The Land at the Crossroads

Address of
Governor John V. Evans, Idaho
at
Annual Convention of the Idaho Cattlemen's
Association
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Editor's Note: Governor Evans has a strong interest in and has been supportive of rangeland development and improvement. He declared it a policy of his administration that a healthy economy and a quality environment be the goals of rangeland use and management in Idaho. Because range livestock production is a major factor in Idaho's economy emphasis has been placed stimulating a healthy and viable livestock industry in the state. He has consistently worked in this direction.

THE STRENGTHS AND STABILITY of Idaho are based upon the use of the land and its resources, with the livestock industry at the foundation of our agricultural way of life. It is extremely appropriate, therefore, that we consider the land and people. From the land and people have come our history, and from that history, we must shape our future. The future of the livestock industry and the future of agriculture are substantially the future of Idaho.

Idaho came into being through man's expression of freedom and independence. The opportunities presented by the Idaho Territory offered the pioneer relief from the complexities of the larger populated areas of the nation. In return for hard work was the promise of a new and better life. The land and its wealth seemed limitless and man's competitors were the forces of nature and the exigencies of the land itself.

The land was thought of, not as a resource, but as an obstacle to be subdued and claimed in the name of capital empire and manifest destiny. This thinking was supported and fostered by eastern industrial interests and by the government in order that the new territories could be settled and developed quickly.

With this development came a way of life and a history perceived by those in other geographical places to have a romance quite unlike the actual conditions which existed. Those legends still persist today in our novels, motion pictures and television.

BUT IF THE LEGENDS STILL PERSIST, national recognition of the historical basis for the legends and the practical applications of that history today do not. For many of our citizens, milk and beef come from a supermarket, and the West is only a place somewhere between the Mississippi River and Los Angeles.

The irony is that some similarities still exist. The land, by many, is still thought of as a commodity: something that exists only in a physical form and not as a resource acting in concert with man's social interaction in the sustenance of life. The conditions of use for the land are still being set by interests in other geographical areas, now as then, in the name of the national interest. Now the land is thought of as a commodity to be kept, rather than conquered or used, a view point which represents the most noble of intentions but still falls short of one recognition: the recognition that the land is, and always has been, a primal resource which supports life.

SO IDAHO AND THE WEST are now in a unique position—viewed by others in the same historical context as 100 years ago but faced with all the complexities of present day life. Idaho, which once was unknown has now become, in the words of a current poster, "what America was," and more and more of America wants to partake of her abundance.

All of this leaves Idaho and her way of life at a crossroads. The very way of life which is attracting growth is in danger of being destroyed by that growth. It therefore becomes in the best interest of the State to strive to enhance the traditional livelihoods of our people, a cornerstone of which is the livestock industry.

During the past year the administration has recognized the importance to Idaho of keeping that cornerstone in place. The Administration has declared the future of the Public Rangeland to be a state priority. I have requested and been designated the Chairman of an Agriculture Subcommittee on Range Resource Management of the National Governors' Association. As of this date, 14 states have agreed to become members, uniting the voice of Idaho with much of the West in the promotion of sound range management.

These actions, however, represent only a partial step toward our goal. There must be a recognition by the entire state that the agriculture basis of our life must remain strong if Idaho is to continue to be what Idaho is now.

TO KEEP THAT BASIS STRONG, our agriculture community must set aside differences within itself and build upon those things held in common. New political allies must also be sought, and in our bargaining we must learn to capitalize upon those issues of agreement and minimize disagreements.

The future of the livestock industry in Idaho is dependent upon our taking the offensive in promoting the interests of the land and a resource to support life.

In your taking the offensive in your interests and the interests of the State, you have everything in which to take pride. You have the history and romance of the West. You have the pride and determination of a free and independent people. You have the courage and vision which can only be acquired by men and women who are not afraid of hard work. You have the patience which can only come from a daily co-existence with the untamed forces of nature. And you have the compassion which is born of those who produce life from the land.