

# American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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## Statement by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney on Baucus Health Care Report November 12, 2008

Today's release of a health care report by the chair of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Max Baucus, is a giant step towards the comprehensive health reform that Americans so badly want and need.

Chairman Baucus' paper constitutes a most welcome and constructive contribution to the cause of achieving a high-performing health care system that would guarantee affordable, quality coverage to all. He has rightly sounded the urgent plea to get comprehensive reform done early in the next Congress and recognizes that the failure to act has dire and unacceptable consequences for working families, businesses and our national economy.

There is much to like in the paper released today, starting with the framing of comprehensive reform as essential to fixing our systemic economic problems. His call for a "high-performing health care system (that) would guarantee all Americans affordable, quality coverage no matter their age, health status or medical history" represents just the kind of leadership that voters were seeking last week.

Many of the specific proposals are laudable, including a Medicare buy-in for 55 to 64 year olds, a public plan option to compete with private plan options in a health insurance exchange, subsidies to make coverage affordable and a requirement that all but small businesses either offer coverage to their workers or pay into a fund to cover the uninsured.

One area where we have concerns, targeted reform of the tax code for those who have employer-sponsored coverage, is considered with the appropriate caution against undermining the coverage that more than half of all Americans now have. Employer-sponsored coverage is largely preferred by workers not because of this tax treatment, as economists may suggest, but because it is the most stable source of affordable coverage for most Americans and is the best, natural pooling mechanism available in our fractured health care system.

We look forward to the debate and hard work to come in this critical effort and we stand ready to work with Senator Baucus, all of Congress and our next President to finally achieve the reforms needed to guarantee high-quality, affordable coverage to all Americans.

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