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Montana PTA (Parent Teacher Association) Convention

Max S. Baucus

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Remarks of Senator Max Baucus  
 to Montana PTA Convention  
 Missoula, Montana  

April 25, 1997

Hello everyone. It is an honor to be speaking to you today. I'd like to thank Jean Curtiss, Cathy Day and Tori Matthews for their hard work on behalf of Montana's children.

I hope that your conference is going well and that you are taking some time to enjoy all that Missoula has to offer.

If you have a chance to get outside, I recommend going for a hike on Mount Sentinel, or maybe taking a walk along Rattlesnake Creek in Greenough Park -- right around where I used to live. You won't regret it.

And while you hike or stroll -- if you're like me -- you will undoubtedly be reminded how lucky we are to live in Montana. We enjoy a way of life that most people in our country can only dream of having.

MONTANA'S DEDICATION TO EDUCATION

Yet, despite her natural beauty, Montana's most precious resource is her people. And like any other treasure, we are responsible for its care. That is why it is our duty to make sure that our children receive the best education possible.

Even before Montana officially became a territory, education was a high priority. The very first school sprang up in 1861 just south of here in the Bitterroot. Public education came around a few years later in 1865. And ever since then, Montana has provided the best education possible for our children.

And that tradition continues today. In national tests last year, Montana's eighth grade math scores ranked fifth among the fifty states. In addition, our students' ACT and SAT scores are not only significantly higher than the national average, they are higher than they were five years ago.

These achievements don't happen by accident. There are many good reasons our schools are some of the best in the country.

First of all, local school districts are committed to challenging academic standards and promoting innovative curricula. Second, we have teachers who are dedicated to teaching our kids the skills they will need to become well-educated and responsible adults. And third, our parents play an active role in the lives of their children.

I was reminded of Montana's firm commitment to education last
year when Malta's high school was gutted by fire. I took a day to join the community in their efforts to rebuild. Everybody in town joined in -- moving equipment, cleaning bricks and rebuilding. It is folks like those in Malta -- and folks like you -- who are making the difference.

But the struggle to remain at the top is only becoming more competitive.

THE NEED FOR TECHNOLOGY IN SCHOOLS

By the year 2000, 60% of all jobs in the nation will require skills in computer and Internet use. Make no mistake, there will be a tremendous rift between those children who are able to use this technology and those who cannot.

If Montana’s children are not ready to meet future challenges head-on, they will be left behind. And that is why the need to teach our children to use computers and the Internet is greater than ever.

WE ALL CAN PLAY A PART

In this struggle, we all have a part to play. The responsibility falls on every one of us.

Last year President Clinton issued an executive order directing federal agencies to donate their excess computer equipment to local schools that need them. I took the President up on his offer.

About a month ago, I acquired 163 computers from a Mineral Management Service office in Denver. The folks at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls offered to upgrade the computers. Then Ray Kuntz, CEO of Watkins-Shepard trucking in Helena, sent the computers to schools where they were desperately needed. And Hewlett-Packard helped defray the costs.

But that’s only a start. There are many ways you can make a difference. Donate time to provide technical support for schools upgrading or maintaining computers. Get involved with the Montana Net Day project whose goal is to wire all Montana’s schools for Internet access. I did some work on the school in Charlo last weekend. It was very rewarding.

Or maybe you have an old computer gathering dust because the technology is a little dated. Give it to a local school where they could put that computer to good use. The list goes on.

CONCLUSION
We are truly blessed to be a part of this time in our country's history. The opportunities are endless. And we are poised to make those opportunities a reality for all Montana's children.

It is up to us to decide what kind of future our children will have. I challenge you all to take an active role in shaping that future.

Again, thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. Enjoy the rest of your conference.