

Governor Candidates Debate At Farm Bureau Forum

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Candidates for governor of Pennsylvania met for the first open debate during a special meet-the-candidates forum held Monday here during the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB).

Moderated by Brad Eckart, director of governmental relations, American Farm Bureau, the highly structured forum presented six questions to each of seven prospective candidates for governor for election in November next year.

Candidates include Tom Ridge, (R-Erie, 21st Dist.); Mark Singel, current state lieutenant governor, democrat; Ernie Preate, Pennsylvania attorney general, republican; Earl Baker (R-Paoli), state senator; Mike Fisher (R-Pittsburgh), state senator; Bob O'Donnell, (D-Phila.), state representative; and Charles J. Volpe, businessman, democrat.

Format for the forum was highly structured, which included an opening statement of three minutes for each candidate; a one-minute answer to the series of six questions (the order was determined through a drawing held prior to the forum); and a two-minute closing statement. Questions varied widely and ranged from property tax reform in the state to how important agricultural programs will be under the new administration to preserving wetlands and labor laws as they apply to seasonal and migrant farm workers.

Candidates were completely in favor of widespread property tax reform, giving high priority to agriculture, support of a mandatory state recycling law, and compensation for farmers if they're property is devaluated. Candidates differed in their opinions somewhat on how they would approach defining and dealing with wetlands and how state labor laws should accommodate the unique aspects of agriculture employment. Nearly all agreed that the state's Department of Environmental Resources (DER) would be restructured.

Following is the list of six questions. Each candidate's response was carefully recorded, and a summary of their platforms and positions is included.

Questions

• Question 1: Do you support property tax reform in Pennsylvania, and more specifically, regarding state and local funding for public education? If you do, is



Mike Fisher



Earl Baker



Ernie Preate



Bob O'Donnell

there a specific approach that you favor?

• Question 2: Both farmers and consumers benefit from Pennsylvania's Department of Agriculture (PDA) programs. What priority of funding would you give to PDA?

• Question 3: Pennsylvania's recycling law hasn't done much to curb roadside litter in rural areas. What do you propose to get and keep bottles and cans out of fields?

• Question 4: What is your definition of a wetland worth preserving? How would you protect wetlands really worth saving?

• Question 5: Should property owners be compensated when their property is devaluated because government regulations are placing restrictions on their land use?

• Question 6: In recent years, certain attempts have been made to apply laws written for transient, seasonal farm workers to all farm workers. How should state labor laws accommodate the unique aspects of agriculture employment?

Tom Ridge

"You need an agriculture leader in the governor's office, and I want to be that leader," said Tom Ridge in his opening statement. "You need someone who understands that you are businessmen and businesswomen and that profitability is what you're interested in, and that in order to do that, you need government off your backs, markets open, so that you can realize the potential that you have in your communities."

In the last 11 years, according to a newsletter published by the Agriculture Coalition Newsletter,



Charles J. Volpe

Ridge for Governor, Ridge has represented rural northwestern Pennsylvania in the House of Representatives. Ridge stressed that his priorities will include "greater marketing efforts, measures to improve farm exports, and a complete overhaul of the Department of Environmental Resources" (DER).

Platform goals include developing an aggressive, well-staffed PDA; make marketing ag products a priority; make "grown in Pennsylvania" and "made in Pennsylvania" labels a trademark seen throughout the world; support new product and market research; and work with state farmers to improve their profitability.

Ridge voted for and strongly supported the recent North American Free Trade Agreement, approved by the U.S. House late



Mark Singel

Wednesday by a vote of 234-200. NAFTA will take effect on Jan. 1, 1994, if Congress approves.

Regarding the property tax reform question, Ridge said that "we don't need more taxes, we need more effective and responsible government. Any tax reform must be revenue-neutral."

Ridge said he favors eliminating the practice of unfunded mandates. He said too often that tax reform is looked at as an excuse to raise taxes, and cited the fact that farm income is down 24 percent last year, and during the past five years, farm taxes went up 38 percent.

Regarding question 2, PDA's funding priority, Ridge said the "primary responsibility is to find better ways to spend the money you're already sending" to the state. He said that if the state government would have limited its spending "simply to the level of inflation the past six to seven years, the state's funding would be \$13 billion instead of \$16 billion."

Regarding question 3, the Bottle Bill-type legislation, he said if the state's going to be in the business of recycling, that somehow the state would have to try to create markets for the kind of material being recycled. Public education about recycling is also key.

