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Montana AFL-CIO

Max S. Baucus

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Remarks For Montana AFL/CIO
May 21, 1999

Thank you, Don, for that warm introduction. It's truly a pleasure to be here tonight to spend a few moments with my brothers and sisters in the labor movement and to introduce you to Montana's next Congresswoman. Wow. That's a nice new word, CongressWOMAN. It's about time, isn't it?

We're here tonight to celebrate the vision of those who were here before us and to look forward to a strong future for this state that is our home. Tonight is a night to celebrate labor and its crucial role in our state, our country, and our world. But it's also a time to draw strength from our past.
Maybe work a phone bank for a couple of hours. Or put up yard signs. Think of it as forty hours of work to preserve the forty hour work week.

Make that commitment today. It will be the best investment you have made in a long time. Ladies and Gentleman, it is my pleasure to introduce you to the next CongressWOMAN from Montana, Nancy Keenan.
Harry Truman used to say, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." I predict that in these coming months, Mr. Burns is going to be feeling some heat himself.

Yellowstone County Democrats, you have much to proud of. Working together we've come a long way. But we all know we still have a long way to go. So tonight, let's celebrate all that we've done. But tomorrow let's wake up energized and ready to get back to work. And let's keep on fighting the good fight until we've made it all the way.
We will build on the momentum here in Yellowstone County, where you've already more than doubled your number of Statehouse Democrats in the past four years.

And I have come here tonight with a little piece of news to share with you all. Senator Conrad Burns will be keeping his promise to only serve two-terms — whether he likes it or not. And I don't want you in Yellowstone County to worry: when we get Conrad out of Washington, we're going to send him back home to Missouri.
There’s an energy in the room tonight. A sense of anticipation that we’re on the verge of something big. Can you feel it?

My friends, the energy I feel tonight tells me the Republicans are about to have a little crisis of their own here in Montana.

We will take back the Governor’s Mansion.

We will win back Pat’s House Seat, with Nancy Keenan.
Montanans believed that America's Democratic Party had lost its way - that it valued rights over responsibilities, criminals over victims, bureaucracy over opportunity.

We could have given up.

But we didn't. Like Harry Truman, we fought back -- and we found our way.

My fellow Democrats, we're here tonight not only because we remember. We're here tonight because we are ready - to turn things around for the better. And we're not going to let anyone break our stride.
We're here tonight because we remember what it was like to have two Democratic United States Senators. And a Democratic Congressman.

We're here tonight because we remember what it was like to have a Democrat in the Governor's mansion. And a majority in the Legislature.

We're here tonight because we remember the sting of 1988, when politics in Montana began to change. We lost a Senate seat for only the third time in our history. We lost the Governor's mansion for the first time in a generation.
And in the end, that's Harry Truman's real lesson to us all. Where the Republicans wanted to have a debate, he wanted to make a difference. He did and that's why he roared back to victory.

I firmly believe that making a real difference and fighting for hard working, ordinary Montanans is our path back to victory.

It is great for us all to be here together tonight. To see old friends and make new ones. But let's not forget: we're here tonight for a reason. We're here tonight with a mission.
We need to do more to promote our Ag products here at home.

And we need to build a stronger safety net to help our farmers and ranchers as they ride out the storms -- both natural and economic. We all know that there are good years and bad years, but for Montana agriculture - the life blood of our state - rain or drought shouldn't mean survive or perish.

These are just some of the issues that I'm working on - but I really believe that our success in tackling these challenges will make a big difference in the lives of hard-working Montanans.
But that doesn't mean we're helpless. That's why I've put forward an Action Plan to get Montana agriculture back on its feet and on the road to being stronger than ever.

First things first. We need to knock down barriers to our products around the world. That's why I've been honored to represent Montana's farmers on trade missions that seek to open up markets all over the globe. We're not asking for special favors, privileges, or protections. Harry Truman stood up for a Fair Deal, all we want is a fair chance. It's this simple: If the playing field is level, we win.
And agriculture makes up 65 percent of our state's total economy. Any way you cut it, agriculture is Montana's heart - and it is in desperate need of an infusion.

And in case anyone has a doubt, let's be clear: the farm crisis is not the fault of our farmers. In the past decade, they've done all the right things. Working harder and smarter, using the latest new technology and tapping into the vast global markets. It's not their fault that basic commodities like wheat and beef are at Depression-level prices.

Facts are facts, we're tied to the global economy.
A strong back alone is no longer a ticket to success. Today for Montanans to have a chance to succeed, they need a flexible mind.

