

05/18/2002 Entry: "THE WEBER REPORT: Wednesday, 15 May 2002"

Today's WEBER REPORT talks about last Saturday in Omaha.

The MAILBOX is my response to last Saturday

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THE WEBER REPORT: Wednesday, 15 May 2002

FACT & COMMENT

About Omaha...

Saturday last found me in Omaha for a special meeting called by the Nebraska Cattlemen's Association, R-Calf and the Organization for Competitive Markets. The agenda was simple: farmer/producers are in trouble. As I said early Monday morning, all were well-served in that Walt Hackney moderated the meeting. His was an impossible task; but, he did it well.

I had a lot of "windshield time" to consider all of it... 735 miles round trip. Going west, I took Route 34... from my house through the southern part of Iowa. That was one of the best trips I've taken in years. For the soul. Once I crossed the river into Iowa... the fences were more and more obvious. The further west I went, the more cows and calves I saw. I loved every minute of that trip. It gave me some time to think about what's going on right now in agriculture. I stayed the night in Red Oak, Iowa. Saturday morning took me on into Omaha and to the meeting which was held in a Holiday Inn on 72nd Street.

There must have been 350 people there. I went intending only to watch. I wanted to be "a reporter". Well, I'm not a reporter. Never could be. I just can't sit still and "be objective". However, I didn't say but just a very few things... and very briefly... from the audience.

Yes, I kept notes. A lot of notes. I intended very much to report on everything which happened during the meeting which started @ 0930 and adjourned sometime around 1700. I've got the notes. I've studied them over and over. But, I'm not going to render the report I intended. Why? I don't think it would serve much purpose.

So, what did I think? Oh, I was several times ready to leave. I heard some real nonsense from people who should know better. But, I also heard some really interesting concepts. I learned something. A lot really. And, I think I learned as much about myself as I learned about the stress endured by today's livestock farmer/producer.

What I learned about myself isn't all that pretty. I'm impatient. Far more so than I should be. I'm certainly not an organization man. As Groucho would have said, "I wouldn't want to belong to any organization which would have me as a member!" I know now more than ever that I'm destined to more often than not be alone in my thoughts. But, I accept that. And, I hope that in some very small way my few thoughts can be of some help to somebody.

They're these:

* in spite of my own frustration... acute at times... I'm convinced that the meeting was worth it. Oh, yes, I was stirred more often than I'd wished with this or that comment. Still, having the meeting was a good exercise... and, hopefully, something will come out of it all. I really hope for that;

* the list of grievances was long. Very long. And, I'll not argue them. For the most part, the grievances aired are legitimate and need attention. But, I also was frustrated that too often the focus of the group was fragmented... and, I worried that a lack of precise focus would dilute the impact of what those in attendance were trying to do; and,

* and, no surprise, I tired very quickly of the same "generals"

attempting to "manage" the meeting. Yes, there were too many there who've had the reins for a good long time and have gotten nothing done and then they expect us to keep listening to the same tired and lame agendas they've been feeding us for too long. As I said, I kept very exact notes. I recorded some of the most preposterous things I've heard in a long time... fully intending to report them in their entirety. I've decided not to do that, for it would really serve no purpose other than to "vent" my own frustrations. That wouldn't be fair to the larger agenda since the good people who were at the meeting deserve better from me. So, I'll keep silent about the nonsense I heard. But, I won't throw those notes away!

The simple reality of it all is this: I'm with the men and women who were there and who are really upset about what's going on in the livestock business today. I agree with what they're trying to do. I may not agree

with each and every tactic. But, I applaud the effort and will do nothing in any way to frustrate that effort. The simple fact is... farmers are in trouble. I don't see how anyone can argue that. And, the trouble is structure. The laws of the land are not being prosecuted. And, because of that, farmers by the tens of thousands have been and are being forced from the land.

I ask that you pay close attention as news of last Saturday's meeting surfaces in the media... that's if it surfaces much at all. And, I ask that you do something... anything... to show your solidarity with your colleagues in U.S. agriculture. Granted, you may not agree with this or that in every instance. I surely don't. But, our objectives are the same... a vigorous independent-farmer sector... good for all of us and good for each of our rural communities. This mess can be changed. But, it won't be changed unless we do it ourselves. It's up to us. So, it's time to put away our petty grievances with each other and to put our shoulders to the wheel and push. Push. And, push again. Harder.

One of the things I thought most about on my way home was this haunting question: "Barry, what can you do right now?"

Well, my answer is a simple one. If I'm under attack, I call the police. I don't call my congressman. I don't call my senator. I call the police. So, today I've sent the letter which you'll find in the MAILBOX to the Attorney General of the United States... with copies to the Assistant Attorney General / Antitrust Division and to my two senators and one congressman. Will it do any good? I don't know. But then I'd never know, would I, unless I tried? I urge everyone to write letters to the Justice Department. Letters. Not emails. Not faxes. Letters... with stamps on them. Letters make an impact.

And, I salute the National Farmers Organization... that group has right now organized a petition drive... also directed at the Justice Department. To sign the petition, just go to the NFO website and register your thoughts. I did that yesterday afternoon. I was the 10th person to sign the petition. The website is: www.nfo.org And, my thanks to the NFO for taking the initiative. (By the way, if you elect to sign that petition, stand tall, don't sign it "anonymously". Let the world know where you stand and how you stand. Nobody signed the Declaration of Independence as "anonymous"!)

So, that's how I see it all. The meeting was worthwhile. I'm glad I went. I appreciate the efforts put forth by those who organized the session. I appreciate the steady hand brought to the proceedings by Walt Hackney.

Write that letter.

That's it for Wednesday, 15 May 2002.

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