Regarding question 4, preserving wetlands, Ridge told those present that he tried to take the lead on a comprehensive wetlands management and reform measure in the House. "I do not think that all wetlands are created equal. I do not think that a farmer or a businessman in a community should have to knock on four or five different doors in order to get some kind of approval." Ridge said classification of wetlands to their ecological value and relationship they have to the community is important.



Tom Ridge

On question 5, property devaluation compensation, what amounts to taking and how that compensation should be carried out needs to be fully examined. "This question needs to be given a very high priority," he said.

On question 6, transient worker laws, Ridge emphasized the need to not take "unfair economic or social advantage of transient workers at any time or any place. The best thing for Pennsylvania to do is to understand that we need them."

Mark Singel

Mark Singel has served as the state's acting government since June, when Gov. Robert Casey underwent a heart transplant. Singel is a former state senator and is a two-term lieutenant governor.

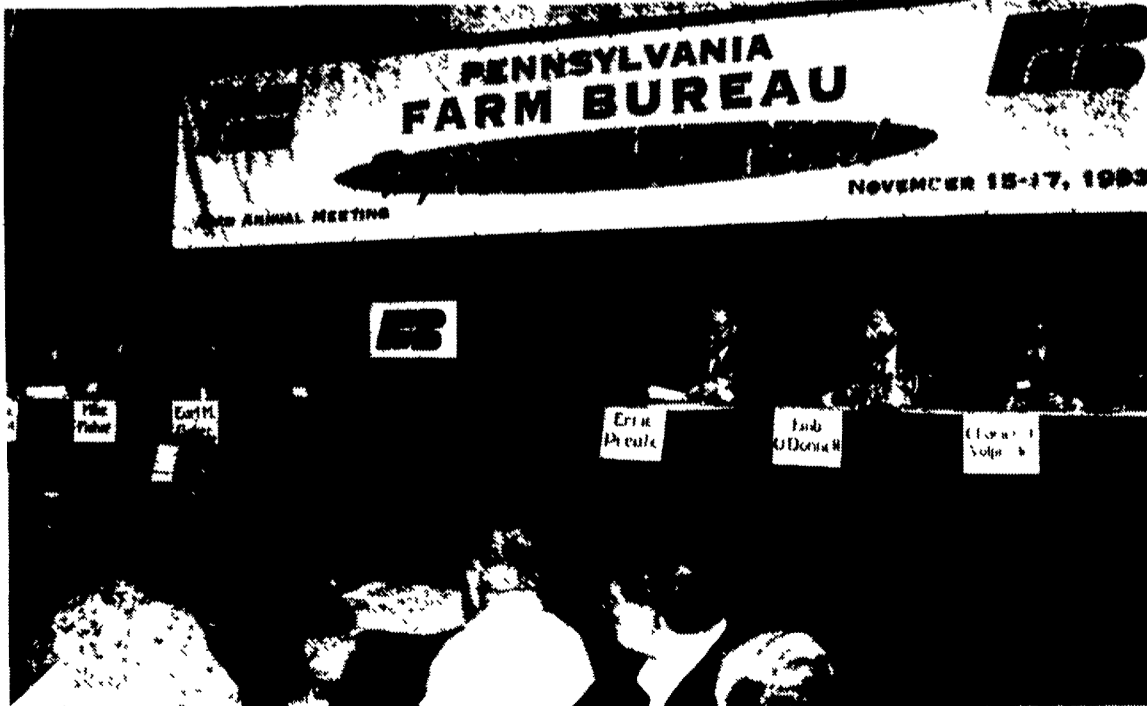
"This has been the most pro-agriculture, pro-farmer administration in the history of Pennsylvania," said Singel. "Every one of the promises and commitments that we made in 1986 were fulfilled. And we intend to do much more."

Singel, in his opening statement, spoke about the leadership given by Secretary of Agriculture Boyd Wolff to represent farming and related industry, the state's "\$40 billion dollar enterprise.

"We will continue to treat it with the top priority that it deserved." Singel said the state has spend \$100 million to preserve some 30,000 acres of farmland in the state.

Regarding the question on property tax reform, Singel said he supports a program that he has supported of which the largest benefits will go to the farmers. On the PDA's funding priority, Singel said that he "will not create new programs just to create new programs." Priorities include market development, product, salesman-

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Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidates at the PFB Convention on Monday. From left, Tom Ridge, Mark Singel, Mike Fisher, Earl Baker, Ernie Preate, Bob O'Donnell, and Charles J. Volpe, Jr.