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Idaho Jefferson-Jackson Dinner

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BAUCUS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

Remarks of Senator Max Baucus Idaho Jefferson/Jackson Dinner

February 19, 1994

Good evening. I am very proud to join you here tonight for this Jefferson/Jackson dinner.

There are few state parties that go back to Jefferson and Jackson. Both of ours do. The Rocky Mountain Democratic tradition starts way back with Merriweather Lewis and William Clark -- both good Jeffersonian Democrats -- who came through the Bitterroot Valley and down the Clearwater in 1805.

Since then, we in the Rocky Mountain West have produced some of the great ones. Mike Mansfield, the pride of Montana, turning ninety-one in less than a month and still miles ahead of us all.

Frank Church. I only had the good luck to serve with him for two years. It was some time ago now; but there still is a kind of reverence in the air when you hear his name. I am very pleased to see Bethine here today. I know it's her birthday, and I'm delighted to offer her a happy 39th.

And of course, Governor Cecil Andrus. He has been a towering figure in the West as Governor, as Interior Secretary, as citizen. He has taken on the tough issues. The ones that demand as much courage as wisdom and expertise. Nuclear waste shipping. Restoring salmon fisheries. Education reform.

He is a man of conscience, action, and wisdom. His has been one of the nation's great careers in public service. I take great pride in congratulating him, and being with you all as you honor him tonight.

COMMITMENT TO CONSERVATION

Western Democrats are as special as the West. In our tradition, reverence for the land takes an equal place with respect for hard work, small-town honesty and decency, self-reliance and self-sufficiency.

We know that government has a role; but that government can be a burden as well as a blessing. As he usually does, Governor Andrus put it best last week, saying at the Western Governors Association meeting that when the federal government starts cutting red tape, we hope they cut by width, not length.

We believe in economic development and in conservation. Nobody did more to develop the Western economy than Frank Church. But nobody did more to save what makes the West unique. Church didn't believe the only good tree is a stump. I can look out from Montana to the wilderness areas in the River of No Return and the Bitterroot, and see a legacy that will last forever.

Why does the land mean so much? Because of the way we live. We're an outdoors people. We hunt, hike, fish, ski. Many of us make our living off the land. All of us love it.

This year, our generation can leave the West a legacy as valuable as Frank Church left us. We are reauthorizing the Clean Water Act this year. I'm the Chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, which is drafting the bill. And I want people to remember the day I took over the Environment Committee as the day clean water became a western issue.

THE CLEAN WATER ACT

For the first time, we are paying attention to western water pollution. We are facing up to problems caused not by factories or sewage sites, but by diffuse, non-point sources of pollution like agriculture, mining and logging. They are deadly serious.

Today seventy-five percent of Montana's river miles fall short of Clean Water Act standards. Over thirteen thousand miles of Montana streams, and over four hundred and sixty-three thousand acres of our lakes, are impaired in one way or another. We've found high levels of toxic pollutants in forty percent of Montana's lake acres.

This is unacceptable in itself, and it goes beyond the environment. Water pollution threatens health, jobs and communities all over the West.

In August I spoke to the convention of the International Federation of Flyfishers. They held it in Livingston, Montana. Nearly seven hundred people came from all over the world. Dan Bailey's Fly Shop is already one of Livingston's biggest employers, and the Convention meant a boom for the local economy.

If Montana's waters continue to deteriorate, the Flyfishers might not come back to Livingston. You all know what it would mean to the Idaho economy if the River of No Return was silted up and smelled of mine tailings. If we in the West don't keep our waters clean, we lose a lot of jobs.

So we are taking on the problem. We are working with state and local government, with farmers, with timber and mining companies to find a balanced approach. We want to clean up our lakes and streams; and we keep our natural resource industries strong. And that's been reflected in the support we've gotten so far -- from environmentalists, state governments and agriculture.

That is how I want to approach all our western issues. You all probably followed the debates last year on grazing fees, timber sales, mining law reform. Like Montanans, you probably bring some different perspectives to it. But I think all of us will agree that back in Washington we lost something in that debate. We lost a sense of balance.

Western Democrats understand the need for balance. We know it's something special to grow up in the West. We understand the carrying capacity of the land. We know the West is the land of small towns, ranchers and miners; and also the land of wilderness, wildlife and flyfishing. We can and we must have it both ways. Because we live in the last best place. And the last best place is worth saving.

THE DEMOCRATIC ECONOMIC RECORD

And so is America. We Democrats have been in power for one year and twenty-three days. And think about how the country has turned around since then.

Last quarter, our economy grew at an annual rate of 6.3%. That's faster growth than we've seen in over a decade.

