

Will President's goals affect you?

Question: *President Bush met with newly-elected members of Congress January 3 and emphasized his second-term goals of simplifying tax laws, partially privatizing Social Security and reining in medical liability lawsuits. What is your opinion of those priorities and if the President is successful in obtaining them, what effects do you think they may have on the average Montanan.*



By Representative Denny Rehberg

Among my favorite times of the year, the beginning of this new Congressional session shows as much promise for Montana as any year in recent memory. Along with a new highway bill, renewed calls for a national energy policy, and progress on other Montana-

specific issues such as education and endangered species act reform, Washington is considering reforming our tax code, medical liability curbs, and Social Security reform.

Certainly most, if not all Americans would welcome a simpler tax code. Over the years, our tax code has become overly burdensome, with the average taxpayer spending far too much money and time on an outdated and unfair system. It's time for honest tax reform, in favor of a system that is both simple and fair.

Over the last four years, I have been a big proponent of medical liability reform, supporting measures that allow economic damages but would cap non-economic damages at \$250,000. The approach has proven effective in states that have enacted similar reforms, yet the legislation has died in the Senate under pressure from the trial lawyers, who are the main benefactors of multi-million dollar punitive damage

awards.

Current projections demonstrate that Social Security must be reformed, since the program will begin deficit spending in 2018 and will be completely bankrupt in 2042, when today's young workers are ready to retire. As a result, today's 25-year old contributor can expect to lose from one to four cents on every dollar contributed. However, with no formal proposal in front of the House, it's too early to tell what specific type of Social Security reform will be advanced. Incorporating a plan to permit private investment of funds is just one of the options that have surfaced. I'm going to study each legislative proposal very carefully, listening to all Montanans on this important issue.

Now in my third term - and as a newly appointed member of the House Appropriations Committee - I'll be working to see that our state benefits from economic development opportunities that can lead to business investment and jobs here in Montana. I remain committed to our state's agricultural producers and will encourage fair trade opportunities while opposing trade measures that do not permit a level playing field. Count on me also to continue leading the fight for mandatory Country of Origin Labeling, working to secure a balanced, long-range national energy policy and supporting the responsible development of our natural resources.



By Senator Max Baucus

Congress will be tackling a lot of important issues during the upcoming year and I plan on working together with my colleagues to do what's right for our state.

My top priority as always will be to boost our state's economy by creating more good-paying jobs. As the top Democrat on the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee, the panel in charge of the new highway bill, I'll be in a good position to bring even more highway dollars to our state. The highway

bill is a huge jobs and economic development bill for Montana and I'm currently working on a bill to increase our state's share of highway dollars.

Agriculture is the backbone of our state's economy and I'm committed to doing my part to help our state's farmers and ranchers. The recent news of multiple mad cow cases in Canada has my full attention and I'm doing everything I can to make sure our beef stays the safest and highest quality in the world. As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I'm pushing the Administration to dispatch a team of U.S. scientists to Canada to inspect their beef and cattle before even considering reopening our borders. The decision

By Senator Max Baucus (cont'd)

to reopening the U.S. border to Canadian beef needs to be based on sound science and transparency and anything short of that is ridiculous.

As the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, the panel with jurisdiction over Social Security and health care, I'll have a large role in the upcoming debate over Social Security. My main goal during this debate is to protect Social Security and keep the promises that we've made to our seniors. As it stands right now, Social Security is a secure program and will be able to provide benefits and help those with disabilities for the next 50 years. I'll continue to fight against privatizing the program and fight to ensure that it's around for the more than 160,000 Montanans who rely on it each year.

In addition to protecting Social Security, providing quality, affordable health care for all Montanans is one of my

top priorities. Medicaid is a vital program that about 83,000 Montanans are enrolled in. In the upcoming months, I'll continue to fight against cuts to Medicaid and CHIP, programs which provide assistance to low-income residents. In fact, I recently met with President Bush's pick for the Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt and I told him that I'm against cuts to Medicaid and CHIP and that the Administration needs to do a better job of tackling the uninsured problem in Montana and America. I'm committed to working together with my colleagues in Congress and the Administration to help reduce the rising cost of health care.

There are a lot of other issues that Congress will face as well. And through it all I remain committed to doing what's right and representing my 900,000 bosses in Congress, after all, that's what they sent me here to do.

Senator Conrad Burns did not reply this month.