

AAM Senter On The Hill 1-31-20

I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone that attended the AAM meeting in Lubbock, January 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>. It was great to spend time with old friends and get to know our new members. There were many great stories told and our friends at Texas Tech University, Southwest Collections were on hand to record many of them for AAM's Oral History archive.

As January ends and February begins, my mind goes back to January 1978 as 50,000 farmers from across the country made their way to Washington, D.C. by train, bus, plane and car. We had a plane load of farmers from our area, some of whom had never been on a plane before and none of us had any idea what we were going to find in our Nation's Capital. No one had any idea how many would answer the call and make the trip, but when we walked around the Capitol Building there were thousands of farmers filling the steps and spilling out into the lawn area. Senators and Members of Congress were lined up welcoming the farmers to DC, for a young farmer, it left me speechless. Everyone used the next couple of days to visit our Representatives and Senators.

During this trip, President Carter gave his State Of The Union Address to Congress. A few farmers were invited to sit in the gallery to hear the speech, but the rest of us stood outside in the snow to listen on speakers. The snow was falling at a good pace and I remember so many things going thru my mind, I spent money I didn't have to come here, but my family farm was worth fighting for. I thought about my young wife at home with our 3 children and with very little money to buy food or pay the bills. Did I make the right decision, my dad came out of retirement to take over the farm work, he said I support what you are doing for our family and family farmers across the land? Even though we didn't hear words of encouragement from the President, we heard them from Members of Congress who offered to take up our fight. I came away with a new determination to stand and fight for our families, farms and rural communities. I wondered what is wrong, why are farmers having to do this, our job is to produce food and fiber. Everyone attending would call home at night to report on the day's activities. Everyone at home would then activate our phone trees and call a few people who would then call a few more. Local media was also involved doing articles and interviews that aired locally. Farmers answered the call and stood up, how could we lose we were right and telling the truth.

A year later during late January and early February 1979, farmers fired up their tractors to go to Washington, D.C. Tractors filled I-20, I-40, I-70, I-80 and I-90, all headed to DC to arrive the same day, February 5<sup>th</sup> to enter the city. Many ask how you was able to plan the trip, so everyone arrived the same day. Farmers have a way of figuring things out, first we knew that the slowest tractor would set the pace for everyone and we knew that some of the old Case and Moline's would only make about 13 or 14 miles per hour, so from that calculation everyone agreed that 100 miles per day should be set as the goal. We broke off a wooden matchstick to match 100 on the map's mileage chart. Then the matchstick was placed on each Interstate and an X was drawn, then moved on and another X was drawn, that was done on each route so

everyone knew where the tractors would be each day and when to join the group as we passed their area. Each night local farmers would have soup or chili, or a BBQ and speeches would be given then the next day the local farmers that were going would join the Tractorcade. Everyone that joined had their place in line, first to leave lead the group, last in was the last. Every night local fuel dealers would come by and fuel up all the tractors free of charge. The community support was awesome. On the Tractorcade were farm families, fathers and sons, grandpa's and their grandchildren, farmers wives, a snapshot of Rural America all demanding fairness for our farm and ranch families. Some like me, couldn't afford the trip but local businesspeople raised money for our county farmers to go. Some that went knew this was their last stand because they could not survive high interest and low prices, and others had a different reason, I talked to a World War II vet who was a farmer and he said, 'I'm alright, my land and equipment is payed for. I payed for it under Parity Pricing in the late 1940's, so I'm doing this so my grandchildren can have the same opportunity I had to farm if they want to'. There are many stories about the trip, friends made, finding support along the way from the flags waving from the overpasses to signs supporting farmers. Some asked how did you get permission to drive on the Interstates, we didn't, all in all most States welcomed the farmers, but when a problem arose, they were told, we will work this out or else every East-West Interstate in the US will be blocked in both directions until we find a solution. So needless to say, there were a few minor problems, but the trip was fairly trouble free except for Mother Nature which had a blizzard planned for I-80. In February 1978 AAM started meeting with House and Senate members and staff to develop and introduce emergency farm legislation. I will continue the AAM History in my next column where I will look back on important milestones in AAM's history each month and the year it occurred.

Keep in touch with your neighbors and make sure they are OK, family farmers and ranchers must stand together, speak out and don't just throw up your hands and walk away, stand strong. Producers need a fair price in the marketplace for their production and competitive markets to sell to. Parity Prices means that producers receive a fair price compared to what their costs are, basically on Par with the rest of the economy. Parity not Charity still rings true.

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