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## CARDIN PRAISES WHITE HOUSE FORUM ON HEALTH REFORM

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), a member of the Senate Budget Committee and long-time advocate for universal health care, lauded President Obama today for making comprehensive health care reform a priority for the opening days of his administration, recognizing the impact it has on every American.

**“I applaud President Obama for keeping his promise to hold an open debate on health care reform with the American public. He has put forward an honest and responsible budget that will enable us to confront the difficult challenges our nation faces, particularly health care, which is a major burden on individual families, businesses, and our whole economy. President Obama’s budget provides a down-payment on comprehensive health care reform. I urge him to use the current momentum for change to develop a system that is universal, expands preventive and oral health care, includes fair pricing for prescription medicines, and addresses the long-term needs of our seniors.**

“We are the richest nation in the world, yet more than 47 million of our citizens are without health coverage. The rising number of uninsured Americans affects all of us through higher medical costs, higher premiums, and worse outcomes. **Health coverage must be universal** with low-cost, quality options for those who cannot afford or do not have access to private insurance; it must give small businesses an affordable way to cover their employees. My bill, the *Universal Health Coverage Act* (S. 1899), introduced in the last Congress, creates a structure that would maintain the current employer-based system and protect government-sponsored health programs.

“Successful health care reform requires an emphasis on **preventive care**. We can save lives, improve quality of life, and reduce costs through early interventions rather than waiting for serious ailments to develop that require expensive treatments. Medicare has shown the effectiveness of this approach. Legislation I authored last Congress, eliminated the deductible for the initial physical examination, which includes preventive screenings for diseases like breast cancer, colon cancer, and glaucoma. We gave the Secretary of Health and Human Services the authority to expand the list of expanded services. Studies had shown that even small deductibles proved an impediment to life-saving tests like mammography. By eliminating the deductible, we opened the door to early detection.

“I’ve also joined with Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) in sponsoring the *Access for All Americans Act* (S. 486), which would quadruple the number of Federally Qualified Health Centers across the country. Overall medical expenses for health center patients are 41 percent lower than for

patients who receive care elsewhere. By emphasizing preventive care, expanding access, and reducing the burden on emergency rooms, community health centers are estimated to reduce health care spending in the United States by between \$10 and \$18 billion annually.

“**Quality oral health care** must be included in any health care program. The link between good oral health and good overall health is scientifically proven. In Maryland, as we mark the second anniversary of the tragic death of 12-year old Deamonte Driver, who’s life could have been saved with an \$80 tooth extraction, we are reminded how much the lack of access to dental care can cost.

“The very first bill I introduced after being sworn in as a United States Senator was the *Preserving Medicare for All Act of 2007*. This legislation would have allowed the federal government to **negotiate the price of prescription drugs under Medicare**, which would bring down the cost for millions of seniors. It is unconscionable that we continue to tie the hands of the federal government, allowing pharmaceutical companies to charge U.S. consumers and taxpayers much more than consumers in other countries.

“As our population grows and grows older, comprehensive reform must address the increased need for **long-term care**. We must have more options – affordable options – for our seniors without adding to the financial burden of our states.

“**I whole-heartedly agree with President Obama that ‘the status quo is one option that is not on the table’ for health care reform.** More than half of families have cut back their spending on health care due to skyrocketing costs and nearly 14,000 are losing their health coverage every day during our current economic crisis. In 2008, half of all people filing for home foreclosure cited medical problems as a cause. We have a responsibility to act for the health of our citizens and the health of our economy. We must act now.”

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