Unemployment is the lowest in six years.

Job growth. We created 1.7 million new jobs last year. That is nearly half a million more jobs than in the whole four years of the Bush Administration put together. Last year Idaho created nearly 16,000 jobs. Fifty-five hundred more in Montana.

The deficit. It has fallen by nearly half since President Clinton took office. This year's deficit will be the lowest, in absolute terms, since 1989. And when you compare it to the size of the economy you find something interesting. In 1994 we will have the lowest real deficit in fourteen years -- that is, since the last time we had a Democratic President. What a surprise.

Alan Greenspan, the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, says this is the strongest economy he has seen in two decades.

American businesses are getting more competitive and exports are rising by the day. Machine tool orders, at \$3.3 billion last year, are the highest since 1988. New housing starts are at record levels. Industrial production last year grew 4.1%, up from 2.3% in 1992 and 1.9% in 1991. Average hourly earnings were up 0.8% in January, the biggest monthly gain since 1983.

We are on the right road, and we won't slow down. This year, we will take on rising health costs in a national health care reform bill. This year, we will pass a new Clean Water Act. This year, we will take up a bill to reform welfare. This year, we will pass the toughest crime bill ever.

Why is the economy up? Why is the deficit down? Why are Montanans and Idahoans coming off the unemployment line and going back onto the production line? Because of the policies we Democrats have advocated for years. They are the right policies for America. And the economy today proves that.

Anybody remember the Bush Administration? Anybody remember "gridlock?" Congress on one side, the White House on the other, the American people in the crossfire? It's gone. President Clinton and the Democrats are getting things done. We're getting things done for America.

THE REPUBLICANS -- JUST SAY NO

Republicans know it. They're scared, and they know they have no alternatives. Their response to the new Democratic agenda is to just say "No."

They said "no" to cutting the deficit last year. The bill's too tough, it hurts too much, the medicine tastes too bad. They predicted millions of jobs lost, a new recession, higher deficits than ever. It was like a whole flock of Chicken Littles came to roost on Capitol Hill.

Did the sky fall when we cut the deficit? No. Instead the sun came out. And today the Republicans are spreading the "A-1" sauce over their words, looking over a side order of roast crow, and getting ready to choke it all down.

As they tuck into their meal, you'd think they might reflect a bit. Think about the lower deficit. The 1.7 million new jobs. The absolutely stunning economic growth. You'd think they might say "Mr. President, we're sorry. Mr. President, we were wrong. Mr. President, we've learned."

No. That is not what they say. They have not learned a thing. They said "no" to cutting the deficit last year. They say "no" to reforming the health care system this year. We're afraid to change, we don't want to control costs, we don't want to take on the big lobbies.

They say "no" to setting standards for education. "No" to cleaning up our rivers and streams in the West. When the crime bill and the welfare reform bill come up, whatever they say today I'll bet they say "no" then.

In short, they want to throw us back into gridlock. They want us to stop getting things done. They want us to fight among ourselves. They'd rather have the Donner Party in Washington than the Democratic Party.

I don't have to tell you, America doesn't need that. We need people who will work together. Who understand that our country's got serious problems. Who are willing to cooperate, make the tough votes and hard choices, and keep things moving.

Maybe you've see this bumper sticker. "Don't Blame Me, I Voted Republican." Next time you see it, pull your truck over. Flag down that BMW and tell the driver that's fine -- we'll take the blame.

We'll take the blame for the highest rate of economic growth in a decade.

We'll take the blame for all the new jobs.

We'll take the blame for the lowest real deficit since the last Democratic Administration.

We'll take the blame for reforming health care, cleaning the rivers and putting criminals in jail.

THE 1994 ELECTION

You want to keep it up? Don't look past this November. We just got the wagon back onto the trail and hitched up the team. We just got America moving again. The Republicans want to pitch the wagon right back in the ditch.

And if they win this November -- if they pick up seats in the House like Larry LaRocco's here or Pat Williams' back home --- if they get back in the Governor's house here in Boise -- that's what happens. The wagon runs off the trail again. America goes back into gridlock.

So you have a big job this year. You've got to keep Congressman LaRocco on the job, maybe pick up the other House seat, and elect a good Democrat like Attorney General Echohawk or Bill Bietelspacher to pick up the torch from Governor Andrus.

The Republicans are scared, and when you back a coyote up against the fence, it gets twice as mean. We've got to be ready for it. We've got to fight just as hard as they will. In fact, we've got to fight harder. It pains me to say it, but we've got to be just as tough as the Boise State Broncos were when they beat our Grizzlies two weeks ago.

It won't be easy. But it's got to be done. And it's up to you and me.