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Baucus Farewell Address

Max S. Baucus

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Farewell Address
Floor Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus
February 6, 2014
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

I. Acknowledgements

Mr. President:

Let me begin by thanking the people of Montana for giving me the honor of representing them in the United States Congress for nearly 40 years.

And I want to thank President Obama for the opportunity to continue to serve the American people as Ambassador to China. I also want to recognize one of the best teammates and friends anyone could ask for –Senator Jon Tester. Thank you.

There is nothing greater in life than the love of family and I have been an incredibly lucky man.

I'd like to thank my wife, Melodee, my son Zeno, and his wife Stephanie. I'd also like to thank our children Katie and Joey.

Mel, Zeno, Stephanie, Katie and Joey: you inspire me daily and I'm so grateful for each of you.

I am so blessed to have Mel in my life: her energy, her zest for life, her positive outlook and love have transformed me.

Katie and Joey are clearly inspired by their mother because they are such good people with bright futures ahead of them.

My son Zeno is an all-around great guy. I'm so proud of him. He is an Assistant U.S. Attorney living in Helena with his wife, Stephanie.

Stephanie has jumped right into life in Montana. She is so talented and special. The Helena community is lucky to have her.

I am thankful to my parents: Jean and John Baucus. I wish they were with us today.

Growing up on a ranch in Montana, you learn the simple lessons. The measure of life.

You learn to cherish the land. It gets in your blood.

Working on a ranch is humbling. There is so much you cannot control. Weather. Prices.

Nature rains down wrath or prosperity on a moment's notice.

On the ranch, you are charged with nurturing life, protecting livestock, all to produce your small part of nature's bounty.

It's the Montana way. We're outdoors people. We work outside, we hunt, we fish, we hike. We find some continuation of ourselves in the outdoors. As Montana writer Bud Guthrie said, "somehow I am part of it, a mortal partner to eternity."

I grew up this way, and it shored up my belief that we all have a moral obligation to our kids and grandkids to leave this place in better shape than we found it.

That internal compass was a lasting gift from my parents and their love of the ranch.

My mom had the class of Grace Kelly and the spunk of Katherine Hepburn.

Always positive. Always upbeat. Always nurturing.

She was so intelligent and so well read.

Someone asked me last week what my mother would have thought of all of this. She would have been incredibly excited and fascinated with the adventure ahead. While I miss her every day, today she is especially on my mind.

As is my father, John Baucus.

He loaded bombs headed for Europe during World War II.

He was a product of the Great Depression who instilled in me the values of hard work, humility and good faith.

No one spoke an ill word of my father, ever.

He had such rock solid character.

I was so blessed to have such great parents.

II. Definitive Year: Hitchhiking Around the Globe

52 years ago, I was full of youthful idealism and curiosity about life beyond the ranch.

As a college student at Stanford, I decided to take a year off from my studies.

I grabbed a knapsack and hitchhiked around the world.

I set out to visit countries I had only imagined — India, Japan, and China, to name a few.

Before I departed, I had never thought about a life of public service, but that trip opened my eyes. It charted my course.

I realized how people across the globe were interconnected, and I saw the indispensable role, America plays as a leader on the world stage.

I had an epiphany in what was then the Belgian Congo.

It just hit me.

The world is getting smaller. Our natural resources are diminishing.

We have to find a way to work together better.

I returned home with a commitment to a career where I could improve the lives of my fellow Montanans and all Americans.

I would not be standing here today had it not been for that trip around the world.

It was, by far, the most defining year of my life.

That one year set into motion a series of opportunities to serve that I would never have dreamed would take me back to China to represent the United States more than fifty years later.

III. Walk Across State/Watergate Babies

When I first ran for statewide office 1973, no one knew me from Adam. I needed some advice.

Senator Mansfield told me if I wanted to run for Congress, it would take a lot of hard work and shoe leather.

I took his advice -- literally.

I wore out as much shoe leather as I knew how.

I walked the entire length of the state of Montana, from Gardiner in the south to the Yaak at the edge of the Canadian border.

I got to know so many great people who put me to work in the U.S. House of Representatives.

It was right in the middle of the Watergate political scandal. I joined a congressional class determined to restore good faith and trust in government.

I think of my friends Chris Dodd, Tom Harkin, Paul Simon, Pat Leahy, Henry Waxman and George Miller.

It was a class of great Americans who were in it for the right reasons.

