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HB 435

Testimony HB 435 Branae  
January 31, 2005

Madam Chairman, members of the committee, for the record my name is Bud Williams, Deputy Superintendent in the OPI. On behalf of the State Superintendent I'm pleased to speak in support of this legislation.

I think the first Whereas in this bill truly captures why this scholarship program is so important. It says that if Montana is to achieve success in attracting new businesses and in promoting a healthier climate for economic growth to provide quality, high-paying jobs for Montana citizens, it is essential that Montana's most talented high school graduates become the "engines" that drive the state's future economic growth!

Montana's per capita income is one of the lowest in the nation and conversely, we have a fast growing tuition rate. Students can go to Dickinson State in North Dakota or Northwest Community College in Powell Wyoming more cheaply than they can attend a Montana School of Higher Education.

As a practicing School Superintendent in Montana for 23 years it was always disconcerting to see so many of our best students go out of state for their Education, in many cases never to return. It was also discouraging to see our graduates not go to college because they believed that they could not afford it.

The need based scholarships and the scholarships to the two year institutions are particularly exciting. Those scholarships will make a difference in the lives of the recipients.

The fact that the scholarships are all renewable is also a wonderful idea. Many of our Graduates get scholarships upon graduation but most are not renewable. I believe that is part of the reason for the low retention rate after the first year of college.

Because these scholarships are renewable, just imagine that in four years 2340 Montana graduates could be receiving scholarships worth 2 ½ million dollars.

There is no better way to keep Montana kids home than to provide an education that is able to qualify a young person for a good Montana job.

In closing I believe that those who can afford to go to college will, and those who can't afford it won't! Needs based Scholarships are important in breaking this trend. If education is truly the bridge from where they are to where they plan to go, then we need to assist our youth by making postsecondary education accessible to all.

Please support this bill.