

## Debt crisis: Cuts shouldn't be across the board

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Our congressional delegation is taking a hard look at our country's balance sheet as they address issues surrounding our national debt crisis. Running a credit union, I certainly understand the need for a healthy balance sheet.

But I also believe that balancing our nation's finances does not equal across-the-board cuts. I urge our elected representatives to take a hard look at what is working and protect funding for what has been shown to strengthen our state's businesses and economy, both in the short and long term.

And what works? Quality early child care and education.

Early learning programs have well-recognized, long-term economic benefits - in fact, as much as \$16 for every \$1 spent. What is not as well recognized is that these programs also increase sales of local good and services. According to a report from the business leaders organization, America's Edge, investments in quality early

learning actually generate more in new sales than in any other sector, to the tune of \$1.61 for every \$1 invested.

What's more, quality early learning will help us ensure we have a workforce with the 21st century skills businesses need. Children who participate in these programs are significantly more likely to enter school with the underlying skills needed to succeed academically and later in the workforce. These programs can also increase language skills, lower the need for special education, and increase graduation rates by as much as 44 percent.

Given the proven, positive impact early learning has, I urge our congressional delegation to prioritize early learning for its real and significant economic impact here in Montana. We need to support what has been proven to work.

*Leslie Womack, President, Montana Educators' Credit Union, Missoula*