

And the Finance plan improves the quality of care. It covers preventive services. It provides incentives for healthy lifestyles. It includes critical and important delivery system reforms

encouraging quality over quantity. And it promotes the adoption of best practices using comparative effectiveness research so doctors and patients can evaluate what works best for them.

Finally, there are things that it does not do. There is no government-run health care here. There are co-ops that would be member operated and oriented. There are no Medicare benefit cuts for seniors. There is no coverage for those who are here illegally. There are none of the rumored “death panels.” And there is no expansion of federal funding for abortion services.

Mr. Chairman, again, I want to thank you and your staff for your very diligent and important work.