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A Breakfast Honoring American Indian and Alaskan Native Children and Families Involved with the Foster Care System

Max S. Baucus

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Senator * or Department*: **BAUCUS**

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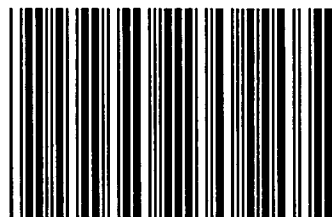
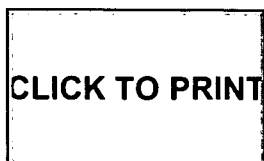
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BAUCUS

A Breakfast Honoring
American Indian and Alaskan Native Children and Families
Involved with the Foster Care System
Statement of Senator Max Baucus
December, 11, 2007

**Chief Joseph, the Great Nez Perce [NEZ
PIERCE] Chief, once said:**

**“Treat all men alike. Give them all the
same law. Give them all an even chance to
live and grow. All men were made by the
same Great Spirit Chief. They are all
brothers. The Earth is the mother of all
people, and all people should have equal
rights upon it.”**

Today we gather once again to affirm that Indian people deserve the same rights and protections under the law. That includes access to Title 4-E funds.

Title 4-E provides entitlement money to reimburse states for the care of the Nation's poorest abused and neglected children. Yet Tribes are not eligible to get this reimbursement directly from the Federal government. Rather, Tribes have to enter into agreements with states to get their fair share.

I am proud of Montana for entering into 4-E agreements with tribes. But I am disappointed that the Federal government has taken so long to recognize the unsurpassed care that tribes provide to Indian children.

I have long supported direct 4-E funding. I was particularly proud to sponsor the Tribal Foster Care and Adoption Access Act, along with Senators Domenici, Bingaman, Smith, Stabenow, McCain, Cantwell, Levin, Dorgan, and Tester. This bill would grant Tribes direct access to 4-E funds. It would allow Tribes to use the same process that states do.

I am honored to be in the company of people today who have been fighting, working, and praying for a better future for Indian children and all children for decades. And I am encouraged by the support that the Tribal Foster Care and Adoption Access Act has received. To date, I have received 56 letters of support. 28 of those letters have come from non-Indian organizations.

I am glad that the entire child welfare community recognizes that the time has come for Tribal access to child welfare funding. We may have our work cut out for us in helping the administration to understand the realities of Indian country. But I'll do my part to help the administration get caught up with the rest of us.

My goal is to work with my partners in the Senate, like Senator Chuck Grassley, the Ranking Republican Member of the Finance Committee. Together, we will work with the administration to increase their understanding of what tribes are already doing. And we will work to increase the capacity of both HHS and Tribes to respond to the needs of Indian children.

Indian children are over-represented in the child welfare system. And they are twice as likely to be placed in foster care.

I'm glad to see so many Montanans in the room. Thanks for making the trip. The work that you do makes me proud to be a Montanan.

Thanks also to the organizations that have worked with us over the years on Tribal legislation. Thanks to the National Indian Child Welfare Association, the Association of American Indian Affairs, and the National Congress of American Indians.

And thanks to the Kids are Waiting Campaign for partnering with the National Indian Child Welfare Association and the National Congress of American Indians to host this event.

We still have work to do. But together, we are getting closer to our ultimate goals. Together, we are getting closer to bringing Tribes to the table. And together, we are getting closer to improving our Nation's child welfare system.

As Chief Joseph said, "All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The Earth is the mother of all people."

So let us continue our work, until the Government treats all people alike. Let us continue our work, until all people in America have the same law. And let us continue our work, until Tribal children have an even chance to live and grow, free from abuse and neglect.

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