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Groundbreaking Ceremony for Western Transportation Institute

Max S. Baucus

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Senator * or Department*: **BAUCUS**

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(1) Subject*: **Transportation**

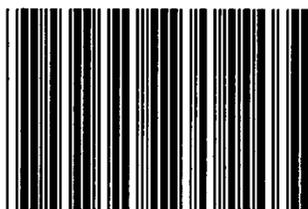
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(2) Subject* **Groundbreaking Ceremony for Western Transportation Institute**

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BAUCUS

**Statement of Senator Max Baucus
Groundbreaking Ceremony for Western Transportation Institute
Montana State University
Bozeman, MT, August 19, 2009**

Thanks to everybody associated with the Western Transportation Institute for having me here.

This is a great day. It is reward for your hard efforts over a number of years. You are each a real credit to M.S.U., and to our state. And, today gives us reason for optimism because your best days lie still ahead of you.

And, thanks for letting me test out that simulator. I checked out the previous one back in 2004 when I was able to do a similar tour, so it's fun to see the latest version.

I want to start by thanking several key people:

- First of all, **Steve Albert**, for his leadership in developing and diversifying the Western Transportation Institute into the national leader it has become.
- I also want to recognize the W.T.I.'s founder **Joe Armijo** (are-MEE-ho).
- And, finally, the man without whom none of this could be possible, **Dick Clotfelter** (clot-felt-er), the man who owns the building we are here celebrating.

It is a great testament to the growth you have managed – and to the relevance of your work -- that we are here today for this ribbon-cutting. Rather than resting on laurels or becoming complacent, the W.T. I. has continued to explore new possibilities.

This expands our education opportunities. That is important because it translates into more people getting educated right here in Montana. And that translates into graduates staying here in our state after finishing school. In turn, this means a more vibrant economy in Montana, and an even brighter future for our state.

While some folks may not think of research as being an obvious part of the Highway Bill, I believe it is critical to our efforts to innovate and improve our transportation networks.

That's why I am glad to have played a part in your growth by including the W.T.I. as a "University Transportation Center" in the last two Highway bills.

You can rest assured that I intend to continue to fight for you in the next Highway bill.

Your focus on matters such as road maintenance in cold climates, and on good common-sense efforts like your road ecology project, is key to our efforts to develop a modern 21st Century transportation network.

We need to encourage those kinds of efforts in the Highway Bill.

Finally, on the issue of the Highway Bill, we have gotten bogged down. We have had to suspend negotiations, and we are looking at a short-term extension of the current law we have relied upon since 2005.

We have gotten to a point in this country where we take for granted having modern, safe roads and bridges. We don't like having to pay to have a good network. But, the simple truth is that transportation infrastructure costs money.

Right now, the kind of money we need to spend is in scarce supply. That's why we just transferred another \$7 billion into the Highway Trust Fund at the beginning of this month. That was to ensure we can meet our guaranteed obligations just through the end of this September.

As a nation, we are going to have to figure out our priorities for transportation as we work through the upcoming Highway Bill. If we want a safe, modern network for moving people and goods in order to have economic growth, we are going to have to find a way to pay for it.

I want to say right here and now, I firmly believe we need to do a good, robust bill to address the real needs we have in this country.

We have to improve the transportation network that we built in the 20th Century because we have new needs in the 21st Century Global Economy – in which Montana is an eager participant with international markets for our beef, our agriculture, and our extracted minerals, among other things.

You know, throughout the second half of the 20th Century, as the richest and most successful country on earth, the United States won the peace. We made the world a safer place, even if we realized some of it only in retrospect.

During that time, we undertook this great effort to construct an interstate highway system. It became a model for the rest of the world. Running primarily east and west, it helped us to be the world's leader.

We could quickly move people and goods to the coasts. From there, they could be shipped to our allies in Western Europe and in the Pacific for trade and for military protection.

And, then, three things happened in quick succession since the early 1990s:

First, the Berlin Wall came down. Suddenly, an enormous integrated European market developed. It combined Western Europe with the former Soviet states – which meant that the Western European countries that we had protected now didn't want our manufactured goods, our foods, and our military strength quite as much as they had for so long.

Second, we passed NAFTA, which opened up new routes of north and south trading with our North American neighbors – this is a thing that Montana has seen clearly in ports across our Northern Border with Canada.

Third, China, and other developing nations such as India, entered the world market with full force, especially in the field of manufacturing. And, they started sending their cheap, manufactured goods to the U.S. to be transported inland across our seamless road network.

Let me pause to tell you a quick story about China. I think it's a fact that in a democracy, we don't like to act until we reach a crisis.

Excuse me for repeating myself, but I related that point one time in a dinner with a group of businessmen. I used the example of the Russians putting a man into orbit with the Sputnik test flight, which motivated us to finally put a man on the moon.

A guy at that dinner, Matt Rose, with the BNSF Railroad, raised his hand, and he said to me “Senator, I have seen Sputnik. It’s called the Port of Shanghai in China.”

I have actually been to Shanghai, and he’s right. It’s a modern, automated system, designed to enable the Chinese to send their televisions, and their shoes, and everything else they manufacture to the rest of the world for consumers to buy at affordable prices.

If we are not currently in a transportation crisis, we are getting close. We’re no longer keeping up. We’re continuing to just do things the old way.

Our east-west road network is no longer sufficient by itself. We have a tremendous backlog of projects that need funding. Half of Montana’s primary roads are nearly 50-years old now, and are in need of modernizing.

Of course, as we all remember, we had a bridge collapse in Minnesota with tragic consequences.

And, as that story about the Shanghai Harbor indicates, China is moving forward with improved transportation networks to move people and goods. So is the European Market. So is India. And so are other places I didn't mention.

We really need to keep up. While we're at it, we need make every effort to make our transportation network safer.

And here's the thing: The effort to figure out how to meet all these needs, big and small, that starts in places like this. It starts with right here with good analytical thinking, innovation, and applied research.

That's how we'll figure out how to do things better. It's using simulators and technology. Studying how well our roads withstand extreme weather conditions. Knowing to build highways where the Deer and the Antelope Don't Play.

That's how we will keep up with, and even exceed, the rest of the world.

That's how we can find a way to get the best bang for our buck, especially considering how hard the dollars are to come by.

That's how we'll continue to prosper in the Last Best Place -- and in the Greatest Country the World Has Ever Known.

In conclusion, thanks for having me here with you today.

Thank you very much for your efforts to benefit Montana and our nation.

And, congratulations on your achievement, which is demonstrated by this new facility.

It is really very exciting, and you should be very proud. I know I am.