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# Geyser High School Commencement

Max S. Baucus

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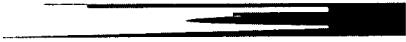
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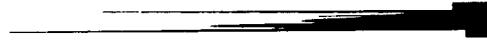
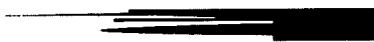
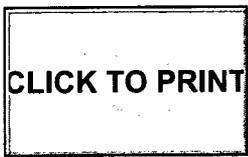
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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2602

## Senator Max Baucus Geysers High School Commencement May 20, 1995

I congratulate each of you graduating today. It's an honor to share this special day with you, your families and your friends.

Before coming here, I did a little research on the history and tradition of graduation ceremonies.

The first known graduation ceremony took place over 800 years ago in Italy.

Montana's first graduation remains for our historians to uncover. But our first schools sprung up in the mining camps of Southwest Montana. So I suspect it was a no-frills ceremony in Nevada City, Virginia City or Bannack.

I do know, however, that here in America the first graduation occurred three hundred and fifty three years ago Harvard. There were nine graduates at that first American commencement. They sat through three addresses: one in Latin, one in Greek and one in Hebrew. It closed with a long debate on philosophy, conducted entirely in Latin.

You'll be glad to know I will give only one talk. A short one. But it will be in Latin ... just kidding.

My son is also graduating from High School this year. So I thought he might give me some advice. He told me, "Dad, keep it short." I'm aiming to live up to that.

### V-E DAY FIFTY YEARS LATER

You all probably saw and heard about the V-E Day anniversary at the beginning of this month – the events marking the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. It may be that your grandparents have told you something about the War. If they haven't, ask them; because you will learn something important.

Watching the V-E Day celebration myself, in the month when my own son graduated high school and I prepared for your commencement, brought something home to me. That is, in many ways you are a lucky generation.

You have a lot of challenges ahead. Montanans have to be better-educated, harder-working, in some ways tougher than ever before. You have to work hard to stay ahead. But you also have a lot to be thankful for.

In the year I was born – 1942 – Montana high school graduates were not thinking much about college. They were not making tough decisions between work at home on the ranch or going off to the city. It was just a few months after Pearl Harbor, and most Montana young people were signing up as soldiers, sailors, Army nurses and Marines.

## BILL GALT

Man for man, we lost more people than any state but one. Let me tell you about one of them.

Bill Galt grew up on a ranch a ways off to the south, in Judith Basin. Like many of you, he spent his high school years at school in the day, and on the ranch on the weekend. And like some of you probably are now, he was looking at a ranching career. He did very well in animal husbandry at MSU.

But the war put it on hold. When he graduated MSU, about five months after Pearl Harbor, he went off to Europe.

Galt fought in North Africa, in Sicily and then in Italy. He rose to become a Captain, and received the Silver Star for helping his company find a path through a minefield. And at the Battle of Monte Cassino – one of the fiercest the U.S. Army has ever fought – he was killed by an 88-millimeter shell while clearing a German trench.

His bravery in that battle made him one of five Montanans to win the Medal of Honor in World War II. That is the highest honor our country gives to its children. Only 431 of them were awarded, in years when thirteen million Americans went through the Armed Forces.

## PRESERVING MONTANA VALUES

You might ask, why go into all that today?

You are growing up in an era of peace. You have many more choices than his generation. You may well spend some time away from Montana – to continue school, start a career, to see the world. But the values you have learned here are as important and in some ways as fragile as they were when Bill Galt went off to war.

We in Montana have a tradition of civility and small-town decency.

We have a natural heritage of clean air, clean water and the world's best hunting and fishing.

And we inherit a bedrock patriotism, and a belief in open government, freedom and democracy.

That is an extraordinary legacy. No sum of money could buy it. And its preservation depends on two things: on citizens who are informed and involved; and on a willingness to work hard, sacrifice, and think about the future.

Our natural beauty; a strong rural economy; above all, our safe, civil and democratic society, are the result of generations of people with these qualities. And they can be broken in pieces if we forget that.

### THE MILITIA AND FREEMEN

In the past year, we have got a good lesson in that. From the so-called "freemen" and "militia" organizations, we see bitter attacks on Jews and minorities. Intimidation of neighbors. Threats against law enforcement. And contempt for democracy. The very things Bill Galt left Montana to fight.

These people do not, of course, pose the dangers our foreign enemies did. But they remind us once again that the battle to preserve Montana values must be fought and won in every generation.

As we protect the rights that make our country so great – the right to free speech and free association; the right to bear arms; the right to vote; the right to privacy – we must remember the responsibilities that give those rights meaning.

The responsibility to respect our neighbors. To show our dissatisfaction with government at elections, not with threats of violence. To respect our sheriffs and police officers. To obey the law.

### HOME TOWN HEROES

And that in turn reminds us of something else. That is, you don't have to go overseas to be a hero. You don't have to leave home at all.

Because people right here at home are heroes. Every day, Montanans give of themselves to make our state the special place it is.

People in law enforcement. As this militia movement has grown, our Sheriffs and County Attorneys have faced down some of the most violent, irrational, lawless people in our country. They put themselves on the line to preserve the rule of law in our state. There is nothing more brave, more honorable, more heroic than that.

Look at your teachers. Every year they make sure Montana boys and girls go out in the world able to compete with the kids from New York, Los Angeles, Tokyo and Beijing; with an understanding of our Montana heritage; with an appreciation of our values; and with the skills to preserve them for the next generation. Like Bum Stiff Arm, whose commitment to education has done so much for everyone here.

Look at your neighbors who give something back to the community every day, through long hours at their small businesses and through volunteer work. Mayor Victor Miller of Harlem. My staff called him a few days ago, and he was out filling a pothole.

And look at your own families. Many of your parents are lifetime farmers and ranchers. Many years of getting up at 4:00 and 5:00 a.m. on my family ranch have taught me that there is nothing tougher or more demanding than agriculture. There is no finer calling than providing food and fiber for the world. And there is no sense of pride and achievement quite like that which comes from living, working and providing for your family on your own land.

My father was a rancher and a leader in agricultural organizations. He read constantly. I am sure he could have been whatever he wanted to be, but he loved the outdoors and thrived on the ranching lifestyle. My brother John has followed in his footsteps. He is a lucky man – and all of you who will go into are lucky too.

## CONCLUSION

There are an infinite number of ways to serve your country, your state and your community.

Like I said at the beginning, I know your generation has some tough challenges. They may not be the challenges Bill Galt faced. But in some ways they are just as difficult.

In a world more closely linked by trade and technology than ever before, you have to keep up with the Class of '95 in high schools not just across America, but all over the world.

The next generation of Hi-Line agricultural producers has all it can handle with the young farmers and ranchers up north in Alberta and down south in Argentina.

We even have people in New York and Minneapolis who are looking out here like old-time prospectors to find a place to dump their garbage.

But these are challenges we can meet. Montanans can outwork anybody. Montana's farmers and ranchers produce the finest grain and beef cattle in the world. And no big city garbage salesman will make it past the Dakota line if I have anything to say about it.

I know that when you give a commencement address, you're supposed to give advice. But I'll leave that to your parents and teachers.

All I will say is that you have great opportunities ahead. I know you can make the most of them. And when you do, your future is as big as the Big Sky over our Great Plains.

Congratulations. Good luck. Thank you, and God bless you.