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Public Lands Access--The Issue of the 90s, Montana Bowhunters Association Convention (1)

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By
Senator Max Baucus

Public Land Access -- The Issue Of The 90's
April 8, 1988

Introduction

Thanks for coming tonight. Well, campaign '88 is upon us. We've got a wild race for the Democratic nomination. And a big race here at home for Governor. I don't know, but I think speedreading is particularly important in 1988....it's the only way you can read all of the names and propositions on the ballot!

I heard that in honor of the presidential candidates, a brand new golf tournament has been named after them. It's called the Mouth Open.

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If there is one thing that ties Montanan's together, it's the land.
Russell painted it. McLean wrote about it. My
FAMILY HAS RANCHED IT FOR YEARS. WE LOVE TO HUNT ON IT.

PEOPLE IN WASHINGTON JUST CAN'T COMPREHEND WHAT WE MONTANANS TAKE FOR GRANTED. THERE, THE LAND IS SOMETHING YOU DRIVE ON. SOMETHING YOU DEVELOP.

HERE, THE LAND IS PART OF OUR LIVES...LIKE FOOD AND WATER. IT IS PART OF OUR HERITAGE. I LOVE BEING HOME, OUT OF WASHINGTON, BECAUSE THE LAND RECHARGES ME. JUST LIKE HUNTING THE LAND MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD.

WE MONTANANS WANT TO PRESERVE THE LAND. AND WE WANT TO WORK OUTSIDE ON THE LAND. THAT'S WHY WE HAVE A WILDERNESS BILL BEFORE CONGRESS.

AND WE MONTANANS WANT TO ENJOY WHAT WE HAVE. THAT'S WHY THIS ISSUE OF PUBLIC ACCESS IS SO IMPORTANT TO US AND OUR STATE.

WE ALL KNOW THE PHRASE "OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, AND FOR THE PEOPLE." IT WAS WRITTEN TO REMIND AMERICANS THAT WE ARE STEWARDS OF OUR
OWN DESTINY. Our future rests in our own hands. If some bureaucrat in Washington is making decisions for us, it's probably because we let it happen.

Government shouldn't work that way. I believe you and I have to work together to set goals for Montana -- to find solutions to our problems. And I need you, because without you, I can't do a good job in Washington.

On wilderness, our partnership has worked well. We are close to ending one of the most contentious chapters in Montana's history. Montanans from all walks of life have shared their views on the wilderness issue with me.

They have spoken with one voice: "Get on with it, Max!," people tell me. "Too much time has been spent fighting over wilderness. The facts are on the table. Make some decisions, and let us get on with building a future for our families and our state."
I'm happy to say we're getting close to achieving that goal. The Senate had a hearing on Montana wilderness a few weeks ago. It was a good hearing. A lot of voices were heard. It highlighted how close we are to getting a final bill.

Sure, there are differences still out there. Differences between Pat's bill and mine. But they are few -- on the majority of issues we agree. And we're working on the differences instead of just talking.

The result is progress on a wilderness bill for the first time in years. And that's good for Montana. I think it is vital that we put the wilderness debate behind us. Happily, we're almost there.

Public Access

And as much as we Montanans want to preserve our land, we also want to enjoy it as well. We have a great tradition of landowners and sportsmen getting along when it comes to access to public lands.
But there are storm clouds on the horizon -- changes afoot that could put rancher and sportsman at each other's necks instead of at each other's side.

We face a problem of meeting the increasing demand for recreation on public lands while maintaining the property rights of land owners.

We are clearly on a collision course on public access. Outdoor recreation is booming. In Montana, the number of bowhunters jumped from nearly 14,000 in 1980 to almost 22,000 in 1985. Recreation is becoming an important industry for our state -- one we need to continue to build. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks reports that hunters and fishermen pumped $____ into Montana's economy in 19??.

This is not just a Montana issue. All across the country people are spending more time outdoors. The demand for access to public lands will continue to increase. And we'll feel that national pressure here, too.
Yet as you know, the problem of public access is growing in Montana. The Forest Service estimates that over 40 percent of the nine million National Forest Service acres east of the Continental Divide in Montana have no public access. And the BLM says the public lacks access to at least 60 percent of the eight million acres its manages in Montana.

Much of the problem is being driven by economic forces. Under this administration less money is being spent on access roads and land acquisitions.

Ranchers, too, have experienced some tough economic times. They are wisely going after recreation dollars as sources of new revenue. Sometimes these landowners just don't want to deal with liability, vandalism and litter problems.

Fortunately, we Montanans are doing more to solve this problem than any other western state. Landowners and sportsmen have a tradition of working together. And from what I can see, both groups want to maintain the friendship. The
Landowner/Sportsmen's Conference last April, which some of you attended, was a great start.

Governor Schwinden has established a Subcommittee of his Natural Resource Council that is chaired by Dennis Hemmer, Commissioner of State Lands. This new group should help get the ball rolling between the Feds and state authorities. This is the first unified effort by state agencies to work on the access issue, and that's good.

We need to get hard facts on the scope of the problem. The Forest Service has completed a study of what roads and trails are needed to improve access. BLM is working on the same.

I'm told all these activities are beginning to pay dividends. Agencies are preparing better maps for the recreationist that identify existing access routes and land ownership boundaries. Better signing programs are being set up and creative management programs with block lands are being tried, to name a few.
There is a lot of activity going on here in the state to define the problem and start working on developing solutions. I think it's time the Federal Government also gets into the act to work out the public access problem.

When something's broke, it needs to be fixed.

One important initiative is the effort by the Keystone Center, a non-profit policy organization, to develop a national dialogue on the public access issue. I'm told that within a year the group's 40-45 participants -- which include representatives of all interested parties and government agencies -- will issue a report outlining the problem of public access in detail and proposing some solutions.

Having government, landowners and sportsmen working together like that is the way to go, and I applaud the effort. However, there is more that I can do to help move the process along.

I can help with federal legislation directing more recreation dollars toward public access --
MONEY FOR EASEMENTS, BLOCK GRANTS AND LAND ACQUISITIONS.

I have written to my good friend, Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, Chairman of the Senate Public Lands Subcommittee, and invited him to co-chair a hearing in Montana on public access.

I know the access issue is not going to be solved overnight, or by any one person, or by one congressional hearing. In part, that's because this is not just a recreational issue, it's a major economic issue and cultural heritage issue for Montana.

CONCLUSION

We Montanans want access to public lands. All Americans do. And we also want to respect the rights of property owners. I believe both public and private interests are compatible. We can achieve a solution because Montanans are already working together.
IF THERE IS ANYTHING YOU TAKE WITH YOU TONIGHT FROM MY REMARKS, LET IT BE THIS: WHEN IT COMES TO ACCESS TO ME, YOU WILL NEVER HAVE A PROBLEM. MY DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN. I SEEK YOUR WISDOM. PUBLIC ACCESS TO MAX IS NOT AN ISSUE, IT'S A RULE.

I WANT TO WORK OUT THIS PROBLEM WITH YOU. I'M HERE AS A RESOURCE. I'M HERE AS A MONTANAN LOOKING TO GET THE JOB DONE.

THANKS FOR COMING TONIGHT. NOW, LET ME HEAR WHAT'S ON YOUR MINDS.