When I hitchhiked around the globe as a young man, I realized no country had a monopoly on religion, culture or virtue.

We're all in this together.

All people, basically, have the same dreams for their families:

- To put food on the table and make ends meet,
- A good education for their kids,
- Health care they can afford,
- And a clean environment for their families to explore and enjoy.

IV. The Senate's Highest Form

The United States Senate can make peoples' dreams a reality.

It offers what few institutions in the world can boast: the opportunity to make a difference when history calls.

One of the greatest privileges I've had in this job is having one of the best staffs on the Hill.

They have always been ready with big ideas and dedication to answer history's call. If there is vanguard of vision, my staff has been it.

1423 people to be exact.

1423 true public servants.

Each person on my team made a positive difference in the lives of others and I thank them all.

V. Serving Those who Have Served Us

In the years I've been here, the U.S. Senate voted to send our sons and daughters to fight wars overseas.

When you come from a beautiful place like Montana, you'll stop at nothing to defend it.

Montana has a proud tradition of answering the call to serve. In fact, more Montanans volunteered for service per capita than nearly any other state in the nation after 9/11.

My own nephew, Phillip, left college to enlist in the Marines.

Before long he was far away, serving this country.

I loved Phillip like a son.

His fellow Marines looked to him for support, leadership and advice as they faced many firefights in Iraq.

He gave his life for our nation.

And then, returned to the family ranch for the very last time.

Phillip, like each one of the fallen heroes who bore our battles, left behind big dreams undone, and countless broken hearts.

Dust to dust, we shudder still.

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.

Here in the Senate, we have made progress.

We enacted tax credits for businesses that hire veterans and a new G.I. Bill that has sent thousands to college.

In the past ten years, Congress has doubled support for the VA. That's an investment we should be proud of.

Someone once wrote: "In war, there are no unwounded soldiers."

When we make the tough votes to authorize war, we must also find the courage to band together so that our troops return to a nation that honors their service.

Of all the bills I've worked on, there are two that stand out.

In 2010, we took the Montana National Guard's model of improved PTSD screening and expanded it nationwide.

Before we passed this law, the screening process wasn't working, and our troops were paying the price.

The new screenings have resulted in more than 800,000 service members have received personal and private, one-on-one attention from a trained health care provider – both before and after deployment.

Make no mistake, these screenings are saving lives.

I'm also proud of another live saving bill – the Affordable Care Act.

It's been almost four years since President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act into law.

In that time, the law has done more than any in the past half-century to expand access to health coverage.

It has provided 71 million Americans free preventive services. More than 6 million seniors have received discounts on vital prescription drugs.

More than 3 million young people have peace of mind knowing they are allowed to stay on their parents' health plans. And I am especially proud that now no child — NO CHILD — can ever be denied health coverage because they've been sick or had a pre-existing condition.

It has been a tough road. But it has been a challenge I am proud to have taken on.

While the debate over the law continues, I am proud to stand up for it because it is helping millions of Americans.

Take Julie from Helena. Julie wrote to me that she is self-employed and finally able to get access to affordable, quality health coverage because of the ACA.

And take John from Missoula whose daughter survived ovarian cancer. Thanks to the ACA she was able to stay on her parents' insurance and win her battle against cancer.

I am very proud of the role I played in helping make health care more accessible and more affordable to many more Americans.

VI. Restoring the Senate: Working Friendships Work

In this chamber there are brilliant men and women.

But with great respect for my colleagues, I insist that, in the most important respect, senators are just ordinary people.

It is only through the extraordinary institution of the Senate that we ordinary people have the power to make life better for all Americans.

We belong to and depend on something bigger than ourselves.

When I first came to the U.S. Senate, senators from opposing parties actually had lunch together in the private Senate dining room. It was called the Inner Sanctum.

In those daily rituals we learned about each other's families, home states, and developed real friendships.

There was a backbone of respect that we all relied upon.

Those friendships provided a refuge from the political firestorms, common ground to return to after wrangling over the disagreements of the day.

Now, schedules are packed with caucus meetings and political fundraisers.

The Senate is losing the spirit of friendship and forgiveness that, in the words of the Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, "is the final oil of harmony in all human relations and which rests upon the contrite recognition that our actions and attitudes are inevitably interpreted in a different light by our friends as well as foes than we interpret them."

That private Senate dining room now carries just the echoes of the friendships once forged at its tables. And we are poorer for it.

Yet, there is nothing inevitable about this trend.

