Montana Office of Public Instruction

Linda McCulloch
State Superintendent

January 31, 2008

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Finance
511 Hart Senate Office
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Montana is fortunate to have you in a leadership position while crafting the economic stimulus package. As you balance the interests of your constituents, I encourage you to advocate for the inclusion of two items that will create jobs, infuse money into the local economy and help education in Montana and across the nation. Those two items are school renovation/construction and Title V funding for No Child Left Behind.

School Renovation/Construction

You already should have received a letter from the National School Board Association outlining the national need. In Montana, many of our 420 school districts are in desperate need of remodeling or modernizing facilities to bring them up to code, make them safer and more energy efficient and make them more suitable as an effective learning environment. Where growth is rapid our districts need new schools, and even our small school districts have modernization needs.

When money is put into these projects, jobs are created. That money is turned over many times in the local economy. This is especially vital in our smaller towns. Furthermore, schools already know their needs and can move to contract these projects very quickly. Granted, new construction takes more lead time, but where a roof needs to be replaced, the economic stimulus money can be flowing into the local economy very quickly and effectively while also helping our schools. The Montana School Board Association already has a list of school needs which can serve as an immediate economic stimulus across the state.

Title V for No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

It is well known that I am not a fan of No Child Left Behind, in large part because it seeks to centralize school management and do away with local control that is an integral part of our Montana educational system. But there is one part of NCLB that I praise—Title V for Innovative Programs. Unfortunately, funding for Title V has been reduced every year, and will be eliminated altogether in next year's budget.

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Unlike the Federal red tape attached to other NCLB funding sources, Title V Part A lists 27 different allowable uses of funds in schools. Montana school districts love the flexibility of Title V Part A to meet their needs and raise student achievement while complying with NCLB mandates. Because all Montana K-12 students are eligible for Title V Part A services, districts can serve their entire student bodies. In 2001, when Congress approved $5.4 million for Title V funding in Montana, we received requests from districts totaling more than $25 million.

Title V Part A provides employment both at the state and local levels. Local school districts hire full or part-time employees as class-size reduction teachers, school nurses, teachers of gifted and talented students, school safety officers and technology coordinators. Some districts hire home-school coordinators to work with at-risk students and others hire teachers to provide after-school or summer remedial services.

In Montana at the state level, Title V Part A has supported the READ Montana Program, one literacy specialist, school improvement activities and personnel, and support staff for using data for decision-making. Two other programs supported by the program in Montana are the Food for the Mind and the Read Well, Be Well programs.

Funding of Title V will immediately prevent job losses all across the state. Returning the funding to 2004 levels will even create jobs, as very small districts may receive enough funds to hire a part-time nurse, for example.

It is difficult for education professionals in Washington to conceive how a state like Montana allows local control of schools, even though it is written into our Constitution. They also refuse to admit that our system of local control produces better results on standardized tests than the national average and centralized places like Texas, which is held up as a model.

I encourage you to advocate for the inclusion of school renovation/construction and full funding of Title V as part of the economic stimulus package because this will create and maintain jobs in almost every town in Montana, while improving the learning conditions for our children and providing flexibility to our locally elected school boards.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Linda McCulloch

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State Superintendent