

Senator John Walsh

Mansfield-Metcalf Speech

Helena, MT • 8 March 2014

As prepared for delivery.

It is a tremendous honor to share a few words as someone trusted with the office of United States Senator. It is not my office. It's yours. And doing right by it is a responsibility I take very seriously.

Sometimes maybe too seriously. Friends tell me: "John, you're too stiff. Remember to smile." Something you should know about me: For 33 years in the military, I was told every day to "wipe that smile off your face, soldier!"

Then again, a year of listening to Steve Bullock's jokes will do that to anybody.

Seriously, Steve: Montana is in good hands thanks to your leadership. Your dedication to protecting kids. Your commitment to investing in students of all ages. And serving their teachers.

Our new Lieutenant Governor? She's fantastic, isn't she? Angela McLean has dedicated her career to changing young lives.

Let me ask: If you are, or have been, a teacher, will you please stand up? (Tester, that means you, too.)

Ladies and gentlemen, let's say thank you to some real heroes in our presence. Teachers, your dedication to future generations is one I proudly share.

Tonight is a celebration of our party and all it has accomplished over the past year. Thanks to all of you, and generations before us:

- Montana's economy — is getting stronger.
- Our budget — is balanced.
- Those who can't protect themselves — are not forgotten.
- Our veterans and seniors — are honored and respected.

We've got a heck of a lot to be proud of. But ladies and gentlemen: all of it is at stake this year.

Washington is broken

You've heard me say it before. And after spending a few days back there you'll hear me say it again. Washington is broken. It's broken in a big way.

I'm still trying to figure out where all the hallways are. But I know that whole place is filled with politicians

who put themselves — and powerful special interests — ahead of doing what's right.

Too many in Congress don't have courage. Too many don't take responsibility to solve our problems.

Thank god we have Tester there. We have a Montana farmer who brings Montana values to the U.S. Senate.

Now, you have a soldier too. And a husband, a dad and a grandpa.

And the values of a soldier are simple. Do what's right, even if it's hard.

I led more than 700 men and women — Montanans — into combat.

Before we all left Montana, I looked their loved ones in the eyes. I told them I'll do my darnedest to bring them all home.

I keep with me the names of four Montanans who did not return.

So when I see TV ads funded by cowards like Karl Rove and the Koch Brothers attacking my record, believe me, I can handle it.

And I do mean cowards, because their agenda — hurting the most vulnerable of citizens just to further their self-interest and their greed — that's cowardice.

They are trying to change the story of Montana.

But I'm not going to let them change our story in Montana. None of us should.

Our story is worth building on.

Our story

It's going to take your help. It's going to take sticking to our principles.

For me, it means putting that +Montana courage+ to work as your Senator.

I support cutting spending and cutting our debt. But we should never do it on the backs of our children. Veterans. Or our seniors.

Leave Social Security and Medicare and food assistance for hungry people — off the table.

I'm a former military commander who believes we should be looking at our defense budget when it comes to wasteful spending.

We do need to be able to defend ourselves, but make no mistake – there is waste in defense. I'm close to introducing a bill that goes after all the taxpayer money we waste on civilian defense contractors. How about the M1 tanks we spend billions on—the tanks that even the Army says we don't need?

Don't get me wrong. I know full well that we must never let our guard down in our stand against terrorism. But we must cut wasteful spending in our military and anywhere else it exists.

We can save hundreds of billions of dollars just by allowing Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices.

We can save hundreds of billions by closing tax loopholes that make it easier for corporations to ship American jobs overseas.

We will save untold money by investing responsibly in our future generations:

- Through good schools.
- By making college more affordable – and reachable for anyone who wants to attend.
- By ensuring that our physical and human infrastructure is sound – so we can continue to focus on rebuilding our economy and creating jobs.

Good jobs. Safe jobs. Jobs that families can make a living off of.

Let's raise the minimum wage. Don't we owe it to hardworking families to see that our minimum wage is a livable wage?

We must always protect a woman's right to make her own health care decisions.

I am proud to stand with all Americans who believe choice and health care is none of the government's damn business. Who believe in something as simple and right as equal pay for equal work.

Montana has a great history of business leaders who happen to be women. Let's keep opening doors to create more women-owned businesses.

We must end sexual assault in our military, and reform the way these terrible crimes are prosecuted. I support legislation to remove prosecution from the military's chain of command.

We must never let our guard down in the fight for our clean air and clean water. Public access to our public land. Our world-class hunting, fishing and hiking.

As proud as I am to come from Butte, nobody visits Butte to see the Berkeley Pit. It's a powerful lesson we must never forget from our past.

To my friends in Indian Country, we have so much opportunity to work together to improve education on our Tribal lands.

- To bring more good teachers to our schools.
- To improve health care.
- To provide hope and opportunity for our young people.
- To live up to all the promises made – and too often forgotten – by our government.

I am your partner, working government to government, to see that relationship only becomes stronger.

To my friends in organized labor: Teachers, Firefighters, Teamsters, Steelworkers, Pipefitters, Postal Workers, Public Employees: I am your partner too.

