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Baucus-Rehburg Highway Roundtable Meeting

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BAUCUS

*(Dennis) Rehberg Highway
Ethical Code August 16, 2001*

Highway Meeting

Talking Points

Thanks for coming to this meeting. It's the fifth in a regular series to discuss how Montana can make the most out of the highway bill- TEA 21. I am especially honored today to have Representative Denny Rehberg here with me cohosting this event. Welcome Congressman Rehberg.

(Denny will make a few comments)

Seated next to me are our speakers today. I would like to ask them to introduce themselves.

(Dave Galt, MDT; Ed Maronick, MCA; Ron Trahan, Tribal Council member; Jerry Driscoll, Montana AFL-CIO)

At our first few meetings, I said I wanted to meet periodically to review developments, keep communications open, and foster a cooperative spirit to problem solving. There is a lot of work out there and the more we can cooperate in delivering the highway program, the better off our state will be. Denny, do you have something to add?

(Denny will make a few comments)

I'd first like to review where we stand on an issue that was discussed at each of our previous meetings, namely, the rate of obligations and contract lettings.

I'll ask Dave Galt, to address that issue.

(Dave will discuss the obligation rate for TEA 21 money. MDT has obligated \$250.4 million of \$259 million available until October 2001. That is an excellent obligation rate.)

(When Dave is finished)

I'd like to call on Ed Maronick, this year's President of The Montana Contractors Association.

(The Contractors are pleased with Dave's appointment by Governor Martz, but are still concerned about how quickly projects are getting approved, especially because of Montana's short construction season.)

(When Ed is finished)

Next I'd like to ask Jerry Driscoll from the Montana AFL-CIO to discuss his views on the lettings.

(When Jerry is finished)

Denny do you have something to add?

(Denny will make a few comments)

I would like to move onto the discussion of Highway 93. This project has been a huge issue for Montana, for the Department of Transportation, for the Tribes and for all of us. I understand that some real progress has been made recently. I'd like to Ask Dave Galt to give us an update.

(Dave will discuss the agreement reached with the Tribe)

Now, I would like to call on Ron Trahan from the Salish Kootenai Tribe.

(In December of 2000, with the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement, the Confederated Salish-Kootenai, FHWA and the State of Montana reached agreement on how to proceed into design on this important segment of US 93. The design concepts within the reservation boundary will demonstrate respect for the beauty of the location and respect for the culture of the Salish-Kootenai.)

I am pleased to see the progress being made on this important section of highway.

(Denny will make a few comments)

Let's move onto the Federal Update.

I would like to tell you a little bit about what happened this session in Congress. I will say a few words about the Senate and then Denny will say a few words about the House.

It was my honor to introduce the Highway Trust Fund Recovery Act of 2001. This bill which was given the number S. 1306, begins to correct the amount of taxes collected by the Highway Trust Fund. HTFRA ensures that taxes paid by highway users on ethanol-blended fuels are collected by the Highway Trust Fund.

Under current law, ethanol enjoys an exemption from current excise tax rates. This exemption allows the price of gasohol (ethanol mixed with gasoline) to be lower than the price of gasoline. Two and one half cents from the sale of this lower priced fuel is still sent to the General Fund of the U.S. Treasury. It should be going to the Highway Trust Fund.

That is what my bill does.

Ensuring necessary and affordable energy supplies, including ethanol-blended motor fuels and other initiatives, is important to the quality of life and economic prosperity of all Americans. Policies to achieve these objectives, however, should not come at the expense of transportation infrastructure improvements.

This bill is important for several reasons. First, the bill reconfirms the landmark 1998 highway bill- TEA 21, which is so important to economic development in Montana and throughout the country. Second, the bill will ensure that much needed highway improvements are made throughout the country. Third, this bill means more jobs for Montanans. More money in the Highway Trust Fund means more highway money for Montana.

Next I would like to discuss the High Speed Rail Investment Act of 2001. This bill which would allow Amtrak to sell bonds, is currently being worked on in the Finance Committee. I was fortunate enough this year to be made Chairman of that committee and we are working very hard to make sure this bill gets passed. What is most important to me about this bill is to ensure that Montana will reap some benefits from all this bonding authority that Amtrak will receive. Currently, the legislation provides for a maximum amount hat can be used in western states. I will be changing that language to ensure that a minium amount gets spent in western states. I know that there are many working to get a southern line to once again come through Montana. I am hopeful that this legislation will help to move that along.

Finally, we are quickly moving toward the time to write a new Highway Bill. The Senate Environment and Public works committee has already been holding hearings regarding the items that will be included in the new highway bill. As the Senior Democrat on that Committee and the Chairman of the Finance Committee--the two main Committees working

on that bill, I am in a unique position to make sure that Montana will get to keep the benefits it already has and is also given new types of flexibility and new technologies to ensure safety and mobility on our roadways. I will continue to keep you updated on our progress.

I know that Denny has been working very hard in his new role on the House of Representatives' Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Denny why don't you tell us what you've been up to.

(Denny gives report)

Denny and I would now like to open up the discussion for any questions the audience may have. I'd like to encourage anyone with a question to go to the microphone so that we all hear what is asked.

(You and Denny call on guests)

(After questions close with statements from You and Denny.)

It is always so helpful to me to hear the issues that are important to all of you. By having a dialogue with members of the transportation community and citizens we can work to better provide all of us with solutions to our transportation problems.

Two years ago, I chose to convene these regular highway meetings to encourage communication and cooperation among all the parties making

the new highway program work for Montana. I felt that it was important to make sure that the highway bill "works on the ground," and that requires continuous work. The bottom line for everyone is that the 60% increase in highway funds that Montana receives under TEA 21 must be translated into more jobs and better roads.

Let me thank everyone for attending today. It helps to have many of the same faces at these meetings. I think that will help us develop even better communications. We will work on date and location of our next meeting. I hope that Congressman Rehberg will be able to join us again.

But in the meantime, if other issues come up, you don't have to wait until then. Call me, or get in touch with my staff in Montana or in Washington. I share with you all a strong desire that the highway program be a great success for our state and for our workers.

It is my pleasure to have Representative Denny Rehberg here with me today to hear about the Montana Highway Program and to work together with him to help deliver much needed funds to that program. Thank you Denny for being here with me today.

(Denny says a few words and closes the meeting)