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Yellowstone County Truman Dinner

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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 Bob Ream 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.
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.
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.
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.
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 though 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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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'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 a century. We lost the Governor's mansion for the first time in a generation.
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.
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.
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.
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.