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Grateful Nation Montana Fallen Soldier Memorial Unveiling

Max S. Baucus

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Remarks

Grateful Nation Montana Fallen Soldier Memorial Unveiling

Date: November 4, 2011

Location: UM Campus, Memorial Row (north of n
the new Journalism building)

Number of Expected Attendees: 150

Podium: Yes

Order of Speakers:

- 1) Welcome: Journalism Dean Peggy Kuhr MC
- 2) Invocation: Colonel Kenneth Duval (Montana National Guard)
- 3) UM President Royce Engstrom
- 4) Senator Baucus**
- 5) President Emeritus George Dennison
- 6) BG Mathew Quinn
- 7) Colonel Duval
- (unveiling of statue)*
- 8) David Bell Closing Remarks

Objective of Statement: To remember Montana's fallen soldiers, celebrate the new memorial and remind people of your work on behalf of veterans.

Thank you Dean Kuhr. First, I want to congratulate David Bell. Thank you for your hard work on Grateful Nation Montana. Your organization will help make dreams come true for dozens of young Montanans. 40 Montanans have lost their lives serving our country, leaving behind 30 children. Your work will help us live up to our commitment to them. It is an honor to be with you today to commemorate this memorial.

Let's have a round of applause for David, those who have helped make this commemoration possible today and all of our military families here today.

**The book of John, Chapter 15, verse 13, says,
“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man
lay down his life for his friends.”**

**Today we commemorate a memorial to men who
gave the ultimate sacrifice. This memorial is a
symbol of two solemn promises. First, we will
never forget the sacrifice made by the men listed
on the memorial. And second, we will uphold our
duty to those who serve and those who have lost
their loved ones in battle.**

**We will never forget the Montanans we recognize
today. They sacrificed so much for us. They were
volunteers. They had wives, sons, daughters,
mothers, fathers, and dear friends.**

They grew up in small towns like Fairfield, Sand Springs, Philipsburg and Wolf Creek. They had big dreams and looked forward to long happy lives.

Private Nicholas Cook, of Hungry Horse loved anything and everything that offered excitement. Skateboarding, riding dirt bikes, and snowboarding. Nick's hunger for adventure helped give him the courage to serve as an Army paratrooper in some of the most dangerous parts of Afghanistan.

Medal of Honor recipient Salvatore Giunta [J-YOO-nta] said this about Nick: “Motivated, excited, strong, quick, fast — everything that you’d expect in a good soldier, he had,”

On September 11th, 2001 many Montanans were inspired to serve. On that day, Sergeant Trevor Johnson, of Forsyth, decided to follow in the footsteps of his grandfathers and serve our country. He was described as the “perfect Marine,” who adopted his own slogan of: “I can defend those who can’t defend themselves.” Trevor is survived by his wife, Nicole, young stepson and infant daughter.

And we remember my nephew Phillip. I loved Phillip like a son. As youngsters, Phillip, my son Zeno and I spent many summer days together at our ranch. We walked, hiked, fished. Phillip was quite a thinker, a huge reader. Phillip enlisted in the Marines without telling his family only to proudly announce his decision suddenly one day.

Before long he was far away serving his country. When he returned from training he was still the same thoughtful man but ready to fulfill his commitment to the marines, himself and his family.

Phillip's fellow Marines he served with in Iraq said they all looked to Phillip for support, leadership and advice. He comforted them when necessary and did his job in a quiet, mature manner. They said they could not have survived the battles in Iraq without Phillip by their side.

When Phillip died, he returned to the family ranch for the last time. We buried his ashes atop his favorite mountain. We all died a bit that day but were better people for having known our dear, sweet Phillip. He also left behind a loving wife, Kathy.

Each one of the fallen heroes listed on this memorial had big dreams. Each one left behind countless broken hearts. We will never forget the sacrifice made by these brave warriors.

President Lincoln concluded his second inaugural address with a call for the nation to “care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan.”

Lincoln’s commitment remains our sacred duty today. To the families, widows and orphans of our troops we say: You are not alone. We are all in this together.

Montanans volunteer for military service at the highest rates in the country. Living under this beautiful big sky, you can't help but fall in love with America and want to do whatever it takes to defend it.

Many of these brave men and women pay a heavy price for their service. Montanans have suffered more casualties per-capita than any other state in the country.

Thousands come home with Traumatic Brain Injuries, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and other injuries.

We see unemployment rates among veterans that far exceed non-veterans.

In Montana, unemployment among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans stands at 20.1 percent.

That's the fourth highest rate in the country. This is a disgrace and we need to get it fixed.

Make no mistake, we have taken important steps to see to it that veterans receive the care they need when they come home.

In the past ten years, Congress has doubled the amount of funding for the VA. We should be proud of that fact.

The additional funding has paid for new clinics across the state, improved mental health services in Helena, and a generous new GI bill to help this generation of veterans get a college degree.

I've led a bipartisan effort to help put more veterans to work. It rewards employers who reward the service and experience of our veterans. It works like this: you hire a veteran, you get a tax credit. I expect to get this legislation passed this year.

But it's going to take much more than the VA and tax credits to keep our promise to our veterans and their families.

This is what makes Grateful Nation Montana so extraordinary.

And so what does it mean to be a Grateful Nation?

It means working every day to make this country as good as the men and women who defend it. It means keeping our promises: never forgetting the sacrifices of the 40 Montanans listed on this memorial, and upholding our duty to veterans and their families. Working together, we can be that Grateful Nation.

Thank you for having me today and may God bless the United States of America.