7-18-2008

St. Mary Bridge Replacement Groundbreaking Event

Max S. Baucus

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Recommended Citation
Baucus, Max S., "St. Mary Bridge Replacement Groundbreaking Event" (July 18, 2008). Max S. Baucus Speeches. 843.
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Senator * or Department*: BAUCUS

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Good morning. Thank you for having me with you today.

We're here today for a very important event. We are here to celebrate a new beginning for an old friend, the St. Mary Diversion project, which will get a new bridge as a result of our efforts.

Like the ancient Romans, we Americans are builders. The Romans built bridges, and aqueducts to divert water, and roads all across Europe as well as parts of the Middle East and Africa – many of which still stand to this day.

While obviously not nearly as old as that Roman infrastructure, the St. Mary Diversion Project is still old by American standards. Nearly 100 years old, in fact.

As one of the very first irrigation projects in the West to be funded by the federal government, it has served us well. It has turned out to be a good investment. But, for a while now, it has needed some reinvestment if we are going to be able to continue to put it to good use.
As was the case about 100 years ago, federal funding is needed here. That is why I have pursued funding for the Diversion Project, and that is why I have pursued federal funding for this bridge.

I was able to work with my Senate colleagues to develop a Highway bill in 2005 that got us $8 million dollars for this bridge. This funding will pay for reconstruction of the bridge.

Thanks to the language I included in a Highway Bill Technical Corrections, that funding will also pay for the bank stabilization and sediment control that Blackfeet Tribe requested.

This year's bill will enable $2.5 million dollars out of that $8 million dollars I got in 2005 to go to the Bureau of Reclamation for bank stabilization.

But, I want to make clear that I have not worked alone on this effort.

I want to publicly applaud the efforts of the St. Mary's Rehabilitation Working Group. With Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger and Chinook resident Randy Reed as co-chairmen, the Working Group's efforts have been critical to moving the St. Mary's water and bridge projects forward.
I also want to point out the efforts of Larry Mires ("MEYERS"), Executive Director of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group. And, I want to commend the Montana Department of Transportation and Jim Lynch.

And, thank you to so many others for hanging in there to get this improvement effort going.

Let’s make sure we can get another 100 years out of the St. Mary Diversion Project, while maintaining our transportation mobility and our way of life.

Like those ancient Roman works, it will still be here after we are gone – serving as a monument to American pride and to our shared efforts.