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Association of Community College Trustees

Max S. Baucus

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Introduction

Thank you, Jane for the kind introduction.

Jane has worked tirelessly for the students of Flathead Valley Community College. She is truly a community leader and a valuable voice for the state of Montana.

Jane is joined today by three of her trustees – Tom Harding, Tom McElwain (MACK-el-wane), and Bob Nystuen (NICE-tune).

President Stefani Hicswa (HICK-Swah) of Miles Community College in Miles City, Montana is also here today. Located 542 miles from Flathead Valley, Miles Community College serves students in eastern Montana. Stefani has brought a whole new life to the institution.

Thank you to the American Association of Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees for this award.

And thank you to all of the community college presidents and trustees here tonight.

Role of Community Colleges

**President Theodore Roosevelt once said,
“Far and away the best prize that life has to offer
is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”**

**I can think of no better example of work
worth doing than the efforts of America’s
community colleges.**

**Serving almost 44 percent of all U.S.
undergraduates, community colleges are the
gateway to postsecondary education for so
many students.**

And your work is now more important than ever.

Since the beginning of the Great Recession, the U.S. has lost more than 8 million jobs. Both young and old are returning to school to enhance their skills.

Workers are quickly discovering what you all have known for decades. The ticket to a better life is through education. Forty years ago, sixty percent of those with a high school degree found themselves in the middle class.

Today, that is just not the case. Those without a college degree are sliding more and more into lower-income levels.

And this trend will continue. Nearly two-thirds of the job vacancies projected between 2008 and 2018 will require some postsecondary education.

Jobs lost over the past two years will be replaced by jobs requiring entirely new sets of skills.

Community colleges will continue to play a critical role in the economic recovery. You are leading the way in preparing students to enter – or reenter the workforce. By partnering with the private sector, community colleges adjust rapidly to ensure students have the skills they need to find a job.

Larry's Story

In fact, community colleges can train workers for everything from their first job to their last.

Larry Netzel is a student at Flathead Valley Community College. He's a sophomore in the Welding and Inspection Program.

And while it has been challenging, Larry is earning good grades and is expected to graduate next May.

Larry isn't training for his first job. But he certainly hopes he's training for his last.

Larry is 64. He never thought he would go back to school.

In fact, Larry hadn't been in school since 1964. He was hired by the Colombia Falls Aluminum Company at age 23 and expected to spend his entire career there.

Those plans came to a halt in 2009, when his aluminum company shut down and laid off nearly 200 workers.

The company worked quickly to file for Trade Adjustment Assistance, a program we often call TAA.

The company collaborated with Flathead Valley Community College to ensure FVCC was prepared to take on the increased student load.

Larry had worked in the same job for nearly 40 years.

Because of programs like TAA and community colleges like Flathead, workers like Larry have a second chance at a new career.

TAA and Community Colleges

And that's why programs like TAA are so important. They provide workers a second chance at earning Roosevelt's best prize – working hard at work worth doing.

In 2009, we fought hard for the significant expansions and important reforms to the TAA program. As a result, 170,000 more American workers received the help they need to find new jobs.

One important expansion was the creation of the TAA for Community College and Career Training Grant program, which was designed especially for colleges like yours to help train workers like Larry.

And in 2010, we helped craft legislation that included \$2 billion for this program.

And I am thrilled that the first installment of these funds – \$500 million – will be available to community colleges this year.

This program will help community colleges in Montana and across the country to address the biggest workforce challenge we face – maintaining America’s competitive edge.

Despite our hard fight to pass an extension, unfortunately, the TAA program expired over the weekend.

We remain committed to extending it and making this right. We need to make sure workers like Larry have the opportunity to work hard at work worth doing. More than 400,000 workers are counting on us.

Tax Reform and Education

I will continue to do all I can to ensure postsecondary education is affordable and accessible for all Americans.

As the Finance Committee begins its work on tax reform, we will ensure that education competitiveness is part of these discussions.

In 2007, Jane testified before my Committee on behalf of the American Association of Community Colleges.

She shared the stories of students in Montana who were struggling to pay for college. She urged us to expand the higher education credits. She urged that the credit should be refundable to allow access to those that need them the most.

I remember that moment clearly. I heard Jane and I listened.

In 2009, we passed the American Opportunity Tax Credit. As a result, 4.5 million lower-income students took advantage of the credit's 40 percent refundability.

We can do more. We need to do more.

We must look at ways to expand these credits. We must look at ways to increase refundability to continue to benefit the students who need them most.

We will propose making the credits permanent, so families can be certain of their benefits from year to year.

We will work for tax incentives that are simpler, consistent, and easier to access.

Conclusion

As Larry works toward his degree, as Jane and Stefani work for the students and workers of Montana, and as you all work each day for the students of our country, I am committed to working for you in Montana and on Capitol Hill.

Thank you for your service and your commitment.

Thank you for your work to help America face the challenges of the 21st century.

And thank you again for this honor.