

7-7-1978

American Legion State Convention (2)

Max S. Baucus

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Baucus, Max S., "American Legion State Convention (2)" (July 7, 1978). *Max S. Baucus Speeches*. 66.
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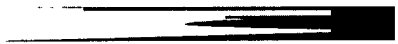
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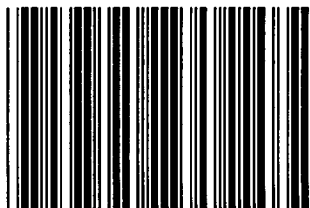

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_____ **Address Before the American Legion State Convention**

_____ **07/07/1978**

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BAUCUS

AN ADDRESS BY CONGRESSMAN MAX BAUCUS
BEFORE THE AMERICAN LEGION STATE CONVENTION

FRIDAY, JULY 7

KALISPELL, MONTANA

GOOD EVENING. IT'S AN HONOR TO STAND BEFORE YOU TODAY. I'D LIKE TO THANK YOU AND YOUR DEPARTMENT ADJUTANT, TONY CUMMINGS, FOR INVITING ME TO SPEAK WITH YOU.

THE AMERICAN LEGION IS A DYNAMIC, INFLUENTIAL ORGANIZATION. IT IS AN ORGANIZATION WHOSE PRIMARY GOAL IS AS SOLID AND CLEARLY STATED AS A GRATEFUL AMERICAN COULD HOPE FOR: THE AMERICAN LEGION PROTECTS OUR COUNTRY'S DEFENDERS FROM THE DISADVANTAGES ASSOCIATED WITH MILITARY SERVICE.

AS ONE AMERICAN WHO HAS NOT FORGOTTEN YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS, I SALUTE AND CONGRATULATE YOU.

WE ALL BELIEVE IN A STRONG AMERICA. TO KEEP AMERICA STRONG AND FREE, WE MUST HAVE A STRONG MILITARY. I BELIEVE THAT WE MUST PLAN OUR DEFENSES CAREFULLY AND SPEND WHATEVER AMOUNTS ARE REQUIRED TO PRESERVE OUR NATIONAL SECURITY AND OUR LEADERSHIP ROLE IN WORLD AFFAIRS. AND, YOU CAN BE CERTAIN I WILL WORK TO MAINTAIN MONTANA MILITARY AS A CONTRIBUTION TO OUR NATIONAL DEFENSE.

BUT NATIONAL DEFENSE, NO MATTER HOW ELABORATE AND TECHNICALLY COMPLEX, STILL COMES DOWN TO ONE THING: THE SOLDIER. THE PERSON WHO IS WILLING TO SACRIFICE THE COMFORT AND SAFETY OF CIVILIAN LIFE TO PROTECT WHAT HE BELIEVES IN.

YOU ARE SPECIAL, NOT JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE WORKING TO DEFEND THE RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS OF YOUR LESS-FORTUNATE COMRADES, BUT BECAUSE YOU CHOSE TO SERVE YOUR COUNTRY WHEN YOUR COUNTRY NEEDED YOU -- AND YOUR COUNTRY IS GRATEFUL.

BUT NATIONS FORGET ALL TOO FAST THOSE WHO SACRIFICED SO GREATLY. THERE IS AN OLD RHYME ABOUT VETERANS WHICH STATES IT WELL:

FOR IT'S "TOMMY THIS," AND "TOMMY THAT,"
AND "CHUCK HIM OUT! THE BRUTE!"
BUT IT'S "SAVIOR OF THE COUNTRY,"
WHEN THE GUNS BEGIN TO SHOOT!

SINCE THE END OF THE VIETNAM WAR, THE BUDGET OF THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HAS DECREASED FROM 5.1% OF THE TOTAL NATIONAL BUDGET IN 1975 TO 3.8% IN FY 1979.

THAT DOWNWARD SHIFT SIGNALS AN ALARMING TREND TO THOSE OF US WHO CONSIDER IT A NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO AID THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO DEFENDED OUR COUNTRY DURING ITS TIME OF NEED.

FORTUNATELY, THERE ARE DEDICATED, CAPABLE ORGANIZATIONS IN WASHINGTON LOOKING OUT FOR THE VETERANS OF AMERICA. THE AMERICAN LEGION IS A LEADER IN THIS CAUSE -- AND WE ARE INDEED FORTUNATE TO HAVE MEN LIKE ROBERT SMITH AND YOUR WASHINGTON LEGISLATIVE STAFF WATCHING OVER THE CONGRESSIONAL SCENE.

MY MESSAGE TO YOU TODAY IS THIS: WE MUST GET FULL FORCE BEHIND YOUR NATIONAL AND LEGISLATIVE LEADERS AND LET THE POWERS THAT BE KNOW THAT YOU WON'T STAND TO HAVE THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION STRIPPED OF ANY SMOOTHLY FUNCTIONING PROGRAMS.

THE ATTACKS COME FROM ALL SIDES -- HEW, THE ADMINISTRATION, INTEREST GROUPS -- EVERYONE WANTS TO TAKE A BITE OUT OF THE APPLE, AND I'VE SEEN IT HAPPEN HUNDREDS OF TIMES -- WORTHWHILE, EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS GET PHASED OUT BECAUSE OF THE FINITE NUMBER OF DOLLARS AVAILABLE IN THE FEDERAL TREASURY.

