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May 29, 2008

## ***CARDIN, COLLINS INTRODUCE ORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE***

*Creates first inventory of federal dental health programs*

Washington, DC – U.S. Senators **Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD)** and **Susan M. Collins (R-ME)** announced they have introduced bipartisan legislation to identify and coordinate federal programs that combat dental disease and improve access to oral healthcare. The Cardin-Collins ***Oral Health Initiative Act of 2008*** would draw upon the resources across the Department of Health and Human Services to maximize the impact of existing oral health programs and policies, and – for the first time – identify duplicative or overlapping programs, evaluate the adequacy of federal support for state-run programs, identify opportunities for new programs, and make recommendations for spending related to oral healthcare. Special attention will be given to identify prevention and treatment of dental disease in low-income and high-risk populations.

“This is not just about dental care. I believe this is a question of whether we are truly committed to improving the overall health of our children and all Americans,” said **Senator Cardin**. “If we can get a clear picture of what resources are available, and what is working, we can direct resources to individuals most in need without escalating costs.”

“Too many Americans today lack access to quality dental care. I am pleased to join Senator Cardin in introducing the ***Oral Health Initiative Act***, which will provide a more coordinated approach on the part of the Department of Health and Human Services to combat dental disease and improve oral health care,” said **Senator Collins**.

Medical researchers have discovered the important linkage between plaque and heart disease; that chewing stimulates brain cell growth; and that gum disease can signal diabetes, liver ailments and hormone imbalances. They have learned the vital connection between oral research and advanced treatments like gene therapy, which can help patients with chronic renal failure. They determined that a pregnant woman who has periodontal disease can be as much as seven times more likely to give birth to a premature or low-birth weight baby.

According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, dental decay is the most common chronic childhood disease in the United States. It affects one in five children aged 2 to 4, half of those aged 6 to 8, and nearly three-fifths of fifteen year olds.

“It is our hope that together, the working group and advisory panel will recommend meaningful ways to repair or, really, rebuild the dental safety net that is so shamefully and needlessly failing too many vulnerable Americans,” **American Dental Association President Mark J. Feldman, DMD** said in a statement of support for the bill. The Cardin-Collins ***Oral Health Initiative Act of 2008*** has been endorsed by the American Dental Association, American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, American Dental Education Association, Academy of General Dentistry, Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors, Children’s Dental Health Project, and the Medicaid/SCHIP Dental Association.

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