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Montana Cattlemen's Association International

Max S. Baucus

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AN ADDRESS BY
CONGRESSMAN MAX BAUCUS
BEFORE THE
MONTANA CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL
RAMADA INN, BILLINGS, MONTANA
NOVEMBER 19, 1977

Thank you for inviting me to be here today. I'm honored to be able to speak to representatives of Montana's largest industry.

According to statistics, 20 percent of Montana's agricultural output is cattle and calves. The cattle business is one we just can't afford to lose.

I'm sorry I missed the panel yesterday on how to survive with 40¢ cattle. It's a real testimonial to the fortitude of cattlemen that you've made it through some very tough years. I'd like to know how you do it.

Unfortunately, there isn't much light on the horizon.

A big problem in the federal bureaucracy is massive indifference to the special problems of the West. I recently read a letter in the "Dear Abby" column that illustrates the situation. A 16-year old girl wrote to Abby. She said, "I have an 18-year old boyfriend. I'd like to get him something for Christmas, but I don't know what he'd like. What do you think an 18-year old boy would like for Christmas?"

Abby wrote back, "Never mind what he wants. Get him a necktie."
THAT'S ABOUT HOW THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WORKS. DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT THE RANCHERS WANT, JUST TIE THEM DOWN WITH MORE RULES AND REGULATIONS.

ONE EXAMPLE OF FEDERAL INDIFFERENCE IS THE PROPOSED RULES FOR ENFORCING THE 160-ACRE LIMITATION. THESE INTERIOR DEPARTMENT RULES WOULD APPLY TO MONTANA THE SAME AS, SAY, CALIFORNIA.

THE AVERAGE GROWTH CROP VALUE PER IRRIGATED ACRE IN CALIFORNIA IS $781 -- IN MONTANA IT'S $149. I DON'T SEE HOW THE SAME RULES CAN APPLY.

I'M NOT TRYING TO PUT ALL THE BLAME ON THE INTERIOR DEPARTMENT. CONGRESS PASSED THE ORIGINAL RECLAMATION ACT AND NOW CONGRESS HAS TO CHANGE IT.

I'VE COSPONSORED A BILL IN THE HOUSE TO PUT A ONE-YEAR MORATORIUM ON THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE PROPOSED REGULATIONS, GIVING CONGRESS TIME TO WORK ON AN EQUIVALENCY BILL. THIS BILL WOULD ALLOW LARGER FARMS IN AREAS LIKE MONTANA WHERE GROWING SEASONS ARE SHORT AND SOILS ARE POOR.

THE USDA SET-ASIDE PROGRAMS ARE ANOTHER AREA WHERE SPECIAL CONDITIONS IN MONTANA HAVE BEEN IGNORED. ESTABLISHING GRASS ON SET-ASIDE ACREAGE IN MONTANA IS NOT ONLY DIFFICULT, BUT VERY EXPENSIVE.

THE GRASSED AREAS WILL FUNCTION MOSTLY AS A BREEDING GROUND FOR WEEDS AND GRASSHOPPERS. THEY WILL REQUIRE BIG EXPENSES FOR FENCING, CLIPPING AND SPRAYING.

I'VE BEEN URGING USDA TO CONSIDER ALLOWING SET-ASIDE LAND TO BE SUMMERFALLOWED. ALSO, GRAZING SHOULD BE ALLOWED DURING THE WINTER. A LOT OF CATTLE ARE WINTERED ON STUBBLE
FIELDS. IT'S UNREASONABLE TO ASK PRODUCERS TO STAND THE EXPENSE OF FENCING CATTLE OUT OF SET-ASIDE ACREAGE DURING THE WINTER.

I'M GLAD TO ANNOUNCE AT LEAST A LITTLE PROGRESS ON THE MEAT AND DAIRY IMPORT INSPECTION AND LABELING BILL I INTRODUCED LAST SPRING. THE HOUSE AGRICULTURE SUBCOMMITTEE ON LIVESTOCK AND GRAIN IS HOLDING HEARINGS ON THE BILL AT SCOTT'S BLUFF, NEBRASKA NEXT TUESDAY. THE COMMITTEE HAS ALSO TENTATIVELY PLANNED HEARINGS IN WASHINGTON EARLY NEXT YEAR.

THE MAIN OBSTACLE TO THIS BILL NOW IS THE STATE DEPARTMENT, WHICH ARGUES THAT THE BILL WOULD SET UP A NON-TARIFF TRADE BARRIER THAT WOULD HURT THE GENEVA TALKS.

I DON'T AGREE. I CAN'T SEE HOW REQUIRING FOREIGN PRODUCTS TO MEET THE SAME HEALTH STANDARDS AS OUR OWN AND TO BE LABELED AS IMPORTED CONSTITUTES A TRADE BARRIER. IMPORTED CARS, IMPORTED CLOTHES, EVEN IMPORTED TOYS ARE MARKED WITH THE COUNTRY THEY COME FROM. BUT A CONSUMER HAS NO WAY OF KNOWING WHAT COUNTRY THE MEAT HE EATS CAME FROM OR WHAT STANDARDS OF SANITATION IT WAS PROCESSED UNDER.

I SEE THAT YOU HAD A PANEL ON PRODUCER-CONSUMER RELATIONS YESTERDAY. ONE THING YOU MIGHT BE TALKING TO CONSUMERS ABOUT IS THE WHOLESOMENESS OF IMPORTED BEEF. I'M NOT SURE THEY'RE FULLY AWARE OF THE LAXNESS OF FOREIGN INSPECTION SYSTEMS.

RECENTLY, I INTRODUCED A BILL IN THE HOUSE TO PUT SOME RESTRICTIONS ON BEEF IMPORTS. THIS BILL WOULD EXPAND THE QUOTAS TO COVER ALL IMPORTED BEEF, NO MATTER HOW IT'S PROCESSED.
The bill, H.R. 9422, is similar to the Senate bill, S. 297, that Senator Melcher introduced. Here we’re facing opposition from the Ways and Means Committee and the State Department. Too bad some of these people aren’t in the beef business and losing $100 or more on every calf they produce.

I’m working to impress other Representatives with the seriousness of the import problem. We’ve got to get the message across that imports are endangering the domestic beef industry.

In the long run, this is going to drive our producers out of business and result in even higher consumer prices.

Y’know, Will Rogers once said, "Through the history of civilization, individuals involved in agriculture have fed society. But it only takes one politician to screw it up."

I hope I’m not that politician. I hope we can work together to solve some of these problems facing cattlemen.

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