

10-24-1978

Missoula Senior Citizens Association

Max S. Baucus

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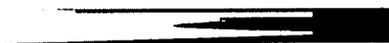
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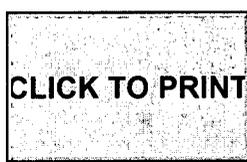
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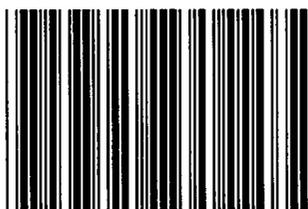

 **Social Conditions**

(select subject from controlled vocabulary, if your office has one)

 **Remarks Before the Missoula Senior Citizens Association**

 **10/24/1978**





BAUCUS

Remarks by Congressman Max Baucus

before the Missoula Senior Citizens Association

Legislative Pot-luck dinner

October 24, 1978

Missoula, Montana

I would like to thank the members of the Missoula Senior Citizens Association, and especially their President, Mr. Claude Williams, for inviting me to speak at tonight's dinner.

I would like to talk for just a few minutes about some of the problems senior citizens face and how I and the Congress have acted of late to respond to them.

I don't know if you know it, but you are part of the fastest growing group in America. There were 22 million Americans over age 65 just 4 years ago. By 40 years from now, this number will have doubled.

I must say that the country and its Congress are having trouble understanding what this means for us.

Inflation hits the elderly like no other group. Medical costs, transportation, rising property taxes, food: I don't think I need to tell anyone of you how incredibly helpless people on fixed incomes are to adjust to the severely inflated costs of these basic necessities.

It's not that you can forego buying a weekly prescription the way someone can pass over buying a second television.

And, when you are forced into selling a house you worked all of your life to pay for -- just to pay high property taxes, something is just plain wrong. And we have to put a stop to it.

Let's talk about housing for a moment.

I wonder how many of you are living in houses of your own. I would guess many of you are having problems paying your taxes -- or know someone who is. And how about those of you who rent? I wonder if there is anyone of you who are listening whose rent has gone down in the last year.

Housing becomes a particular problem as people grow older. People can find themselves with fewer and fewer choices.

Often, right in Montana, people are prematurely forced into adult care homes and institutions just because they can't afford to maintain their homes or rent decent apartments.

Not only is this sad on a person-to-person basis, but it just doesn't make sense as public policy.

It costs a heck of a lot when the public supports a person in an institution -- often a lot more than if we'd designed our system to keep people out of institutions if at all possible.

I am on the Appropriations Subcommittee which funds the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and there are some good changes going on which I think you might want to know about.

First, many of you may have heard of the HUD program for elderly and handicapped housing. Just last month I was pleased when loans came through to build 30 units of this housing for the elderly and handicapped in Whitefish, 24 more in Shelby, and another 9 units in Butte.

One more thing we can do is shift the emphasis on health care toward home health care. The vast majority of the elderly must rely on Medicare and Medicaid support, neither of which pay for home health care services.

The General Accounting Office released a report just this year which revealed that for many older people, the cost of nursing home care exceeds the cost of home care -- including the value of support given at home by family and friends.

I don't know how many of you are familiar with Congressman Claude Pepper, but he is the Chairman of the House Select Committee on Aging, and over the years he's lead the fight for older Americans in Congress.

Well, he has had another really good idea on this home health care problem. I joined him this year in sponsoring legislation that would have changed Medicare to allow unlimited home health care visits. It would also have eliminated the three-day hospital requirement for Medicare, and it would have dispensed with the \$60 deductible on home health care benefits.

Although I supported these changes strongly, we were unable to move them out of the Ways and Means Committee. I hope next year to be able to see this legislation through.

There is one final area I would like to talk to you about ~~the~~ -- and that's jobs and retirement as people grow older.

Right now, only 3 percent of the entire civilian labor force in the United States is over age 65.

Frankly, this is a waste of some of our best talent, and the United States can't afford it.

A few years ago the ratio of workers to Social Security beneficiaries was 4 to 1. Now that ratio is 3 to 1. Fifty years from now, if trends continue, it will be 2 to 1.

From a self-serving standpoint, the workers of this country should be encouraging older Americans to stay on their jobs and keep earning. Instead, we have been forcing them to retire, often by law. People earn their retirement, and they should look forward to it, but they should not be booted into retiring before they are ready.

As many of you know, I was a sponsor of the legislation which passed earlier this year to curb mandatory retirement. This has been signed into law, and at the end of September,

Starting in January, the mandatory retirement age limit in the private sector will be raised to 70.

The next step will be to abolish mandatory retirement based solely on age altogether.

This year Congress passed an expanded and improved Older Americans Act. You should know what's going on and take advantage of it.

There's going to be a new emphasis on senior centers and on home-delivered meals. And the Commissioner of Aging has been made directly responsible to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare. The should put a new emphasis on senior programs within HEW.

I should add that in the category of small improvements, there is one I sponsored which seems to be working already. This bill permitted airlines to offer reduced fares for senior citizens. Many airlines have started to do this.

And in the category of big improvements, I supported the successful passage of a bill to shore up the Social Security System. This will guarantee that all of you will continue to receive uninterrupted the benefits you have worked for and rightfully earned.

I hope this has illuminated for you some of what Congress -- and I -- have been doing for you lately.

I thank you for your kind invitation and your attention. And I'm especially grateful to the many of you who donated your time and talent to producing this delicious dinner. Thanks.