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Hardin Kiwanis Club

Max S. Baucus

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BAUCUS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

Remarks of Senator Max Baucus
Hardin Kiwanis Club
Hardin, Montana

November 2, 1994

Good afternoon. Thank you all. It's great to join my fellow Kiwanians again.

When the Congress closed down three weeks ago, I got out of Washington and back home as soon as I could. Since then, I've been traveling the state.

I've visited Missoula, Libby, Chester, Havre, Helena, Great Falls, Billings, Big Timber, Bozeman, Townsend, Missoula again, Hamilton, Stevensville, Helena, Bozeman, then back to Billings and out here to Hardin and Crow Agency today. I've talked with high school students, senior citizens groups, economic development experts, Indian manufacturing companies, people in state and local government, agricultural producers and medical professionals.

A NEW GOLDEN AGE

And these meetings have convinced me more firmly than ever that we all have a lot of work and a lot of hard thinking to do. Because our state, and our whole country, are on the verge of some historic changes.

Some are already obvious. And it is already clear that many of them are to the good. I believe, in fact, that when our children look back at the 1990s, they will see a golden age.

An age in which we were prosperous. When the national economy created millions of new jobs and grew by \$200 billion or even more, every single year. When Montanans were more successful at exporting everything from beef to computers to wheat to environmental technology than ever before.

An age in which science, technology, medicine and communications surged ahead. When a family doctor with a tough case at the Crow Agency could use new telecommunications networks to search the most advanced diagnostic files in the world at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, or the National Institutes of Health in Maryland. And when Superintendent Svee of the Hardin School District could put the schools on computer, and connect them to a whole world of learning.

An age in which we were at peace. When, for the first time in sixty long years -- for the first time since Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933 -- we faced not a single deadly foreign threat. When it was less likely than ever before that Montana boys --

now Montana girls too -- would be called to foreign wars.

Eventually, I hope, an age in which we faced up to our problems and solved them. When we made our education system the world's best. When our new National Highway System made our roads the best kept and most technically advanced anywhere. When we slowed the growth in health care costs. When we dealt with the federal deficit once and for all, and made government work as efficiently and effectively as it ought to work.

WE HAVE MADE A START

We have made a start. Since George Bush left office, we have cut the deficit by more than half, from \$335 billion to \$203 billion. Relative to the economy as a whole, it is lower than at any time in the past fifteen years.

The federal government has eliminated 71,000 positions, and is on track to eliminate 180,000 more by 1997. It now employs fewer people than at any time since President Kennedy.

And as you'd expect, the results are good. Nationwide, unemployment is as low as it has been in six years. Here in Montana it has fallen from 6.1% to 4.8% since 1992.

Job growth is faster than ever. We have created 17,500 new jobs in Montana in the past two years. New business incorporations are up 19%, and business failures are down 15%.

And slow but sure, we are cutting the waste and fat. The Vice President's "Reinventing Government" proposal called for \$108 billion in savings over five years. Through legislation and Executive Orders, we've already saved \$47 billion.

There are a lot of good anecdotes there. People no longer have to fill out forms to buy paper clips. You don't have to make sure an ashtray can withstand a smack with a ball peen hammer. Real common sense stuff.

But here's the one I like most. The Office of Personnel Management has thrown out its ten-thousand page Federal Personnel Manual. Tossed it right in the trash.

Can you imagine anything more useless than a ten-thousand page book? War and Peace is about fourteen hundred pages. The King James Bible I keep in my office is only eighteen hundred -- and it's a big type version. Who could read ten thousand pages on "personnel management"? Well, now nobody has to try.

AN AGE OF DISCONTENT

But it is a paradox. You may see the unemployment rate falling and new companies

springing up across the state. You may see government making some efforts to reform itself, both in Washington and in Helena. You may hear good news everywhere.

But if you spend a little time traveling the state and talking to ordinary Montanans, you don't find happiness and contentment. You find very few who believe we live in a golden age. Instead you find anger. Frustration. Discontent.

Why is that? In part, I think, it is the feeling Alexis de Tocqueville called:

"that strange mood of melancholy which often haunts the inhabitants of democratic countries in the midst of their abundance, and the disgust at life which sometime seizes upon them in the midst of calm and easy circumstances."

There is something of that in our mood. After our forty-year mobilization for the Cold War, the country is a little tired. A little jaded. We are eager for a new purpose, but not yet sure what that purpose will be. We respond to vague calls for "change" with enthusiasm, but balk at specific measures to cut the deficit or reform the health care system.

