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CONTACT: Anthony Coley/Melissa Wagoner
(202) 224-2633

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY AT THE NOMINATION
HEARING FOR HHS- DESIGNATE TOM DASCHLE**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

It is an honor to welcome our members to our first hearing of the new Congress.

I particularly welcome our very special witness today – a valued friend and former colleague, Tom Daschle.

Tom Daschle is a leader of great integrity and strong dedication. He has served his nation with distinction, both in uniform and in the Senate.

He has admirers all across the country and on both sides of the aisle.

I commend President-elect Obama for selecting such an extraordinary nominee to lead the nation's health care agenda.

Tom Daschle understands the urgency and the challenges of health reform.

He knows that Americans feel the heavy weight of rising costs.

He knows that families are afraid that they will lose their health insurance. And he knows that 46 million Americans do not have health insurance at all.

Reform is urgently needed and Tom Daschle is just the person for the job. In considering health reform, the fundamental question before us was once expressed in words far more eloquent than my own: "Will we honor the uniquely American ideal that we are responsible for passing this country on to a generation in the future that is better?"

"Or will we forfeit the promise of the future for the reward of the moment?" Those are not my words. They are the words of an extraordinary Senate Leader as he said farewell to the Senate four years ago.

We must answer that question by taking action now to provide affordable and quality health care for all Americans.

Senator Daschle, welcome to our committee. And I look forward to your early confirmation as our next Secretary of Health and Human Services.

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