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Retired Officers Dinner, Malmstrom Air Force Base (2)

Max S. Baucus

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(1) Subject*:  Defense
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(2) Subject*  Retired Officers Dinner speech at Malmstrom AFB

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* "required information"
GOOD EVENING. I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO
SHARE IN THE FESTIVITIES OF THE RETIRED OFFICERS DINNER TONIGHT.

IT IS A SPECIAL PLEASURE TO SIT BACK, EAT A DELICIOUS MEAL,
AND ENJOY THE COMPANY OF SO MANY DISTINGUISHED MONTANANS.

I KNOW YOU HAVE ALL HAD A BUSY, AND I HOPE, PRODUCTIVE DAY.
SO -- I WON'T GO ON LONG.

LET ME SIMPLY SAY THAT IS A VERY SATISFYING FEELING TO BE
HERE AT MALMSTROM TONIGHT.

MALMSTROM IS NOT ONLY A PLACE IN GREAT FALLS, MONTANA.

MALMSTROM IS NOT ONLY A PLACE IN WHAT MANY IN WASHINGTON
REGARD AS THE WILD, WILD WEST.

RATHER, MALMSTROM IS A VITAL PART OF OUR NATIONAL DEFENSE.
CONTINUED SURVIVABILITY OF MALMSTROM'S MINUTEMAN MISSILE FORCE IS
OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE NOT ONLY TO MONTANA, BUT TO THE ENTIRE
NATION. MALMSTROM IS ALSO AT THE HEART OF A VIBRANT GREAT FALLS
ECONOMY.
IN SHORT, MALMSTROM IS AN IMPORTANT PLACE TO EVERY SINGLE AMERICAN.

I HAVE VISITED SAC AND NORAD HEADQUARTERS IN AN EFFORT TO GET A MORE THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEMS FACING MALMSTROM, AND OUR DEFENSE POSTURE IN GENERAL.

I'M ESPECIALLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE VULNERABILITY OF THE NORTHERN TIER STATES TO A SUBMARINE OR OVER-THE-POLE ATTACK. HERE, TOO, I HAVE BEEN THOROUGHLY BRIEFED BY DEFENSE EXPERTS REGARDING OUR DEFENSE POSTURE.

I WOULD LIKE TO STRESS THAT I HAVE NOT ONLY BEEN LISTENING TO OTHERS ABOUT THESE ISSUES, I HAVE ALSO BEEN TALKING WITH OTHERS. I AM IN WASHINGTON TO REPRESENT YOU, AND I CERTAINLY BEAR THIS IN MIND IN MY MANY CONVERSATIONS.

IT IS A CURIOUS THING. MANY AMERICANS ALL TOO EASILY TAKE THE DEFENSE OF THEIR COUNTRY FOR GRANTED, AND MANY AMERICANS ALL TOO EASILY DISMISS THE FUNDAMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MILITARY BASES TO OUR NATIONAL WELL-BEING.

MILITARY BASES LIKE MALMSTROM.
Indeed, I am often struck with the lack of understanding many in Washington have for the military. Of course, there is always the ready stereotype or the casual shrug. This callous attitude of many Americans toward the military disturbs me deeply.

The issue is more important than mere lack of appreciation. The issue centers around the need to rally around a common cause: a strong and free America.

I think it is time that all Americans recognize that serving in the military is not the easiest way to serve your country. It requires courage, dedication, and patriotism. I, for one, appreciate each of these qualities in each of you.

In this vein, let me say that I continue to be impressed with the organization and efficiency of America's military. Each time I request a briefing, or some specific information, I have been promptly and completely answered.

This is not an idle compliment. It is a sad fact that much of the Washington bureaucracy resembles a sprawling and sluggish mass of useless paperwork. It is most refreshing to receive thorough and enthusiastic feedback from the military officers both here and in Washington.
I am continually impressed by the ability of the military to cut to the heart of an issue and present the essence of an argument. Obviously, you believe in what you are doing.

Here, I would like to digress a bit and talk about defense spending. Again, all Americans have a stake in a strong defense. Still, it seems that citizens like yourself are sometimes the only ones who have a thorough understanding of just how important a strong defense is.

There is a lot of haggling in Congress these days about what exactly constitutes a "strong defense." Of course, the definition is hard to pin down. It is my belief that a strong defense is a comprehensive defense, and a defense capable of defending our nation against outside threats of all sorts.

Just a few weeks ago, I voted for a 3 percent real increase in defense spending. I do not believe this is an excessive increase. Nor is it arbitrary. Rather, it is the fulfillment of a pledge the United States made to, and with, our NATO allies in Brussels back in 1977.

This was a pledge not only of dollars and cents. This was a pledge to stand by a strong and United Western World.

The United States has kept its pledge. Since 1974, American defense expenditures have been heavily oriented toward NATO. The majority of our defense increases have gone to bolstering combat capabilities for a potential NATO conflict.
I firmly believe the United States must stand by its commitment to NATO. We live in a time when a comprehensive commitment to defense is of the essence. Without it, we endanger the way of life we have come to cherish. With it, we stand by our allies and way of life.

In addition, the U.S. has a special task of maintaining "essential equivalence" with the Soviet Union. The 3 percent increase in defense spending this year will assure that the U.S. keeps pace with its global challengers.

Of course, you know as well as I do many Americans resent any increase in defense spending. They feel that enough government money goes for defense, and that much of their tax dollar is wasted. I have not ignored these complaints. There are very legitimate grounds to be concerned about waste in the federal government. I am chairman of a subcommittee which deals with many oversight issues. We have pursued many of these complaints and gotten results.

I will give one example which I think all of you will find both disturbing and infuriating. This example centers around the nearly $13 billion worth of arms that the Shah of Iran's government ordered from the United States. The revolutionary Khomeini government cancelled these orders.
I was concerned that the American taxpayer would end up
shouldering the cost of Khomeini's action. So -- I ordered a
gao investigation of the Iranian trust fund and arms situation.
The report is now out, and I can say, quite frankly, that I am
deeply concerned.

The report details an enormous amount of mismanagement in our
entire foreign military sales program. The United States treasury
may well be liable for billions of dollars of arms contracts
cancelled by Iran. The defense department's management of foreign
arms sales is nothing short of miserable.

The report raises other serious problems that I shall not
detail. Let me simply say that I am demanding specific, and
thorough responses to all these issues from the department of
defense.

If I am not satisfied, I will take my questions further.

Waste and inefficiency can and does occur at all levels of
the federal government. The defense department is not an isolated
example, by any means. Rather, I mention it to highlight my argument.
A strong defense will cost the United States a substantial amount of money.

That is a fact.

But it is also a fact that we have other funding priorities which demand immediate attention as well. Thus -- it is absolutely essential that we spend our defense dollars wisely and cautiously.

There is no room for waste.

There is no room for spending dollars on the wrong program.

We must continue to strengthen our defense capabilities, with the total well-being of the United States in mind. A dollar well spent on national defense is a dollar well spent for the fundamental security goals of the United States.

In closing, I simply want to thank the many good people here at Malmstrom and throughout the state, who have made this day possible.

Montana has a special need for this kind of gathering. As we all know, the distance between towns and people are vast here, and it is often a difficult task bringing everyone together. In this vein, let me say that I am sure you all share my enthusiasm for the new Retiree Affairs office that opened here this spring. It will prove invaluable for organizing this kind of event in the future, I am sure.
I WILL SIT DOWN NOW, BUT LET ME SAY ONCE AGAIN THAT I AM HONORED TO BE HERE AT THE RETIRED OFFICERS DINNER. I'M GLAD TO SEE SUCH A FULL HOUSE.

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!