But that's not all there is to it. The anger George Bush faced in 1992, the anger Bill Clinton faces now, the anger that mounts against Congress every year, is more than a passing thing.

It is a growing conviction, stronger all the time, that something basic is wrong. Something has cracked in our nation's foundation. The system has become stacked against the ordinary, honest, hard-working, middle-class Montana family.

MIDDLE CLASS FORGOTTEN AGAIN

Everywhere I go, all over the state, ordinary men and women feel the people in power are pushing them around. Making decisions without asking their opinion. Telling them what to do.

Whether it is Congress, the national political parties, or big Washington agencies, people feel government is too big and too bureaucratic. It gives you too many forms to fill out and too few straight answers to your questions. It ignores the average middle-class husband and wife -- the people who pay the taxes -- and listens to the people who take the taxes.

It is not just government. It is also the media. The middle class wants the entertainment industry to be more responsible, to show less sex and less violence to their teenagers in prime time. And they want the news to be less sensational, less cynical and more factual. There was a time, not very long ago, when a network anchorman -- Walter Cronkite -- was called "the most trusted man in America." Hard to imagine that today.

And it is educators. Kids are shooting each other in city schools back east or in California. It even happened in Butte. Rural schools have rain coming in through the roof. American kids lag behind the Asians and Europeans in math and science. High school graduates don't know whether World War II came before or after the Civil War. And the system seems to care more about exotic side issues like "political correctness" than the basics.

And it also is business. Montanans want business to think a little more about Montana. We used to feel proud when we heard about companies like Anaconda or the big timber firms. Companies that led the world. Today, they see some of the timber companies cutting all they can as fast as they can, then closing the mill. Leaving loyal communities stranded. Or grain companies as happy to fill their elevators with Canadian as with American grain. And they feel more suspicion than pride.

REFORM -- NOT CYNICISM

From government to business to news to education, on to the law and medicine and beyond, ordinary people believe the elites are ignoring them and failing the country. These feelings are not altogether wrong. And they will not go away easily.

They are good, healthy feelings if we use them to push Montana and the country in the right direction. But they are dangerous if they're ignored.

Because democracy requires idealism. It requires participation. It requires faith. And when those qualities are replaced by cynicism and indifference, democracy dies.

And if that happens we lose. We diminish ourselves in the moral sense, and shortchange ourselves in the practical sense. To take my own field, government does a lot of good things. Government bought those computers for the kids in the Hardin Elementary School. Government put Hardin onto I-90 and gave the ranchers here a link with their markets. Government opened the Bighorn Canyon Recreation Office and kept it open. If we just give up on it -- if we burn it down instead of cleaning it up -- Montana is going to lose big.

So whether it is community leaders, or people in public service, or people in business, we all have a heavy responsibility in the next few years. A responsibility to make sure that public discontent moves us toward reform, not just cynicism and giving up.

And we have to begin by being honest and straight. Not pandering, but listening. Promising no more than we can deliver, and delivering on those promises we make.

There is plenty of blame to share around. But nothing has made me feel worse this year than a Republican campaign ploy -- the so-called "Contract for America." A document that promises to bust the budget and balance it at the same time. A document so obviously, so blatantly tacked together by pollsters that its authors proudly say "everything on it is has a

60% approval rating or better." A document that takes the people for fools.

RETURN TO THE BASICS OF DEMOCRACY

What we should do -- what we have to do -- is simple. Not easy, but simple. We have to return our country to the basic principles of democracy.

Like all basic principles, they are very clear, very obvious, very straightforward. They were defined a long time ago. Pericles said in his Funeral Oration:

"Our city is called a democracy because it is governed by the many, not the few. In the realm of private disputes everyone is equal before the law, but when it is a matter of public honors each man is preferred not on the basis of his class but of his good reputation and his merit. No one, moreover, if he has it in him to do some good for the city, is barred because of poverty or humble origins."

That is the democracy America must recapture. The days when Americans won because of their merit, not their connections. When what counted was reputation, not a high-priced lawyer. When whatever your wealth or your origins, you had a chance to do some good for the country.

We've got to return to basics.

Straight talk. Fewer promises. More results.

More respect afforded to the individual, and more responsibility expected of the individual.

They are simple ideas. They are basic Montana values. And they are the right ideas. The right values. They work. When we put them into practice, the results are plain to see.

It can be done. And only we the people of Montana can do it.