That's why this past February, I announced my Corps of Discovery agenda - a comprehensive package of education initiatives to prepare our kids for tomorrow's jobs, provide classrooms equipped for the 21st century, and improve access to higher education for every Montanan.

I'm also fighting to rebuild Montana's agriculture base. About one out of every five Montanans work in farming or ranching related jobs.
I'm working to give small businesses a helping hand and untangle them from all the federal red tape.

And I believe we need to do a lot more to make sure that every Montanan gets a first-rate, world-class education. Back when Thomas Jefferson sent Lewis and Clark on their dangerous mission, the frontiers of new lands were a ticket to success. It was the Oro y Plata - the Gold and Silver - that brought opportunity for a better life.

But today, our world has changed. Today, it's the frontiers of the mind that matter more and more.
That's why I want to spend a few moments tonight speaking about some of the big initiatives I'm involved with right now — and why I think they're so important.

First, I'm doing all I can to jumpstart Montana's economy. At a time when America is experiencing an economic boom of historic proportions, Montanans are getting left behind — and that's just not right. So I'm working to invest in 21st century infrastructure — our roads, rail, and air transportation. Modern telecommunications that will connect us to a whole world of jobs and opportunities.
Like Montana Democrats, Harry Truman knew what it meant to be in a tough political spot. Back in 1948, even his own mother was sure he'd lose. The Republicans were practically measuring the drapes for the Oval Office.

But Harry Truman came back from the dead. And he did it not just because he delivered funny one-liners from the caboose of a train. And not just because he gave 'em hell. He won that unbelievable victory by standing up and fighting for old principles and new ideas for mainstream values and Main Street interests.

That's what we need to do today.
And that's really the story of Yellowstone County Democrats working together toward common goals with uncommon energy and vision.

There's something else I thought of out on the Missouri today. And that was the great President from Missouri, Harry Truman. And I thought about how appropriate it is that this dinner is named in his honor.

As in the days of Harry Truman's presidency, we are living through a time of enormous transformation at home and around the world. And, once again, this nation needs strong, creative Democratic leadership to guide our path.
By giving thousands of Montana school children better access to the Pillar, you have given them better access to the inspiration and knowledge they will need as they set out on their own voyage of discovery. In 1806, William Clark carved his name into the Pillar. Through their hard work and commitment, the people of Yellowstone County have carved their name into the story of this special spot.

I was proud to have done my part by carrying the legislation to make the Pillar a large part of our public lands legacy. It is very important.
I thought about our own Senator Lee Metcalf who carried the legislation that preserved this section of the Missouri. A few years from now, as Americans by the thousands stream through here to mark the journey of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark - they will be able to experience this untrammeled natural glory. On behalf of all Montanans - and really all Americans - thank you, Lee.

Lee's not the only one I thought of out on the river today. I thought about all the folks in Yellowstone County who gathered together to protect and preserve one of the most important sites along the Lewis and Clark Trail, Pompey's Pillar.
Not just because we get along so well. And not just because we've been through so much together over the years. Our friendships are strong because of our common values, common struggle, common dreams.

That came home to me earlier today. I was out on the Missouri River with Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt. And as we floated through the beautiful natural vistas altered so little since Lewis and Clark walked the land nearly 200 years ago - I thought about all the work that people in this room had done to preserve these sacred sights.
Remarks by Senator Max Baucus
Yellowstone County Truman Dinner
Saturday, May 22, 1999

Thank you Mr. President for that warm introduction. And thank you to Kevin and Randy and Bill Kennedy and Donna Kilpatrick and all the other folks in the Yellowstone Democratic Party.

And let's give a big round of applause to and the great folks at state party headquarters for all their hard work and dedication.

It is wonderful to be here tonight with so many dear friends. And I hope you'll agree that our friendships are built on a strong foundation.
One of those six seats must come from Montana.

Truly, we are fielding our best candidate. A former State Legislator famous for her brains, her wit, and her energy. Then, for twelve years as a warrior for our children. And now, we have the chance to have her in the United States Congress.

Make no mistake. Nancy Keenan can win. She represents the mainstream views of Montana with vision and dedication. She will win if everyone in this room—you, me, everyone—works a little harder.

That's why I am asking each one of you to dedicate forty hours of your time over the next year and a half to Nancy's campaign.
We are six seats away from passing labor law reform that actually makes it easier to organize workers.

Six seats away from stopping OSHA reform that makes it voluntary – not mandatory – to protect our workers.

Six seats away from passing a Patients Bill of Rights so patients, not insurance companies, make our health care decisions.

