

6-21-1999

Montana Behavioral Initiative

Max S. Baucus

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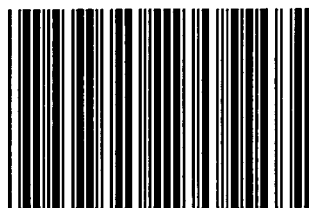
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BAUCUS

Montana Behavioral Initiative Remarks

U.S. Senator Max Baucus

June 21, 1999

Bozeman

Thank you, Nancy. I appreciate that kind introduction. I applaud your office for sponsoring this program, and the hard work of Joe Furshong, who coordinates the Montana Behavioral Initiative.

It's good to be here in Bozeman today, spending time with you to talk about education and violence in our schools.

And, I welcome Secretary Riley to Montana. He didn't hesitate to say yes when I invited him. He has left an indelible impression on our educational system, and I am so pleased that he is with us here today.

First, on behalf of a grateful state, let me thank all of you here who work so hard to improve education in Montana. You truly make a difference to our kids, families, communities, and future.

We can all agree that the future of our state is directly tied to the future of our education system.

We have no challenge more important than making sure that our kids get a quality education to prepare them for the world of tomorrow.

This education can only take place in a safe environment. We need to meet this challenge together -- with courage, creativity, and cooperation.

The Montana Behavioral Initiative certainly does its part by working to stop youth violence before it starts. MBI's unique approach enables communities to work together to create public school environments where kids can thrive.

And where all kids are accepted and encouraged regardless of individual differences or disabilities.

When kids are accepted and take responsibility for themselves, their studies, and their own actions, they succeed, and society as a whole is strengthened.

This is a great program. And you're all doing a great job addressing a very serious problem.

The recent tragedies in Colorado and Georgia make it painfully clear how serious the problem of youth violence is in our society.

These tragedies hit close to home for us.

Montanans will never forget Jeremy Bullock and what happened in Butte on April 12, 1994. Jeremy was age 11. He and his twin brother, Joshua, left for school together as they always did.

But Jeremy didn't come home from school that day. He was shot and killed on the playground, leaving a family and a community forever changed.

That day and ever since, folks in Butte and all over the state have grieved as the Littleton community is grieving now.

And for good reason -- when we send our kids to school, we expect them to learn, not to witness violence and death. Incidents like these make us feel as if society's fabric is ripping apart at the seams.

Since Columbine, I have had the opportunity to talk with school kids and parents from across Montana.

What impresses me most is that folks everywhere - even our children - recognize that individual responsibility is key to preventing tragedies like Littleton.

Today's youth know that they must take responsibility for their own actions.

Parents know that they need to take greater responsibility for their kids. And schools and local governments know that they need to take responsibility for the safety of our classrooms and our communities.

Individual responsibility is the key to addressing this problem. But there is a role for the Federal Government, too.

The government needs to do its part by providing local communities -- schools, parents, teachers and children -- with the tools to effectively address this problem at the local level.

Earlier this year, I released an education plan to do just that. To provide the tools to educate our kids for tomorrow's jobs, provide classrooms equipped for the 21st century, and improve access to higher education for every Montanan.

This plan aims to bring the promise of a world class education to every Montanan.

I called this plan "the Corps of Discovery" after Lewis and Clark's epic journey.

As Lewis and Clark set out to map a new territory, we are about to set out to map a new century.

A new century of a global marketplace, information technology that connects us to the entire world, and a New Economy where innovation is the engine of prosperity.

Today, we need a new Corps of Discovery, a renewed commitment to education and to expanding the frontiers of knowledge -- a commitment that will enable our children to compete in tomorrow's economy and that will attract high-paying jobs to our state.

The four initiatives of my Corps of Discovery are:

- Educating our kids for the jobs of tomorrow
- Improving higher education for Montana families
- Maintaining local control over education decisions
- And giving our kids a better learning environment.

The Corps of Discovery starts with preparing our kids for the jobs of tomorrow. That means connecting them to the endless possibilities technology has to offer.

The Internet holds the promise of giving every child in every small town in Montana the access to the same universe of knowledge.

Imagine a young boy in Columbia Falls who can read the great books in the Library of Congress. A young girl in Hamilton who can look at every painting in the National Gallery of Art.

We can make their horizons so large that the skies of the Great Plains will seem cramped in comparison.

