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Address to Hill County Democrats, Hill County Democratic Dinner

Max S. Baucus

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2602

"Address to Hill County Democrats"

Senator Max Baucus
Hill County Democratic Dinner
Havre, Montana

April 29, 1995

Thank you all very much. Thank you Ray.

It's great to see so many friends here.

First of all, our House Minority Leader -- and next Speaker -- Ray Peck. Rose Goar. Warren Taylor. Our very fine Mayor Phyllis Leonard. Commissioners Nora Nelson and Kathy Beassett.

Here in Hill you have put together the strongest Democratic County in the state. And when we take back the Legislature next year, a lot of the credit will go to all of you here tonight.

THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

In just ten days, we will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi surrender in World War II. And thus I would like to recognize a couple of very special people here with us tonight: Montana's World War II veterans.

Ray Peck. Stand up.

Bob Hockett.

Warren Taylor.

I hope I haven't missed anybody, but if I have, stand up.

Let's give these people a hand. We -- our state -- our country -- owe you more than we can ever repay.

Your courage and your sacrifice brought your children's generations, on the whole, an era of peace and freedom. And I think I can speak for all of us here tonight in telling you that we are grateful.

MAINSTREAM VALUES VS. EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY

After the war, we found an equilibrium. Americans combined a work ethic, strong unions and an energized private sector to make us more prosperous and powerful than every before.

Well-run, responsible government was an irreplaceable part of that. The Interstate highway system, widespread college education, Medicare, health services for veterans all date from that era. Safe workplaces. A cleaner environment. Veterans' benefits. Defense of Social Security. It was, and no coincidence, an era of Democratic government.

But today, the other outfit both in Washington and in Helena want to tear it all down.

The new ruling class on Capitol Hill wants to cut school lunches. I was in Anaconda for breakfast at the Lincoln School a few weeks ago. I can tell you, that money is well spent. And when Newt Gingrich tries to take it away, he has no tougher, more effective foe than Pat Williams.

And people a few miles down Route 87 in Helena want to gut our public schools and universities.

What could be more shortsighted and wrong? Denying Montana children the education they need to keep up with the New Yorkers and Californians and Japanese. Telling them to get out of Montana if they want a shot at the dream. And I am so proud to see our Democratic legislators stand up and fight against this extremist proposal and for the future of our state.

People like Greg Jergeson from Chinook. He has been in there day after day, fighting the good fight. We may be outvoted, but we are right and I am proud to see people like Greg in there fighting for Montana's future. Let's give him a hand.

A FUNDAMENTAL DEBATE

Vice President Gore said a couple of weeks ago that our country is beginning a fundamental debate over the role of government. I think he is right. And I am convinced that we Democrats are on the right side of that debate.

We need to cut waste. We need to make the Army Corps of Engineers treat Montana fairly. We need to cut waste on federal courthouses, the Space Station, TV Marti and other pet projects.

We need to bring government closer to the people. That's why I'm fighting to give our prairie towns like Miles City the power to say "no" to East Coast garbage entrepreneurs

who want to dump New York City trash on the Treasure State.

BASIC DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Government needs reform. But government needs to reflect the goodness in American hearts. It needs to help out ordinary families. And we Democrats understand that.

Giving our kids and college students top-quality education.

Linking agricultural producers to the markets with the world's best highways, and making sure our small prairie towns stay on the Amtrak routes and Essential Air Service. I was out there this morning at the Amtrak meeting, and I can guarantee you that there's no one who could do a better job than Jerry Smith.

Making sure we have clean air, clean water and clean neighborhoods.

Helping people like Tony Priete and now Dick King bring jobs and economic development to our rural counties.

Paying the debt to our military veterans.

Putting police on the street to help our towns, counties and Indian reservations keep their neighborhoods safe.

Offering unemployment insurance and job training for working people in a tough spot.

Protecting senior citizens by keeping Social Security and Medicare strong.

CONCLUSION

All this means something real to our people. It reflects the values for which our Montana Democratic Party stands.

Values like fairness. Tolerance. Respect for the law and for the good sense of ordinary people. Values that made us the party of Montana's working middle class from Lewis and Clark, to Mansfield and Metcalf, to us here tonight.

I've spent a lot of time walking in the past few months. From Missoula down Route 93 to Hamilton. Along I-90 from Livingston to Bozeman. A couple of weeks ago, the route Lewis and Clark took from Helena to Three Forks. Everywhere I go, all over Montana, ordinary men and women share these values.

I met a waitress in a little coffee shop in Florence. She was in her 60s, and her husband had died a few years earlier. Ever since, she needed to work to replace the annuity.

She asked if I could help her with SSI. I said of course I would, but then she said she didn't want any special treatment, because a lot of people are worse off than her and needed the help more.

These are good people. Compassionate people. They reject extremism. They reject the thoughtless, mindless rush to eliminate every service that gives a kid from a working family a chance to make it.

We have a lot of work ahead. We must re-energize our party. Bring together the people and the groups who are part of it. And fight for the values and ideas we share. It's a tall order, but we can do it. We will take back our state -- and we will take back our country.

NO PLACE FOR HATE

Finally, I would like to say something very serious. And it is not something partisan. It is something that I hope we and our Republican friends will join together to accomplish. Because we disagree on a lot. But we are all together, as Americans, the things that are most important.

If we needed any reminder of why people like Ray Peck, Wayne Taylor and Bob Hockett and all the rest signed up to cross the sea fifty years ago, we got one two weeks ago.

I am speaking, of course, of the bombing in Oklahoma City. Our sympathy and solidarity go out to the victims of this terrible crime and their families. And we learn that fifty years after the war, the battle against hate is not over.

We Montanans like to call our state the "last, best place." We take pride in our low crime rate and our civil society. And we like to think we are immune to the crime and violence that so sadly affects our country.

But we are not immune. Our easy-going ways now seem to attract some of the worst elements in our country. We find that anti-Semites, right-wing extremists and terrorists -- the so-called "Militias" and "freemen" believe they can find a home in our state.

The good news is that ringleaders of the hate groups are few in number. Garfield County Attorney Nick Murnion has studied them closely -- after they threatened to hang him from a bridge last year. He believes they have no more than twenty-five to thirty core members around the state. And in many cases, they are common criminals. People who refuse to pay their taxes and live by the law. They should be arrested, tried and put in jail.

But if they are not, the situation will likely get worse. As Musselshell County Attorney John Bohlman -- a Republican, and a good and brave man who has to live with the worst of these groups -- says:

"The more the federal and local law enforcement agencies behave with a "hands-off" attitude, the more bold and daring these groups become."

The casual adherents -- about five hundred people have attended militia meetings -- are not dangerous. They are merely loud, deluded people who embarrass but do not threaten our state. And the whole community -- Democrats, Republicans, farmers, teachers, business owners, everybody -- has a responsibility to deal with them through moral pressure and a united stand against hate.

American citizens have the right to think and say what they believe -- even if what they believe is nuts. But with that right comes the responsibility to respect our neighbors, respect law enforcement, accept the community's democratic choices and obey the laws.

The vast majority of Montana families accept that responsibility. When some do not, we have to speak out and say they are wrong. We have to tell them they are not welcome in our homes, our groceries, our churches. And I believe that will work. Just as the people of Billings drove the "skinheads" out of town last year, we can do it this year. And we can all do it together.

Thank you all, and let's get to it.