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Remarks at the Sun Day Dinner

Max S. Baucus

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Energy

Remarks at the Sun Day Dinner

04/29/1978
REMARKS BY
CONGRESSMAN MAX BAUCUS
AT THE SUN DAY DINNER
BLACK EAGLE, MONTANA
APRIL 29, 1978

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK. AFTER AN EXHAUSTING DAY ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL, I FEEL AS IF I COULD USE SOME ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCES MYSELF.

I WANT TO TALK SPECIFICALLY ABOUT SOLAR ENERGY. YOU MAY KNOW THAT CONGRESS HAS DECLARED WEDNESDAY SUN DAY. DON’T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS. WE ON CAPITOL HILL HAVE NOT BEGUN TO MONKEY WITH THE DAYS OF THE WEEK. MAY 3 WAS DESIGNATED SUN DAY TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF SOLAR ENERGY AS ONE WAY OF MEETING OUR SERIOUS ENERGY PROBLEMS.

I HAVE ALWAYS THOUGHT SOLAR ENERGY WAS A PARTICULARLY FERTILE TOPIC FOR THE SORT OF SILLY RHETORIC THAT PLAGUES POLITICIANS’ SPEECHES. TRY THIS: SOLAR ENERGY IS NOT SOMETHING THAT SHOULD BE TAKEN LIGHTLY. OR THIS: SOLAR ENERGY IS A RAY OF HOPE IN OUR DISMAL ENERGY PICTURE.
SERIOUSLY, THOUGH, OUR NATIONAL ENERGY CRISIS IS REAL. ANOTHER ARAB OIL EMBARGO COULD CAUSE FAR MORE DISRUPTION IN OUR WAY OF LIFE THAN WE EXPERIENCED IN THE WINTER OF 1974. OUR INCREASING DEPENDENCE ON FOREIGN OIL IS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR TRADE DEFICIT, WHICH IS A SEVERE THREAT TO OUR ECONOMIC WELL-BEING.

WE MUST FIND AND DEVELOP OTHER SOURCES OF ENERGY BEHIND FOSSIL FUELS, WHICH ARE RUNNING OUT, AND NUCLEAR POWER, WHICH IS BESET BY PROBLEMS, MOST NOTABLY WASTE DISPOSAL.

SUNLIGHT IS SAFE. THE SUPPLY ISN'T DECLINING. THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO USE IT -- FROM RELATIVELY SIMPLE WATER HEATERS THAT MANY HOMEOWNERS CAN AFFORD, TO GIANT SOLAR SATELLITES COSTING BILLIONS OF DOLLARS.

I DON'T WANT TO DOWNPLAY THIS LAST ALTERNATIVE. THESE SATELLITES, WHICH WOULD COLLECT THE SUN'S ENERGY IN SPACE AND TRANSMIT IT TO EARTH BY MICROWAVES, ARE SURELY CONTROVERSIAL. BUT IN VIEW OF OUR PRESENT ENERGY SITUATION, WE NEED TO TAKE A CAREFUL LOOK AT ALL REASONABLE SOLUTIONS. I HAVE CO-SPONSORED LEGISLATION THAT WOULD PROVIDE FOR A RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM TO DETERMINE THE FEASIBILITY OF SUCH SATELLITES.
But solar satellites are not an alternative for the average person who owns a home and wants to do something now to ease the nation's dependence on fossil fuels and cut down own oil bill. I believe one of the things Congress can do is to ensure that existing federal programs are flexible enough to assist businesses and individuals in using solar energy.

Last year, I introduced three bills that do exactly that. One is now law, another is in energy legislation now being considered by a House-Senate Conference Committee and the third is still being studied by a House committee.

The first bill amends the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act to explicitly include solar equipment among the items for which farm improvement loans may be made or guaranteed. It was included in the 1977 Farm Bill, which is now law.

The second bill allows the limits on HUD housing loan programs to rise by up to 20 percent to cover the extra cost of solar equipment. A low-income family might purchase a solar unit if it could get this extension. Without the increase, a gas or oil furnace might be purchased instead. This bill is included in the National Energy Act, which is now being considered by House-Senate conferees.
The third bill permits inclusion of solar equipment among items for which VA guaranteed loans to veterans can be made. It stipulates that such equipment cannot exceed 20 percent of the value of the home in which it is installed.

Collectively, these bills have the advantage of creating no new bureaucracies or spending programs. But beyond that, they typify the simple things the federal government can do to promote solar energy.

Congress is taking many other initiatives to promote the use of solar energy. The National Energy Legislation no! before the Conference Committee contains tax credits for solar equipment. I have co-sponsored a bill to establish a solar energy development bank that would provide long-term, low-interest loans for the purchase and installation of solar energy equipment in commercial and residential buildings. I have also co-sponsored a bill to provide for a solar and energy conservation loan program within the Small Business Administration.

Another bill I have co-sponsored would direct the Secretary of Commerce to carry out a global market survey with respect to American-made solar energy technology equipment.
THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE WATCHED A SUNRISE KNOW THAT GLOWING ORANGE ORB RISING INTO THE SKY IS A THING NOT ONLY OF GREAT BEAUTY, BUT OF IMMENSE POWER. THAT POWER WARM OUR EARTH, LIGHTS OUR DAYS AND PROVIDES THE ENERGY TO RAISE ALL LIVING THINGS. WE CAN MAKE IT DO MORE.

THANK YOU.