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"A New Search for Common Ground", NAM National Conference on the Environment

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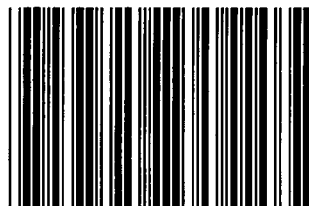
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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

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"A NEW SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND"

Speech by Senator Max Baucus

NAM National Conference on the Environment

April 21, 1993

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to work closely with NAM on many important trade issues, from opening Japanese markets to improving compliance with trade agreements. We haven't always agreed, but we have always tried to communicate and find common ground.

Now that I've become chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, I look forward to developing the same kind of relationship with NAM on environmental issues.

So I appreciate the invitation to this conference. It's very timely. Not simply because tomorrow is Earth Day. But because we are on the brink of an extraordinary new era in environmental policy.

We face new challenges. And our success will be determined, in large part, by whether we can break old patterns of mistrust and misunderstanding; whether we can end the "religious wars" between the business and environmental communities; and whether, as your conference title suggests, we can build "new partnerships" that promote economic and environmental progress.

Let me step back for a moment, to try to put things in perspective.

Up until now, there have been two eras of modern environmental policy.

The first era was the "Golden Age" of environmental protection. It began, roughly speaking, 23 years ago tomorrow, on Earth Day 1970, when millions of Americans participated in a nationwide environmental "teach-in." That first Earth Day showed that people were tired of burning rivers, smog-blackened skies, and toxic waste dumps. They wanted change. Over the next decade Congress responded, passing the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act, and Superfund.

Then came the second era. Call it the Dark Ages. President Reagan tried to turn back the clock, and Congress fought him every step of the way. Consensus disappeared. The business and environmental communities squared off. Both sides were convinced that they were playing a zero sum game, pitting the economy against the environment. Both sides became mistrustful. Both sides became shrill. It was gridlock, plain and simple.

Now we are on the verge of an third era: an environmental renaissance.

The most telling evidence of this new era is the refreshing search for common ground. This conference is one small example. There are many more: Bruce Smart's book, Beyond Compliance; the recent New York Times series on the economics of environmental policy; the work of business and environmental leaders like Frank Popoff and Jonathan Lasch, who are exploring "win-win" solutions that protect the environment and create jobs.

The same message keeps coming through: we don't have to remain locked in a zero sum game. Economic progress and environmental progress don't have to remain at odds. In fact, it is becoming increasingly clear that we can't have one without the other. The National Commission on the Environment, chaired by Russell Train, recently put it this way:

Economic and environmental well-being are mutually reinforcing goals that must be pursued simultaneously if either is to be achieved. Economic growth cannot be sustained if it continues to undermine the healthy functioning of the Earth's natural systems or to exhaust natural resources. By the same token, only healthy economies can generate the resources necessary for investments in environmental protection.

To put it another way, we must pursue a long-term strategy of sustainable development. This doesn't mean living in tents in the forest. It means achieving economic progress in a way that protects the environment and, by doing so, broadly improves the prospects for future generations.

The linchpin is technology. By the year 2050, both population and per capita output are expected to more than double. As a result, the level of worldwide economic activity will be five times greater than it is today.

That level is sustainable only if we make major improvements in the way that we produce goods and services. In his new book, Preparing for the 21st Century, Professor Paul Kennedy compares our situation to that of 18th Century Europe. Malthus predicted that escalating population growth would lead to perpetual famine. The prediction was wrong, Kennedy says, because it did not account for "humankind's capacity to develop new resources through technology." Similarly, Kennedy says, our own ability to avoid an environmental catastrophe will be determined, in large part, by our ability to develop environmental technology.

Bruce Smart takes it one step further. He estimates that we eventually must reduce the environmental impact of each unit of industrial production by more than 80 percent. That's right: 80 percent.

This is where environmental technology comes in. Environmental technology doesn't just mean a new black box at the end of a pipe. Environmental technology means the broad application of science to the entire production process. It means new ways to make products that waste less; new products that run cleaner. It means pollution prevention and life-cycle planning. It means, in short, a new way of thinking.

Environmental technology makes good economic sense. After all, pollution is waste; increasingly, we see evidence that "thinking green" helps keep a company in the black.