Six seats away from preserving the forty-hour work week.
Jobs. It's a simple word isn't it. Yet it's the problem that every Montanan knows must be solved. We know that the boom on Wall Street hasn't gotten to Main Street. We have a vision for Montana and luckily our opponents are standing in the middle of a rainstorm, trying to convince voters the sun is shining.

That brings me to our answer. Right now, we are only six seats shy of a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. Six.
Likewise, last year Congress passed my bill to revitalize the Economic Development Agency, which has poured over $130 million into Montana for crucial projects like the AsimI silicon chip plant in Butte and the Pasta Montana plant in Great Falls.

That federal partnership also must include a real system to fund and protect pensions for Montana workers. I am proud to have worked closely with the great leaders at the AFL-CIO to propose a pension bill that will truly allow Montana businesses and workers to work together to ensure a secure retirement for all of us.
Jack and Gene teamed up with me to have the first ever Labor-management Conference in Montana, working to find common ground in our ongoing efforts to pay better wages, protect our workers, and make sure Montana businesses survive and prosper.

Finally, we must invest in a partnership between the federal government, Montana businesses, and its workers. In the last two years alone, working with The U.S. Department of Agriculture, we’ve been able to invest more than $215 million in Montana. That sustains 10,000 new and existing Montana jobs and helps 4,800 Montana businesses.
Third, we need to invest in our infrastructure. This week is the one year anniversary of TEA-21, the federal highway bill. This bill, which I was proud to help write, creates and supports 11,000 jobs -- including 4000 new jobs -- right here in Montana. I'd like to thank our good friends like Jack Caldwell and Gene Fenderson.
Every day, your work makes a real difference in the lives of Montana workers.

Investing also means putting a computer in every classroom and linking our schools to the Internet. And it means constructing and modernizing our schools. Let me say a word about building our schools. Just this week in the Finance Committee, we attempted to pass a bill that would make a serious investment in building and modernizing new schools. Some folks wanted to pass that bill, but without specific language mandating Davis-Bacon protections. I said No! You will not get my support for a bill that does not include Davis-Bacon. It just isn’t going to happen.
The first investment I want to make is in our workers. Simply, let's raise the minimum wage! Just this month, in the Senate, we tried to do just that. The majority in power wouldn't even let us debate it. So, you know what to do. Let's go get us some new members of Congress who will vote our way.

Second, we need to invest in our people and in our schools. That means a life-long commitment to learning and worker retraining. Labor knows that better than anyone. Let me take a minute to thank the hard-working staff at Project Challenge.
I have seen statistics showing us dead last. Recently, some numbers came out showing Montana in 47th place. Some folks said, "Great, we've moved up!"

Ladies and gentleman, 47th place isn't good news. In fact, it's very, very bad news. Our workers deserve better. And we are going to give it to them.

How? By investing in our future. If we care enough, Montana will make crucial investments that will create good paying jobs for you, your children, and theirs too.
Some say that Montana has moved so far to the right that pro-worker, pro-education, pro-jobs candidates can't win.

Well, I am here to tell you that is wrong. Dead wrong. And come the 2000 elections, I have a strong feeling that we are going to make history.

I want to spend a couple of minutes telling you one big reason. Simply, the key to this election is one word: JOBS. Good paying jobs for Montana workers.

You all know that Montana per capita income is near the bottom.
We will take back the Governor's Mansion.

We will send another friend of the worker to the United States Senate. I'm getting a little lonely in there.

And we will win back Pat Williams' House Seat and replace him with my friend Nancy Keenan.

Some might say, "how'? How are we going to win these fights? The opposing forces have more money, right? The other side has all the momentum, right?
My friends, we’re here tonight not only because we remember. We’re here tonight because we are ready – to turn things around for the better. To carve a brighter future for our state. And we’re not going to let anyone break our stride.

There’s an energy in the room tonight. A sense of anticipation that we’re on the verge of something big. Can you feel it? Right?

My friends, the energy I feel tonight tells me the right-wingers are about to have a little crisis of their own here in Montana.
We lost a Senate seat for only the third time in our state's history. We lost the Governor's mansion for the first time in a generation.

For twelve long years we have been banished to the woodshed in the backyard of Montana politics. Twelve long, long years.

We could have given up.

But we didn't. We fought back—and we found our way.
What a grand past Montana labor has. And with real, tough work, we can celebrate a bright future.

We're here tonight because we remember what it was like to have two pro-labor United States Senators. And a member of Congress who was a true champion of the worker.

We're here tonight because we remember what it was like to have a friend in the Governor's mansion. And a majority in the Legislature.

We're here tonight because we remember the sting of 1988, when politics in our state began to change.