

AAM Senter On The Hill 4-28-20

I am going to continue my AAM memories for the month of April beginning with 1978. April 10, 1978 was a day of celebration for AAM farmers because the United States Senate passed the AAM supported bill, the Dole Flexible Parity Act on a voice vote. We felt that all our days of work had paid off with the vote. There were celebrations across the country as word spread of the victory and now the focus turned to the House. President Carter told advisors that he wanted to support the farmers but his economic advisors told him the bill would raise inflation by one half percent so he would oppose passage. President Carter then turned to Jim Wright, the House Majority Leader, to lead the opposition and defeat it on the House Floor. The Leadership move left many farm state democrats in a difficult position, where some continued their support others backed away. The vote was bipartisan, but the Dole Flexible Parity plan was defeated, leading to massive nonviolent protests across the country. In AAM meetings that followed, frustration with the elected leadership continued to build. That is when the idea was put on the table for a massive Tractorcade to Washington, DC. Farmers were driving tractors in local communities and states, if the elected House Members did not listen to farmers, let us see what they do when we all drive tractors to see them. The House defeat also rallied AAMer's to get involved politically, I know in Texas, a large group of new House members were elected and many of them won with AAM's support. It even led us in Texas to try and get involved in both Democratic and Republican parties. I know we found out how the delegates were elected to the State Democratic Convention which was held in Fort Worth that year. The message was sent out that everyone should attend their precinct meeting and get elected as a delegate if possible. Now remember there were no cell phones, computers or faxes, but despite that word spread. The deal was that AAMer's would meet in the Texas Hotel the night before to organize. We had no idea how successful the effort was until we met, over 700 AAMer's were seated delegates for the state. We had the largest voting block in attendance, so we thought, what do we do now? Someone had an idea that we hook up with organized labor who also had a large block of delegates. During the meeting labor suggested that since AAM had the largest block we should elect someone to be Vice Chair of the convention. I was told 'Senter, you are it'. During the opening ceremony all the leaders of the party were on stage including me. I was standing by Lt Governor Bill Hobby the Convention Chair and he looked at me and said, who the hell are you and how many conventions have you attended? Well I told him, this is my first convention and I am the one that will chair this meeting when you leave the stage. We worked out a plan for the votes on the floor, the plan was I would stand up and either give a thumbs up or a thumbs down and that how the AAMer's would vote. It worked good too, because I was explaining the system to someone on the stage and I gave a thumbs up and several stood up and voted yes even though there was no vote happening at the time. This is just my story, but there are hundreds if not thousands of stories out there.

Now moving on to 1985, with the heartland sinking into a deep farm depression, Congress was debating emergency farm legislation to boost prices and help farmers that were losing their farms. AAM used the Parity March the month before to build support for passage of the

legislation. The bill was finally passed by Congress and ready to be sent to President Reagan for his signature. AAM farmers gathered in Washington, DC and the plan was to hand carry the bill from the Capital to the White House. Members of the House and Senate marched along with farmers carrying the bill down Pennsylvania Ave. We felt like we were participating in democracy and sending the message of hope back to family farmers and ranchers. However, there was discouraging signals from the White House where there was concerns that President Reagan would veto the bill. Having arrived at the White House the bill was delivered, and a press conference was held outside the gates when a reporter came running up and said that Reagan had vetoed the bill. What an insult for him to veto it while everyone was there. Several Republican farm state Senators told the President, this action would lead to losses in the 1986 elections for them and sure enough, Democrats took over control of the Senate in the 1986 election. Finally in 1987, the 1987 Credit Act was passed by Congress and under pressure from the Republican Party, President Reagan signed it, which stopped all farm foreclosures, mandated restructuring and helped Rural America begin to pull it's self out of the crisis that destroyed hundreds of farms.

Reflections from the past are important for the younger generations to see where we have come from and how they might participate and speak out on their beliefs. One of AAM's top priorities is to make sure the next generation of young farmers and ranchers can enter agriculture and make a living from it for their families. Farm and Ranch families pump the blood thru our rural communities and without them the heart of the Heartland dies. You end up with a totally corporate controlled food supply. We now see long lines at Food Banks and farmers dumping milk and produce, unable to get it to market. USDA should be working with all the State Departments of Agriculture to be buying produce and dairy products and getting it to people that are hungry. Do not tell me it cannot happen, buy the food and get it where people need it. Enough of follow the money and let corporations' cash in, I will stop there, I think you see where I am at, till later, God Bless all the family farmers and ranchers.

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