But there's another dimension to it. An international dimension. There is a worldwide trend towards stricter environmental protection. Companies that get ahead of the curve and develop environmental technology will have the edge in an international market that already has reached \$200 billion and is growing by ten percent a year.

So how do we encourage the development of cutting-edge environmental technology?

The first step is for the federal government to put its own house in order, by improving our research efforts. The federal government spends about four billion dollars a year on what we'd consider environmental technology. But the work is not coordinated and priorities are not set.

To correct this, I am working with Senator Mikulski, Senator Lieberman, and others to write legislation that will establish an overall strategy for federal environmental technology research. It also will create incentives for public-private partnerships and make the fruits of our research more readily available to small businesses. We don't necessarily need to spend more. But we do need to spend more wisely.

The second step is to create a regulatory regime that stimulates the development of cutting-edge environmental technology by the private sector.

This is where the rubber meets the road. To some in the business community, the best environmental regulation seems to be the weakest one. That's not what I'm talking about. If we truly are going to find common ground, we have to get beyond this stonewall approach. The regulatory regime that I'm talking about has two elements. It's aggressive. And it's flexible.

An aggressive regulatory regime is one that addresses rather than ignores environmental problems. Not just the conventional problems, like air pollution, water pollution, and waste disposal. But also the grave new threats that previously had been beyond our range of vision. Climate change. The loss of biodiversity. The cumulative effects of minute concentrations of toxic pollutants. Problems that threaten our children's very future.

We have to address these problems, head-on. At the same time, we have to be flexible. We have to set high goals, but then give businesses the freedom and the incentive to find new, creative, efficient, cost-effective ways to achieve those goals. That way, we can harness the power of the marketplace.

Let me give you an example. Last year, I toured a BMW factory in Germany. But it wasn't your typical automotive plant. They don't build the 535i. They break it apart. Then they separate the parts for recycling. The engineers I spoke with said it was part of their effort to comply with a new law that requires many products, including automobiles, to be recycled. They are redesigning their cars so they can be recycled more easily.

The aggressive German recycling law is driving the development of new environmental technology. BMW is taking advantage. When the law takes effect, BMW will have an edge. And when other countries enact similar recycling laws, BMW will have an international edge.

Some U.S. companies are doing the same. Dow Chemical. The "big three" automakers, who are banding together to develop a clean car to comply with the Clean Air Act. But every American company should be looking for ways to get ahead of the environmental curve. That's the only way we're going to invent the technology we need to achieve sustainable development. And that's the only way we can hold our own with the Germans, the Japanese, and others.

The government can't do it alone. Business can't do it alone. The environmental community can't do it alone. But we can do it together.

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee is about to review the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and Superfund. In each case, I plan to work with the business and environmental groups to find common ground; that is, to find new approaches that enhance environmental protection, promote the development of environmental technology, and create new economic opportunities.

What does this mean? Among other things--

--It means a Clean Water Act that shifts towards pollution prevention.

--It means an Endangered Species Act based on better science, better data, and creative approaches that avert crises before they occur.

--It means a recycling law that encourages product life-cycle planning.

--And it means a Superfund that sets priorities and encourages the development of new cleanup technologies.

Superfund may be the best example. If we spend hundreds of billions of dollars cleaning contaminated sites, we should spend that money wisely. We should INVEST some of the clean-up money in the development of new technology which will not only clean up our mess but will create new jobs, income, and add to our competitive strength as a nation.

The new environmental era will test us all. We face tough problems. The stakes are high. We sometimes will have sharp disagreements.

But we must communicate. And we must continue to search for common ground. Because the quest for environmentally and economically sustainable development affects each and every one of us. Our states. Our companies. Our families.

This point was made in one of the most eloquent speeches given 23 years ago, to commemorate the first Earth Day. It wasn't given by an environmentalist. Or by a Senator. It was given by a business leader, J. Paul Austin, Chairman of the Coca Cola Company. He described the steps that his company was taking to reduce emissions and packaging waste. Then he explained why these steps were necessary. He said:

Pollution is the sole common danger that confronts us all, spares no institution or individual, is recognized by every segment of our society, and can unite us all in a common goal. There is no political spectrum here. No color line. ... No public-private sector conflict. No urban-rural clash. No "haves" and "have nots." We share this fragile issue braided together.

My friends, we are, indeed, braided together. And we must work together. Government, business, environmentalists, and all Americans. To find common ground. To, as you say, build new partnerships and find new solutions.

Thank you.