THIS IS WHY YOU NEED TO STAY ACTIVE -- AND VOCAL.

FOR YEARS HEW HAS BEEN TRYING TO TAKE OVER THE 172 HOSPITALS OF THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION -- AND FOR GOOD REASON. THE VA HOSPITAL SYSTEM WITH ALL ITS COMPLEXITIES IS CERTAINLY ONE OF THE FINEST SYSTEMS OF MEDICAL CARE IN THE WORLD. THEY SEE THE VA HOSPITAL SYSTEM AS A POTENTIAL CORNERSTONE TO THE PROPOSED NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE SYSTEM, THAT WOULD CARE FOR ALL AMERICANS FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE.

THIS MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN -- WE NEED TO PRESERVE VETERANS HOSPITALS FOR VETERANS.

TWO OTHER AREAS I AM CONCERNED WITH ARE PENSIONS AND PAYMENTS TO VETERANS AND ELIGIBLE SURVIVORS. LAST WEEK THE HOUSE PASSED A BILL TO INCREASE PENSIONS AND SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENTS ALONG SIMILAR FORMULAS. I SUPPORTED THIS BILL BECAUSE IT ASSURES THAT PENSIONERS WILL GET A FULL COST-OF-LIVING INCREASE EACH YEAR AT THE SAME TIME SOCIAL SECURITY RATES ARE RAISED. THIS MEANS PENSIONS WILL NO LONGER GO DOWN WHEN SOCIAL SECURITY GOES UP. FOR ANY PENSIONER NOT BENEFITTED BY LAW, CURRENT PENSION PAYMENTS WOULD BE PROTECTED. IT ALSO MEANS THAT PENSIONERS 80 YEARS OLD AND OVER WILL NEVER AGAIN BE FORCED TO LIVE BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL.

ON THE LEGISLATIVE FRONT, WE RECENTLY WENT THROUGH A TERRIFIC BATTLE IN THE HOUSE TO SAVE 3,000 VA HOSPITAL BEDS, PREVENT CURTAILED MEDICAL RESEARCH AND CONSTRUCTION, AND HASTEN PENSION REFORM AND OTHER PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS.

THE DECISIVE ROUND CAME ON THE FLOOR OF THE HOUSE WHEN CONGRESSMAN RAY ROBERTS INTRODUCED -- AND THE HOUSE ADOPTED -- AN AMENDMENT THAT ADDED OVER \$1 BILLION TO THE HOUSE BUDGET AUTHORITY FOR THE VA. \$170 MILLION WAS ADDED TO VA MEDICAL PROGRAMS, AND THE OVERALL BUDGET PASSED BY THE HOUSE INCREASED FROM \$19.2 BILLION TO \$21.0 BILLION.

I'M SURE YOU'VE ALL BEEN FOLLOWING RECENT DEBATE CONCERNING VETERANS PREFERENCE IN FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT. THIS IS AN ISSUE WHICH HAS BEEN TIED TO THE PRESIDENT'S NEW PROPOSAL FOR CIVIL SERVICE REFORM.

I QUESTION THE VALIDITY OF THE PRESENT CRITICISM. THERE SEEMS TO BE A NOTION THAT VETERANS ARE GETTING MORE THAN THEIR FAIR SHARE OF FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT.

FRANKLY, I FIND THIS HARD TO BELIEVE SINCE APPROXIMATELY 50% OF THE FEDERAL WORKERS ARE VETERANS AND 48% OF THE NATIONAL WORKING FORCE IS COMPOSED OF FORMER MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY. MOREOVER, I AM NOT ADVERSE TO GIVING OUR VETERANS AN EDGE WHEN IT COMES TO FEDERAL JOBS. IN FACT, THERE IS A BILL PRESENTLY PENDING, WHICH I SUPPORT, TO ALLOW VETERANS TO BE GIVEN JOBS WITHOUT APPLYING THROUGH THE FEDERAL REGISTER. THESE JOBS HELP ESPECIALLY THE YOUNGER VETERANS WHO ARE NOT AS FORTUNATE AS THEIR CIVILIAN COUNTERPARTS IN RECEIVING AN EARLY EDUCATION AND JOB EXPERIENCE.

IN GENERAL, I BELIEVE THAT A REASONABLE POLICY OF AIDING VETERANS, PARTICULARLY YOUNG VETERANS, IS APPROPRIATE AND EASILY COMPATIBLE WITH OUR NATIONAL POLICIES.

I KNOW IT GOES AGAINST THE GRAIN FOR VETERANS TO CLAIM THEY ARE A SPECIAL BREED, BUT THEY ARE. THE DEBT OUR COUNTRY OWES YOU IS CONSIDERABLE, AND WE NEED TO INSURE THAT THIS DEBT IS REPAYED.

AGAIN, I PLEDGE TO CONTINUE TO WORK, LISTEN AND LEARN. MY DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN. THE ISSUES ARE COMPLEX AND VARIED. BUT WITH YOUR HELP AND ADVICE, AS WELL AS YOUR CONTINUED EFFORTS IN WASHINGTON, I FEEL CERTAIN WE CAN CONTINUE TO HELP OUR VETERANS.

THANK YOU.