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Erase the Hate Day

Max S. Baucus
Senator * or Department*: BAUCUS

Instructions:
Prepare one form for insertion at the beginning of each record series.
Prepare and insert additional forms at points that you want to index.
For example: at the beginning of a new folder, briefing book, topic, project, or date sequence.

Record Type*: Speeches & Remarks

MONTH/YEAR of Records*: April-1997
(Example: JANUARY-2003)

(1) Subject*: Federal Issues
(select subject from controlled vocabulary, if your office has one)

(2) Subject* Erase the Hate Day

DOCUMENT DATE*: 04/30/1997
(Example: 01/12/1966)

* "required information"
Remarks of Senator Max Baucus
Erase the Hate Day
Bozeman, Montana

April 30, 1997

In 1964, Mike Mansfield of Montana, then majority leader of the United State Senate, ushered through Congress the landmark Civil Rights Act. His national foresight and courage in those years was widely praised in the press and by his peers. As one colleague said upon Senator Mansfield's retirement, "The distinguished majority leader votes his convictions and lets the chips fall where they will."

In the last several years, however, Montanans of a different generation have come under the microscope of less favorable scrutiny. The reputation of Montana as a state of forward thinkers and tolerant individuals was marred by the standoff between the FBI and the so-called Freemen outside Jordan, and a series of hate crimes in some of our cities.

Make no mistake, it is important for the media and others to focus on these events, whether they occur in Montana or elsewhere. But equally, if we are to learn from them, then we also need to listen to the stories of hope, of the people who are willing to stand up to bigots and hate groups. Take, for example, what happened in Billings, Montana, a few years ago.

Peaceful life in Billings was shattered in November 1993, when a group of "skinheads" threw a bottle through the glass door of the home of a Jewish family. A few days later they put a brick through the window of another Jewish family's home -- with a five-year-old boy in the room. Then they smashed the windows of a Catholic high school that had a "Happy Hanukkah" sign on its marquee.

Though the people of Billings were horrified, they did not sit back and ignore the problem. They did not let the hatred take root. The community banded together. Residents in thousands of homes put Menorahs in their windows. They showed the skinheads that the people of Billings were united against hate. And that year, Billings held the largest Martin Luther King Day march ever in Montana.

This story sends two powerful messages to the world. First, Montana is no home for bullies and hate-mongers. And second, and more importantly, wherever you live, violence and bigotry do not have to be accepted in your community.

It was in the spirit of the people of Billings that I recently co-sponsored legislation in the Senate that designates April 30, 1997 as National Erase the Hate and Eliminate Racism Day. The resolution also calls on President Clinton to issue a proclamation urging all Americans to use each day as an opportunity to take a
stand against racism and hate.

There is no doubt that we have come a long way as a nation. But with 8,000 hate crimes reported to the U.S. Department of Justice each year, it is clear we still have much more work to do.

In addition to taking a day to recognize the importance of the fight, we must continue to support groups like the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment, the Montana Human Rights Network, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and the many other groups and individuals who continue this work every day.

In fact, many of those involved in this arena are now urging President Clinton to convene a White House conference on the issue. They have my strong support in their request. Surely, what we can do to encourage volunteerism, we must do to end hate.

I know a simple Senate resolution, or even a national conference, will not end the problems we still have. A piece of paper alone cannot teach a child that hate is wrong. But I do believe a piece of paper can make people think. A conference will not end intolerance. But it can make people talk about hate crimes. Designating April 30 as a day to address these important problems is a first step and can light a spark of hope in people’s hearts and minds.

Again, perhaps our predecessor in the Senate, Mr. Mansfield, when speaking about the task in 1964, said it best when he noted, “What we do here in the ... Congress will not, of itself, correct these faults, but we can and must join the wisdom - the collective wisdom of this body - to the efforts of others in this Nation to face up to them for what they are - a serious erosion of the fundamental rock upon which the unity of the Nation stands."

Tolerance and respect are our nation’s bedrock. Today we can join together to renew the fight for a better America. And if we continue to look at the good, courageous, decent things our neighbors are doing, the sparks of hope we light just might catch fire, in Montana and all across the country.

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