



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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For Immediate Release
Thursday, September 14, 2006

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BAUCUS PROPOSES FREE COLLEGE FOR MATH & SCIENCE MAJORS, UNIVERSAL PRE-K & MORE IN MAJOR EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Senator says bold education overhaul essential for U.S. economic competitiveness

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Ranking Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, today unveiled a set of major education proposals that will prepare American workers to win and keep good-paying jobs in the competitive global economy. The **Baucus Education Competitiveness Act of 2006** will send thousands more Americans to college to obtain science, math, and teaching degrees, and will help get millions more American children ready to learn early in life. In addition to offering scholarships and even free tuition to many American college students, and creating a universal pre-kindergarten program, the Baucus proposal would also increase Pell Grants for college students, enhance tax incentives to support schools, and launch a host of other initiatives to improve American education.

“Smart folks around the globe are getting jobs that used to belong exclusively to American workers. Congress must act to stop America’s educational slide, or the U.S. economy will suffer - along with American families’ finances,” said Baucus. **“If we make learning a priority again in America, our educated workforce will attract and keep the best jobs available in the coming decades. This bill will help more Americans succeed in a competitive world.”**

Baucus announced his intention to promote a comprehensive American competitiveness agenda – including education – in January of this year. The Education Competitiveness Act is the fifth in a series of Baucus competitiveness bills introduced in 2006 so far. Its seven titles provide both immediate improvement opportunities and long-term, strategic positioning of America’s education efforts. Its aims include:

Encouraging and rewarding teachers

To help students achieve their full potential, America must invest in teachers. The **Teaching Competitiveness Title** creates full college scholarships for future teachers of math and science, foreign languages, and early education instruction. It honors the commitment of teachers in rural and underserved areas with supplemental wages and incentives, and boosts the number of Advanced Placement teachers who can help the nation’s brightest students learn.

Emphasizing early learning

Quality early education gives students a competitive edge throughout their lives. Children who fall behind early in academics, however, fall even further behind in subsequent years. The **Early Education Title** commits to a national voluntary universal pre-kindergarten education program for all income levels.

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Without changing existing early education programs, the Early Education Title matches state funding for a qualified program to provide voluntary, universal pre-kindergarten. The title requires minimum standards for hours of instruction, teacher qualifications, and integration with K-12 education. The program will increase matching funds as states increase their pre-kindergarten education accessibility, moving ultimately toward universal access in 2020. This title also creates grants to establish state-level pre-kindergarten through college (PK-16) collaboratives. These collaboratives will bring together stakeholders in pre-kindergarten, primary, secondary, and higher education to create a constructive forum to achieve a seamless, quality education for students.

Extending learning beyond the school day

Enrichment activities can open new horizons for learning and provide encouragement to stay on track academically and in life. Recognizing this fact, the **Enrichment Title** supports language learning, college preparation, after-school activities, and mentoring programs to get students thinking creatively and to help them prepare for college. Schools will design programs to meet their own children’s most pressing needs, from college preparation courses to crime or drug abuse prevention (including methamphetamine prevention efforts) to vocational training.

Supporting every American student

Support for Indian education has fallen off sharply at the Federal level, and a renewed commitment is long overdue. The **Indian Education Title** fully funds currently successful initiatives such as Johnson-O’Malley and native language immersion programs. It also fully funds our nation’s Tribal Colleges.

Giving adults learning opportunities for better employment

A competitive America never stops learning. To keep the classroom open to Americans of all ages and skill levels, the **Lifelong Learning Title** encourages businesses and educators to help meet workforce needs. This title also provides opportunities for colleges of technology to work with local businesses to encourage economic development and raise additional sources of funding as well as develop distance learning programs.

Shaping the tax code to support education

The **Education Tax Incentives Title** simplifies confusing tax credits by combining them into a single refundable Higher Education Credit of up to \$2,000 per student for qualified tuition and related expenses. Qualified tuition and related expenses means tuition, fees, books, supplies and equipment required for enrollment. Expenses of the taxpayer taxpayer’s spouse or any dependent of the taxpayer, are also covered. A refundable credit will allow families and students to receive refunds when their educational tax credit exceeds their income tax liability. This title will also ease the burden of loan repayment, permitting graduates to deduct more of the interest paid on their student loans.

“Some of these ideas may be controversial, and they’ll cost money, but they’ll cost a lot less than letting American education lag,” said Baucus. **“Our children and grandchildren deserve the same economic security and prosperity that we saw in the last century. This bill will restore education as the foundation of a strong U.S. economy.”**

The Baucus Education Competitiveness Act of 2006 is expected to be referred to the Finance Committee for initial consideration. More information about each title of the bill can be found at <http://finance.senate.gov/sitepages/baucus.htm>.