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SEBELIUS, CORKER, HOYER, NELSON AND BAYH ADDRESS 2010 FAH ANNUAL PUBLIC POLICY CONFERENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. – HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, Sen. Bob Corker (R-TN), House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD), Sen. Ben Nelson (D-NE) and Sen. Evan Bayh (D-IN) today addressed the plenary session of the 2010 annual public policy conference of the Federation of American Hospitals.

Hospital leaders are health care leaders, both with health reform and in developing innovative strategies for better care at lower cost, remarked HHS Secretary Sebelius. Hospitals know the cost of delaying health reform, and “your leaders have seen the connection between quality and cost,” she observed. She also thanked the FAH and its members for being advocates for fixing the health system, adding that the FAH has “great credibility” when speaking out for health reform.

Sen. Corker thanked FAH members for their innovations to health care and said that there was “80 percent agreement” among Democrats and Republicans at the onset of the health reform debate. He also said that the debate on health reform has increased partisanship on many other issues, and urged FAH members to work with Members of Congress and the Administration toward moving beyond partisanship.

The FAH has been “at the forefront of reform,” remarked House Majority Leader Hoyer, adding that “your continuing support is vital” and “your counsel continues to be sought.” Health care costs, he said, can be contained in part through competition, by demanding that insurers justify their premium increases, and preventing insurers from “discriminating” based upon health status. Health reform represents the difference between America restoring its fiscal health or sinking further into debt, he added.

Regarding health reform, Sen. Nelson noted that he “resolutely” opposes including a public option as well as a national insurance exchange. He also opposes starting over, which he equates to doing

nothing, which would cause hospital costs to continue to rise, federal dollars available for health care to shrink, and increase the number of uninsured people in the U.S. Furthermore, without health reform, health care spending as a percentage of gross domestic product, currently near 18 percent, will grow to 34 percent in three decades, he noted.

Sen. Bayh, who announced recently that he would not seek re-election, observed that our political system is stuck and that “our politics have become too tribal.” He expressed concern that the political system is increasingly unable to deal with the fiscal challenges affecting the nation, which has implications for entitlement programs, such as Medicare, he noted.

In a related matter, during its meeting today, the FAH Board of Directors formally expressed its concern regarding physician payment reductions that will occur absent Congressional action, and urged appropriate payment levels for physicians under Medicare.

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The Federation of American Hospitals is the national representative of investor-owned or managed hospitals and health systems. Our members include general community and teaching hospitals in urban and rural areas as well as rehabilitation, long-term, cancer and psychiatric hospitals.