That's why I'm fighting for the "e-rate" – which gives deep discounts on Internet access to Montana's schools.

And that's why I'm pushing for tax credits to encourage businesses to donate new computers to our schools. And that's also why each week I have an Internet chat with school kids in Montana – to show them directly the promise of this new technology.

And the "Corps of Discovery" seeks improved access to higher education for all Montanans. Because in an age when technology and innovation leap past science fiction, a high school diploma just isn't enough.

The "Corps of Discovery" plan includes legislation to increase the amount of the Hope Scholarship and to extend the Lifetime Learning Credit to include employer contributions.

And it includes my commitment to push to fully fund Pell Grant and student loan programs -- to throw open the doors of college to every student who needs our help.

But most important to hard working Montanans, and to students right here in Bozeman and across our state, the "Corps of Discovery" plan makes every cent of interest on student loans tax deductible.

Hard working graduates paying off their loans should not have to worry about another bill from the IRS.

The Corps of Discovery Plan also lays out a series of initiatives to ensure that control of our schools stays at the local level. I'm pleased to announce today that we've already taken a giant leap forward to making that happen.

Earlier this year, the President signed into law a bill that I co-sponsored and that Secretary Riley supported -- the Education Flexibility Act.

"Ed-Flex" lifts burdensome federal regulations placed on public education without taking away much-needed federal funding. I firmly believe that this bill will give teachers and parents the flexibility they need to better educate our children for tomorrow's challenges.

21st Century classrooms. Access to higher education. Preserving local control over education decisions. These are all top priorities.

But you know, kids can't learn if they don't feel safe. That's why the Corps of Discovery also focuses on giving our kids a better learning environment.

I know that Secretary Riley agrees with me when I say that one of the keys to a safer learning environment is smaller class size.

That's why I support a comprehensive class size reduction plan endorsed by the President, and why I have introduced legislation to modernize schools for students who live on Indian land or on military installations. In Montana, this legislation will help over 12,000 children who attend these schools.

And we also need to make sure that schools have the tools they need to create better, safer learning environments within the classroom.

When the Senate considered the Juvenile Justice bill recently, I voted for a series of initiatives to do just that.

I voted to provide funding for local communities to put 10,000 new counselors in their schools. To give our kids the guidance that they need. 100,000 new police officers on their streets.

And enhanced security in our schools to make them safer. I voted to provide schools with grants to conduct after school programs to help keep kids out of trouble.

Now we need to continue our efforts at the community level. Last year I helped secure a \$350,000 grant to the University of Montana to help train teachers to deal with school violence.

Later this year, I will be hosting a youth violence prevention summit, to talk about what we're doing and what we still need to do to confront the crisis and solve the problem. I hope to see all of you there.

Together we can prevent additional tragedies and ensure that every Montana child is fully prepared to meet the dawn of the new century equipped with a world-class education.

With your help, I know we can reach that goal.

Now I want to introduce Secretary of Education Richard Riley. We're all delighted to have the Secretary here to see what we've accomplished, to witness our challenges and hopes for the future of education in Montana.

First let me thank the Secretary for visiting our state over the Father's Day break. As a father of 4 and a grandfather of 10, Father's Day is especially meaningful for him.

Secretary Riley's integrity and leadership, his commitment to children, and his lifelong devotion to education have made him one of the most respected leaders in the history of education in America.

When Secretary Riley was the Governor of South Carolina, the people of South Carolina were so fond of him and his work that they amended their state constitution and elected Secretary Riley for a second term. Now that's what I call a mandate.

The Secretary was nominated by President Clinton and confirmed as Secretary of Education in 1992.

During his first term, he enacted historical measures to raise academic standards; improve education for the disadvantaged and poor; and helped finance more federal aid for secondary education than ever before.

He also co-created the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education.

In his second term, Secretary Riley established an historical benchmark by arranging for the FCC to give schools and libraries discounts for Internet access and telecommunication services, the E-rate discount.

He's helped effect improvements for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, worked for flexibility in education, smaller class sizes, modernizing schools across the nation, and connecting every school to the Internet.

You know, Secretary Riley has a motto, "Better education is everybody's business." I couldn't agree more. And under his stewardship and guidance, we are closer to that goal than ever before. Ladies and Gentleman, please welcome my good friend and our great Secretary of Education, Richard Riley.