10-11-2005

"Women in Agriculture"

Max S. Baucus
Senator * or Department*: **BAUCUS**

Instructions:
Prepare one form for insertion at the beginning of each record series.
Prepare and insert additional forms at points that you want to index.
For example: at the beginning of a new folder, briefing book, topic, project, or date sequence.

Record Type*: **Speeches**

MONTH/YEAR of Records*: **October-2005**
(Example: **JANUARY-2003**)

(1) Subject*: **Agriculture**
(select subject from controlled vocabulary, if your office has one)

(2) Subject* **Women**

DOCUMENT DATE*: **10/11/2005**
(Example: **01/12/1966**)

* "required information"
Thank you Heidi for that kind introduction.

I am very happy to be here with you all today. It's wonderful that all of you are getting together to talk about the role of women in agriculture. All you make important contributions to the backbone of our state's economy – agriculture.

I'm here really to hear from you Montana's agricultural leaders so I'll only mention a couple of items that I see on the immediate agenda for agriculture.
Budget Reconciliation

As most of you are aware the Congress has proposed $3 Billion in cuts to agriculture as part of a reconciliation process.

Coming from a fifth generation Montana ranching family, I don't believe that these cuts make any sense. We should be doing all we can to boost agriculture, not make devastating cuts.

As a senior Member of the Agriculture Committee, I was at the table to help write and pass the 2002 Farm Bill. The bill that was signed into law was a delicate balance among diverse interests.
The 2002 Farm Bill was a multiyear bill and included provisions for a variety issues ranging from nutrition to conservation programs.

Producers had reason to expect that it settled farm policy for 6 years.

Changing course now by virtually cutting all programs would shatter that delicate balance.

These proposed spending cuts also are ill-timed because they unilaterally disarm our trade negotiators.
The United States should not commit to the substantial agricultural policy changes this budget resolution will require while we are engaged in WTO trade talks.

Recent events have also made it even clearer that these cuts are misplaced.

Right now the difference between life and death for many Americans is the food stamp program, yet the Senate proposes to cut food stamps by hundreds of millions of dollars.

Such cuts are unconscionable and immoral and I strongly oppose them.
Finally, as farmers and ranchers face soaring inputs and falling commodity prices Congress' answer to these problems can not be a cut in support and assistance.

Earlier this year I offered an amendment to prevent cutting Agriculture.

Cutting funding was wrong then and it is wrong now. You can count on me to continue fighting cuts to vital Agriculture programs.

As if cuts to Agriculture programs aren't enough, the USDA is adding insult to injury by cutting Farm Service Agency offices all over the country.
FSA Tomorrow

FSA recently announced a modernization effort entitled “FSA Tomorrow”.

Through FSA Tomorrow, 6 Montana FSA offices are on the chopping block: Ravalli, Sanders, Meagher, Park, Sweetgrass and Treasure counties will be closed.

I’ve already sent a letter to Secretary Johanns indicating that FSA cuts to Montana should be reconsidered.

Montana FSA agents do a wonderful job helping farmers and ranchers navigate through the USDA’s programs.
[ In fact Randy Johnson, Montana’s FSA head is here today. Most of you know Randy...Randy where are you? Stand up so we can see you. ]

Shutting down local Farm Service Agency offices would hurt farmers and ranchers’ ability to access federal agriculture programs and I’m not interested in giving any offices up.

The Senate Ag Committee will have a hearing on Oct. 20th and I’ll be working to stop these closures.
Livestock Disaster Payments

Many of you probably have heard about the meeting I had with USDA Deputy Secretary Conner the other week.

I heard from many of you that you weren't receiving your much-needed and much-deserved livestock assistant payments. I was extremely frustrated and angered by this as Conner had promised me in previous meetings that payments would be distributed.

During my meeting with Conner, he cited that there were technical difficulties in distributing payments. One of the responsibilities of FSA offices is to distribute assistance payments.
Since Montana producers aren’t receiving livestock assistance payments it doesn’t make any sense for us to give up our local FSA offices – the USDA’s record speaks volumes to why we should keep the offices.

I promised Mr. Conner that I would not drop this issue until every Montana rancher received every penny that the government promised.

This situation is inexcusable.
In addition to my meeting with Mr. Conner, I asked the Government Accountability Office to launch an investigation into what went wrong in this modernization effort.

And I have another meeting scheduled with the Deputy Secretary next week when I’m back in Washington.

I hope I get good news from him about payments during that meeting but even if I do, you can see why I’m so leery to agree to FSA’s modernization schemes that rely heavily on computers and centralized control from Washington.
Local FSA offices have administered disaster assistance in the past and the system worked.

FSA offices are valuable to the local communities they serve and that’s why I’ll work to protect them.

**Japanese Beef**

As must of you know, the United States and Japan signed an agreement for Japan to resume beef trade in October 2004.

Unfortunately, Japan has not lived up to its end of the deal and the American beef market is feeling the affects.

This is unacceptable.
We cannot accept Japan's excuses any longer.

Montana and America raises the safest high quality and best tasting beef in the world and it is long overdue for the Japanese to let it in.

In fact I signed a letter asking the President to immediately impose economic sanctions against Japan as a way to leverage open the market.

The time for talk has passed and we need to see Japanese action to reopen the border.
COOL

While I’m talking about beef I want to mention country-of-origin labeling (COOL).

The House Agriculture Appropriations bill contains language that further delays the implementation of COOL for meat products until September 2007.

While the law would likely go into effect, USDA would not have the authority to enforce any of its provisions.
Democrats and Republicans on the Senate Agriculture Appropriations subcommittee have indicated that they will work against this delay and I’ll support them in this effort.

COOL passed through Congress and was signed into law by the President as part of the 2002 Farm Bill.

It is appalling that a law that was so broadly supported could be delayed by a few people in a back room.

This law can and should be implemented in a way that does not overburden producers, packers or retailers.
I will continue to work to see that country-of-origin labeling is implemented in the way it was intended—in a simple and cost effective manner.

2007 Farm Bill

As all of you know, the 2007 Farm Bill is rapidly approaching.

I have begun collecting information from producers and producer groups in Montana in order to begin to sketch out the outlines of the Farm Bill as Montanans see it.
I hope to gather even more information here today because I believe that together we can seize the opportunities that face Montana agriculture.

Thank you again for having me here today. Good luck with your meeting. By coming together, sharing ideas, we can help strengthen the backbone of Montana's economy for years to come.