



For Immediate Release
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**BAUCUS, GRASSLEY WIN PASSAGE OF MEASURE
TO PROTECT RURAL HEALTH CARE CLINICS**

*Finance leaders' provision to protect certification of rural clinics
passes in Health Care Safety Net Act*

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Ranking Member Chuck Grassley (R- Iowa) have won passage of a provision that will protect rural clinics from the risk of closing. Baucus and Grassley included the measure in the Health Care Safety Net Act, which passed with unanimous consent in the Senate Wednesday evening, and is expected to pass the House of Representatives soon. The Senators' provision would change the timeframe for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to certify rural health clinics from every three years to every four years. This change would ensure that the timeframe for CMS designation of these critical facilities is consistent with that used by the Health Resources and Services Administration in determining what areas of the country are in need of safety-net rural health clinics. The Senators said today that without this change, clinics that are desperately needed in rural areas could lose their certification and risk closing simply as a result of uncoordinated timing.

“Clinics are certified as Rural Health Care Centers because they are the only place within miles of a community where people can receive the medical care they need,” said Baucus. **“I will not stand by while Montanans and rural Americans across this country lose access to doctors and clinics because of an illogical CMS certification policy. Rural clinics are vital to the people living in rural communities and the law we passed today ensures that these centers are protected.”**

“Rural health clinics are often the only health care option for people in rural communities,” Grassley said. **“That’s especially true with high fuel costs that make it harder to travel long distances to cities for health care. This simple change will fix an administrative inconsistency and help rural clinics keep their doors open for patients in Iowa and other rural states.”**

Baucus and Grassley first became concerned about risk to rural health care centers when CMS issued a rule on June 27, 2008, that would change many of the existing requirements for rural health clinics and add new requirements for recertification. On August 22, 2008, the Senators sent a letter to Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt expressing concern about the risks to rural clinics that these changes would impose. The Senators requested more time for rural clinics to provide feedback on how the rule would affect them and their ability to provide care in rural areas. However, CMS closed the comment period without extending time for comment.

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Baucus and Grassley thanked Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chairman Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Ranking Member Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) for including the provision in the Health Care Safety Net Act, and noted that the Finance Committee will maintain jurisdiction over the programs included in the measure.

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