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National Cattlemen's Association

Max S. Baucus

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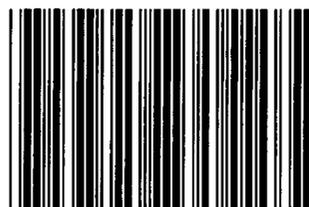
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_____ **Remarks to the National Cattlemen's Association**

_____ **03/15/1993**



BAUCUS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2602

Remarks of Senator Max Baucus
To the National Cattlemen's Association
Washington, D.C.
March 15, 1993

The American beef industry is an American success story. You work hard and you do a good job. American beef is the safest and most complete protein source in the world. I tend to think it's also one of the best tasting foods around.

People all over the world know that. Beef is one of the very few American industries to get and hold a place in the Japanese market. You and I have both worked hard to make that happen. Closer to home, exports to Canada are up 800%, and exports to Mexico are up 1600% since 1987.

The result is that in 1992, when America ran a trade deficit of \$65 billion, the American beef industry had a trade surplus of \$1.2 billion. That tells me you've got a good product; you work hard; and you market it well. Keep it up.

I'm sure more than a few of you agree that Washington hasn't done quite such a good job over the past few years. We've produced a whole lot of rhetoric, and a whole lot of frustration. Those are products with a limited market.

This year, I've become Chairman of the Senate's Committee on the Environment and Public Works. As Chairman, I hope to cool down the heat which environmental issues have generated -- because I know for a fact that there's more common ground there than many people think.

I grew up on a family ranch. And I know that ranchers don't face a choice between protecting the environment and making a living. If the cattle don't graze, you go broke -- and if the land is ruined, you also go broke. People in Washington have got to understand that you can't go to either extreme. You can protect the environment and make a living at the same time. You've got to do both.

Today I'd like to talk for a little while about the environmental legislation affecting cattlemen this year, and about the trade agreements coming up before my Subcommittee on Trade as well. I'll also talk a bit about the bigger picture -- a new Democratic Administration in Washington, a very different budget from the ones we've gotten used to. And then we'll have some time for me to take questions, and for you to give me your thoughts and advice.

CLEAN WATER ACT

During the next two years, my Committee will reauthorize four major environmental laws, including the two you're particularly concerned about. I'm hoping to do the Clean Water Act first. The new version of the bill will see some changes, and three issues are likely to dominate the debate.

-- First, funding. The Act as a whole doesn't have enough money to meet its requirements; the funding mechanism isn't flexible enough to meet the needs of diverse states; and small and rural communities face particular cost problems due to economies of scale. I want to see the burden spread around a little more fairly.

-- Second, pollution prevention. We should stop pollution before it starts, rather than cleaning it up afterwards at high cost to the taxpayers and to business.

-- Finally, and of particular concern to ranchers, control of "diffuse" or "non-point" sources of pollution. That is to say, on industries which pollute relatively little one business at a time, but which all together produce about half of the US's water pollution problem.

As this debate proceeds, I will give particular weight to the special challenges posed by agricultural sources. Cattle need water to drink. They also need it to be clean, safe water that doesn't make them sick. So you've got a big stake in a good bill, and you've got some good advice for us.

Both the EPA staff and we in Congress will need to work cooperatively with individual farmers, and with associations like the NCA, to address the problem. EPA Director Carol Browner has dealt with agricultural issues before as Florida's Environmental Commissioner, and I'm confident she'll have an open mind and an open office.

The one thing I want to avoid is a bill that caters to extremism on any side of this debate. I want a bill that provides solutions to real problems, and contributes to the economic, health and environmental needs of the American people. I'm going to want to hear your views as we move along. So Roger and the rest of you better be ready.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

I also want to talk a little about the Endangered Species Act. I am very unhappy about all the rancor and bitterness that have become so familiar in the endangered species debate. Too many people, on all sides of this issue, often miss the big point. The fact is that very few listings cause trouble, and in most cases the Act does a very good job.

One way I see to make it work better for everyone is to improve federal implementation. The point of endangered species policy is to prevent species from becoming endangered, not to let them go and then have to rescue them. Too often we've done the reverse -- wait around doing nothing while species become endangered, then we've stomped in like Bigfoot. I want to make sure that doesn't happen any more.

The Western Governors Association has made a thoughtful contribution to the debate. They begin from the premise that development and species recovery can coexist, understand the concerns of producers, and point out that federal-state cooperation needs improvement. I think those are points we all have to recognize, and I'd like to work with them and with you as we proceed.

Like I said, we've got a full schedule, so I'm not sure when the Act is going to come up. But once again, I'm going to want to hear from you when it does.

NAFTA

Over in my trade subcommittee we're going to be just as busy. The two biggest items, of course, are the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Uruguay Round of GATT.

NAFTA can be very good for American cattlemen. Sales of US beef in Mexico have grown rapidly there over the past five years, as I noted earlier, and the NAFTA offers us the prospect of still more to come, although Mexico's decision to impose higher tariffs on beef last fall was not a good sign. Assuming that we can work out the details of rules of origin and make sure that Mexican beef inspection along with health and safety standards meet American standards, I think it's going to work out very well.

In a more general sense, President Clinton has said that NAFTA means a great deal for jobs and growth in our country, but that the present text by itself is not enough. I agree with him. We need to make sure that our higher environmental and labor standards don't give an unfair advantage to Mexican firms and agricultural producers. Wheat and sugar growers, along with some other industries, also have raised some legitimate concerns.

Once those are settled -- and I think they all can be settled -- I expect that President Clinton will sign off and send the NAFTA down to Congress. And I think he'll find a lot of support.

GATT

I'm nowhere near as confident about the Uruguay Round. It's gone on for seven years now, more than two years past the date it was supposed to end. As I told Mickey Kantor last Tuesday, a lot of us are starting to think of it as a guest who's stayed around watching TV four hours after the others have gone home. We're running out of patience.

I expect the Administration to come to us in the near future with a request for extending fast-track negotiating authority, and I'm going to support them on it. But this will be the last time. If we can't get an agreement this year, I won't expect any agreement at all.

If that happens, I'll be disappointed. But I won't be devastated. We cannot afford to sign a bad agreement for the sake of signing something. We'll just have to open markets in other ways -- as we've done for beef in Japan. A few years ago they bought almost nothing. We worked hard to change that. I and others in the government made beef a top priority in trade negotiations. Today they're our biggest market. It's been good for the Japanese consumers and there's no need to tell you it's been good for cattlemen.

BUDGET

Finally, I'd like to talk a little bit about the bigger political picture. As you know, the President's budget proposes some big changes not only in taxes and spending, but in our public lands policies. These include a sizable increase in grazing fees.

However, we're just at the beginning of the process. And I'm very pleased to say that Secretary Babbitt has agreed to come out to Montana this spring to take a look at the grazing fees issue and other public lands questions for himself. He'll be in Bozeman on April 30th, and you're all invited to stop by and share some of your ideas with him.

I want to stress, though, that this budget plan makes real cuts in the deficit. That is what America needs. And if here or there you or I might like to see something a little different, we've got to come up with more than protests and objections. We've got to have specific proposals that make equally deep cuts in the deficit and spread them around fairly. If that happens, he'll listen.

That's why I supported Bill Clinton so early and so strongly when he ran for President. He puts our national interest first, and he's willing to listen.

And that's the philosophy I bring to all these issues, whether it's the budget or trade or the environment. I want to hear everybody's point of view, and I want everyone to remember that we're all in it together. We all need jobs. We all need a growing economy. We all need a clean environment. We all need to listen to each other.