

Ag Doesn't Look Like Priority In Harrisburg, Preate Tells Business Leaders

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MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) — Earnest Preate, Pennsylvania attorney general, admitted to ag industry representatives recently that he has a lot to learn before committing himself to gubernatorial candidacy.

But one thing he does know, and the largely unrecognized ag industry in the state should be aware of, is we don't need 3,000 more state employees in Harrisburg as proposed by the Casey Administration. Of those, the state wants to commit half — 1,500 — to DER alone.

Although DER is necessary, "no question about it," said the attorney general, what we need "is better management." He told the largest gathering of the Ag Issues Forum, which brought together nearly 60 agribusiness representatives from the state and a contingent of visiting Michigan Cooperative Extension members in the area, that what is needed is less strangulating regulations, "less duplicity of paperwork, less government intrusion into our private lives and our private businesses."

Preate said, "It's too often we treat farmers as the enemies of the environment, when we should be considering them as partners in a progressive development of the environment."

In the case of DER, Preate suggested that perhaps some of the responsibility can be transferred to the Department of Agriculture. The voice of agriculture, according to the attorney general, "really needs to be heard, and if I were

there, hear that voice and take the step to make sure that Pennsylvania is agriculture-friendly."

Agriculture remains Pennsylvania's number 1 industry. Preate said the state should be committed to the industry because it provides \$3.5 billion of cash income and generates \$38 billion in economic activity, providing jobs for 20 percent of the state workforce.

"If agriculture is our number one industry in Pennsylvania, it sure doesn't look it when you go to Harrisburg and sit around the legislature and listen to the governor's speech, or you look at what's being done to promote agriculture interests in the state," said Preate.

Agriculture — and the stimulus it has on affiliated industries — is almost completely ignored at the state and federal level, according to the attorney general.

In a recent speech by Gov. Robert Casey, Preate admitted to the agribusiness leaders at the Ag Issues Forum that he was upset. In the speech, according to Preate, the governor devoted 17 pages to "where we were as a state, and of those 17 pages, one sentence — one sentence — (was) devoted to Pennsylvania agriculture."

"That doesn't tell me that Pennsylvania rural issues and agricultural economic issues are a priority in Harrisburg," he said.

Preate mentioned the plan by the state administration to build a new lab to test for animal diseases, but at the same time, funding for the Pennsylvania Veterinary School out of the University of Pennsylvania is being cut. "It just doesn't seem to me to make any sense," he said.

The governor's budget for 1993-1994, according to Preate, is cutting the agricultural budget by 2.6 percent and provides no increase in funding for ag extension programs. The "backbone" of state ag business "is not being assisted by the administration in Harrisburg."

In addition, the Pennsylvania Products Promotion budget is being cut 12 percent.

"Instead of hassling people in this business, we ought to be helping them," he said.

The Clinton Administration plan for "stimulating" the economy fares even worse. According to Preate, farmers will suffer because of it. He said that on a recent trip to the White House, he spoke to several people from the justice department and, if you just mention the word farming, he said, "nobody even understands what you're talking about."

"The farm community is being asked to take three times more cuts than any other domestic budget sector," he said. "That to me is not a good sign."

The following will have negative aspects on farming in general, according to Preate:

- The proposed energy tax will "dramatically affect the ability of a farmer to produce profitably," he said. The tax will hit the farmers hardest, including an increase in direct cost for fuel, fertilizers, and shipping.

- Proposed Clinton spending cuts will affect ag rural programs to the tune of \$8 billion, according to Preate.

- Although agriculture accounts



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for only 1.8 percent of domestic spending, "it will shoulder three times that in the cuts over the next

four years."

- Of the proposed Clinton "eco-

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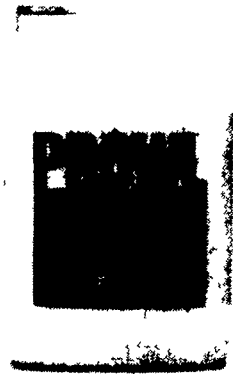
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