The hope of this body lies in the hearts of individual Senators.

The heart set upon solutions to problems will win over the heart devising traps for political gain.

VII. Anecdotes on Working Together

It was my honor to have friendships that formed the basis for solving some of the nation's most difficult problems.

I'll never forget working together with the late-Senator John Chafee on the Environment and Public Works Committee.

I worked with him for years before finding out he was an amazing war hero, decorated for his service in the Korean War.

Few people knew this about his war record because he didn't brag about it or use it for political points.

He served because he believed in it, not because he thought he'd get credit for it.

Without a doubt, we need more John Chafees in the world.

Between 1989 and 1990, we sat together in a small room just off the Senate floor, facing wave after wave of unhappy senators – sometimes until one or two in the morning.

He was the ranking Republican member of the EPW committee, and I had become the chairman of the Environmental Protection subcommittee.

Together, we met with our colleagues, ironing out compromises on acid rain, ozone depletion, air quality permits, and scores of other issues.

Senator Chafee later became Chairman of the EPW Committee.

We had our disagreements, but by and large, under Senator Chafee's chairmanship I recall an oasis of civility.

That friendship helped us pass the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990.

It's a small point - but I always respected that he never raised his voice.

John never lost his temper. He listened carefully to the other person's point of view. He was the paragon of a senator.

As is my good friend, from Iowa, Chuck Grassley.

Chuck and I began our friendship by deciding to meet weekly.

Face to face, to discuss initiatives, legislation or sometime just for friendly conversation.

The point is we always got together.

Pretty soon, our staffs started talking.

Then they started working together.

If you were a fly on the wall – you'd think it was one unified team.

Our friendship led to a culture of respect and honesty on the Senate Finance Committee that helped us pass important agreements and other bills to expand trading opportunities with the rest of the world.

I am especially proud of our work together to successfully shepherd through the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003.

I'd also like to thank my good friend Dave Camp, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. We've worked together a lot over the last couple years on tax reform.

We bridged the partisan divide to help pass the most recent Highway Bill and the Payroll Tax Cut.

It's also been an honor working with Senator Hatch. Orrin, Dave and I just recently worked together to introduce Trade Promotion Authority legislation to make Congress a full partner in trade negotiations.

In trade, as in so many important areas, working together is the only way to get the job done.

In 1961, President-elect John F. Kennedy said, "Our governments, in every branch, at every level, national, state and local, must be as a city upon a hill — constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and their great responsibilities."

If we are indeed a city on a hill, it rests firmly on the bridges Senators build when they face even the deepest of divides. I mention my closest friendships across the aisle because it is those bridges that we lack the most today.

The epiphany I had as a young man hitchhiking around the world 52 years ago is even more relevant today.

Advances in technology and communications have made us more interconnected as people than ever before.

The challenges of globalization from climate change to terrorism, to economic development and education can only be addressed with good faith and a commitment to finding common ground.

I am committed in my next chapter to meet these challenges.

The U.S.-China relationship is one of the most important bilateral relationships in the world. It will shape global affairs for generations.

We must get it right.

VIII. Message for Montana

Thirty eight years ago, Mike Mansfield said farewell to this institution by simply declaring: “There is a time to stay and a time to go.”

Now, as I face my own cross roads, I’m humbled to have the opportunity to follow in his footsteps.

As America’s ambassador to Japan, Mansfield worked hard to strengthen and improve America’s relationships throughout Asia. I’ll do the same.

Many of you know that I love to run. I've actually got my eye on the Beijing Marathon. Well, let's be honest – more like half-marathon.

As I think about the next endeavor, I'm reminded of something professional runner Paul Tergat once said:

“Ask yourself: ‘Can I give more?’ The answer is usually: Yes.”

I can give more. And I thank President Obama for asking me. I am indeed energized to serve America in this new role and look at this as my sprint to the finish.

I trust Montanans to choose wisely as they have so well with my friend, the great Senator from Montana, Jon Tester.

My final message is not for my esteemed peers, but for young people chasing their dreams across the Montana Hi-Line, searching for meaning through the Yellowstone River valley, or climbing toward their future along the Rocky Mountain Front.

The headlines paint the picture that there is no honor in public service.

I urge you to challenge that. Change it.

Choose to serve others. For me, it has been the honor of a lifetime.

And be ready – because history is calling.

It is with deep gratitude and respect that I say for the last time, with full faith in the highest forms of the Senate: I yield the floor. # # #