My dad was pipefitter. Today, I filed for office at his old union hall in Butte. Growing up, we had a picture of George Meany right next to a picture of John F. Kennedy, and Jesus Christ.

That's where my Montana values come from.

And when it comes to our national economy, we must never, ever bring our country to the brink of disaster.

A contrast

And that brings me back to why we have so much at stake.

You see, Congressman Steve Daines +doesn't+ stand for these things.

It's nothing personal against Congressman Daines. But he has some very different priorities than us.

He is looking out for a few, like the Koch Brothers.

He defends an ideology masked as principle. But the reality is that Congressman Daines' ideology only seeks to preserve privilege. They claim freedom, but deny some people rights. They say hard work should be rewarded, but pay women less.

It is a cruel ideology. A cowardly one.

And in seeking to preserve the privileges of a few, it is profoundly irresponsible when it comes to the welfare of the many.

Congressman Daines was one of just a handful of Tea Party lawmakers who demanded a shutdown of the

federal government. +Here's the letter that did it.+ He voted for it. He got his way.

It cost our small businesses tens of millions of dollars in lost revenue. It created uncertainty for farmers and ranchers. It left Indian Country without critical services.

Our Congressman voted to privatize Medicare. He tried to make it into a voucher system. All while giving tax cuts to millionaires.

That's not fiscally responsible – that's irresponsible.

Over the next eight months, you're going to hear our Congressman talk a lot about jobs. He's got a record, alright. He has a record of setting up factories... in China. Worse? The company he was working for was shutting down factories here in America.

He's even supported protecting special tax breaks for corporations that outsource jobs to China.

Congressman Daines has tried again and again to repeal the Indian Healthcare Improvement Act.

He wrote a bill in Washington that would make some of our best hunting and fishing areas off limits. That bill ends critical resources for our rural schools and roads, forever.

As for the Farm Bill? He voted for it – a year late. And only after putting Montana's largest industry in a lurch. After he voted to literally take food away from hungry kids, seniors and veterans.

That's not looking out for Montana, that's putting the interest of his party and his ideology, ahead of those he is supposed to be representing.

And this is very important: When it comes to a woman's right to make her own health care decisions, make no mistake: Congressman Daines is a far worse threat than Congressman Rehberg ever was.

He does not even support choice in cases of rape or incest. His name is on a bill that not only overturns Roe-v-Wade – it also outlaws birth control pills.

Ladies and gentlemen: Can I get a loud commitment from you? That we will do whatever it takes to show our Congressman the door once again?

A path to victory

That's good to hear. But what it's going to take is a whole lot of hard work.

Jon Tester showed us the path to victory. First we have to show voters there is a difference -- a difference that matters in their lives.

Then, as Jon Tester did, we have to have a powerful campaign on the ground. That is where I need your help.

We need you making phone calls, writing letters to your local newspaper, talking to your friends—setting the record straight. A lot of these attacks against me are going to be personal. You were on the ground to fight back with Jon Tester and thank God it worked.

We're going to need it again this year.

We know the other side will have people knocking on doors and making phone calls and stuffing envelopes and writing big checks.

We have more door-knockers. More phone-callers. More envelope-stuffers. We just have to make sure we put them all to work.

We may not have many big checks, but we have a lot more people willing to write checks, because we know what it takes to win.

In 2012, Steve and I won. In 2012, Jon won. Denise won. Linda, Monica and Ed won.

We did it with a powerful ground game. This year, without a Presidential election on the ballot, we need a ground game more powerful than ever to win again.

Conclusion

I could do none of it without the people sitting down there: My family.

You know, my heart skipped a beat when I first saw the woman sitting down here. Some things never change. Janet and I just celebrated our 29th anniversary. Janet, thank you for being the most important part of my life.

Our son Michael and our daughter-in-law, April, are here, too. You'll probably see our other son Taylor on the campaign trail in the months ahead.

And the newest member of our family is our granddaughter, Kennedy. She is not even one year old. But she reminds me what I get up every day to go fight for.

There's one other person here I want to recognize. Sergeant John Bennett. Janet and I have the honor of sitting with John. In 2004, John was part of a Montana National Guard patrol that came under sniper fire.

Back then, National Guard Humvees didn't have the same armor as Army Humvees. Do you know what protected the roof of Sergeant Bennett's Humvee? A piece of plywood.

That's no match for the attack John endured. Tonight, John is with us in a wheelchair. Most of us can't imagine that kind sacrifice for our nation. John, we honor that sacrifice tonight and forever.

It's because of John Bennett that fighting for Montana troops runs deep. I encouraged all my officers to join an organization that sticks up for National Guard units across the nation. Because of that organization's work, National Guard equipment is stronger.

You are going to hear ads attacking me on TV, calling into question decisions I made to protect the men and women under my command. And you know what I say: I will never apologize for fighting for Montana.

We have too much at stake. We have too much to fight for. And I'm honored to go into that fight, with all of my friends by my side.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for all your work. And God bless you all.