



For Immediate Release
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Hearing Statement of Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.)
**“Realizing a Competitive Education: Identifying Needs,
Partnerships and Resources”**

An article in the December 18 edition of Time Magazine began with this story:

“Rip Van Winkle awakens in the 21st century after a hundred-year snooze and is, of course, utterly bewildered by what he sees. Men and women dash about, talking to small metal devices pinned to their ears. . . . Older folk defy death . . . with metronomes in their chests . . . Airports, hospitals, shopping malls — every place Rip goes just baffles him. But when he finally walks into a schoolroom, the old man knows exactly where he is. ‘This is a school,’ he declares. ‘We used to have these back in 1906. Only now the blackboards are green.’

This story sheds some light on where we are in education. We have been sleeping for years. It’s time to wake up.

We need to wake up, before the world around us changes. We need to wake up, before 100 years go by, and we wake up bewildered. By that time, it will be too late.

America faces a world more integrated, more interdependent, and more competitive, than ever. It is our challenge to succeed in this new environment. It is our challenge to create an economy in which investment in our youth is our greatest asset — not our heaviest burden. It is our challenge to leave our children and grandchildren with an economy that is better than the one that we inherited.

We must meet this challenge.

And meeting this challenge begins with addressing education.

We must change the way that we look at education. As policymakers, we tend to look at our education challenge like a multiple choice test. We want to choose between a few simple options.

But the answers are not as simple as “A,” “B,” or “C.”

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We must look at our challenge as if it were a math proof. We must think through every step, to reach the end result. The process is as important as the outcome. The outcome must be appropriate for today's needs. But the outcome must also be appropriate for the needs of the future.

100 years from now — even ten years from now — our society will be very different from what we see today. If we find the right solution, our students will excel in school. If we find the right solution, our graduates will be ready to enter the workforce. And if we find the right solution, America will retain its economic leadership.

But if we look only for simple options, we may never reach a solution.

I have spent much of the past two years planning a comprehensive competitiveness agenda. I have spoken about it on the Senate floor. And I have introduced bills on trade, energy, savings, research, and education.

My education bill embraces education at all stages. It addresses early education through higher education, continuing education and worker training.

In this Congress, I will work toward solutions that promote our economic competitiveness. I want to work with Republicans and Democrats. I want to move legislation that addresses our challenges and points us toward success.

The Finance Committee will hold hearings that go beyond simple multiple choice answers. We will hold hearings that address the big picture.

Today's hearing is a step in the proof to solve our education challenge. This first step is to identify our needs. It is to identify resources. And it is to identify partnerships.

We have invited witnesses who will do just that.

We will hear about the needs of our teachers and the shape of our schools. We will hear about our community colleges and how they are fostering economic development. We will identify what resources we have, and what resources we still need. We will learn about unique partnerships to promote innovation and 21st Century skills. And we will learn how the business community is getting involved in developing their future workforce.

We will begin the process of solving our proof.

Let us not rest or be complacent. Let us not end up like Rip Van Winkle. Rather, let us wake up to meet the education challenge.

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