

National Grange In Harrisburg Adopts Policy, Elects Officers

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lowering the likelihood that local agrarian enterprise could effectively compete with other capitalistic opportunities for control of the land and other resources.

Adopts Policies

The Grange adopted policy it considers would protect private property rights, while at the same time help protect the environment and natural resources.

The policy calls for the "U.S. Constitution to be designated as the ultimate protector of private property," according to the press office of the National Grange.

At the same time, the Grange policy includes a recognition of the importance of protecting local watersheds.

For other environmental goals, the Grange has adopted the position that voluntary programs should be created which give local communities the say as to which resources are best managed through public agencies.

The Grange also adopted policy that would direct the use of public agricultural support toward the family farmer in an effort to provide a buffer against large corporate farms.

In this policy, the Grange calls for the use of "means testing" for all major commodities, full planting flexibility, and basing support payments on production, not acreage.

The National Grange also agreed to call upon the U.S. Congress to produce a tax system that is less

complicated and more fair.

In their consideration of a variety of proposals for tax and fiscal policy, the delegates approved backing a tax system that would use a simpler and fairer federal income tax, such as a flat tax; reform of capital gains tax to allow a 50-percent deduction, coupled with a graduated note tied to higher income brackets; and reform of federal estate tax laws to exclude the first \$1.5 million of qualified family business assets from estate taxes.

In related policy, the Grange spoke out against the concentration of economic power in the hands of large commercial banks.

Delegates adopted a position that opposes allowing large banks to buy insurance funds or sell securities.

The Grange seeks protections of the rights of parents to make decisions regarding the discipline and welfare of their children instead of having those rights taken over by legislative bodies and the judicial system.

The Grange delegate body also called for strong opposition to the ratification of the United Nation's Treaty on the Rights of the Child, because it "challenges parents' rights that are protected by the U.S. Constitution," said Maurice Wiles, chairman of the National Grange Committee on Foreign Affairs.

At the same time, the Grange delegate body endorsed the Parental Rights and Responsibilities Act of 1995 because it is seen as a protection of the rights of parents in

the education and health care of the children, while protecting children from abuse and neglect.

Master's Address

National Grange Master Robert E. Barrow presided over the convention.

In his opening speech to the delegates, Barrow, a member of the Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, said, "We cannot neglect the small to mid-size commercial farms.

"Until new programs are created, we must support means testing and directing program benefits to this class of farms.

"Throughout the debate on the 1995 Farm Bill, we have heard the (Clinton) Administration, lawmakers and other farm organizations say that any cut in farm commodity program benefits would be devastating to rural America," Barrow said.

"But since 1970, farming has become significantly less important as an economic factor in a majority of rural areas.

"Less than 12 percent of rural counties were farm-dependent by the end of the 1980s."

According to Barrow, as the number of farms has decreased, those counties still with farms are considered to be those counties where residents enjoy higher incomes and standards of living than most — the "have" counties.

"The government's farm program payments contribute almost nothing to income in poor rural counties," Barrow said. "In the



Pennsylvania State Grange Master Gordon Hiller presents a hand-made patriotic tie to state Gov. Tom Ridge. All men from the Pennsylvania host state wore the same tie pattern made special for the 129th national convention.

upper income counties, nearly 10 percent of the income is derived from the government's farm payments as compared to only 2 percent in the poorer counties."

According to Barrow, he told both the U.S. Senate and House agriculture committees that an understanding of the current character of U.S. agriculture is order to create a Farm Bill that helps where help is needed.

"It is against today's demographics of rural America that we must consider farm policy and rural development, not on what agriculture was, but on what agriculture is," he said.

He said he told Congress that means testing and making sure program payments go to small to mid-size commercial farms is essential.

In addition, he said that new programs have to ignore government classifications as "farm dependent" because it doesn't reflect the rural reality of need. There are 2,083 such counties. He said new programs have to be focused on providing help to those

with need, not based upon government classifications about community economic structure.

In addition, Barrow said that for additional rural development, that industry related to agriculture must be promoted.

"We have suggested that the potential for increased growth in rural employment can be found by attracting industries related to agriculture, such as adding value to farm products or manufacturing new industrial uses for farm commodities," he said.

As a word of caution, he said that emphasizing agribusiness as a source of employment for rural economic development could be the same level of mistake made in support programs caused by over-emphasizing the intensity of farming in a county.

According to a news release from the National Grange outlining his speech, Barrow said that those same counties currently receiving the bulk of government support are already financially well-off and most likely the coun-

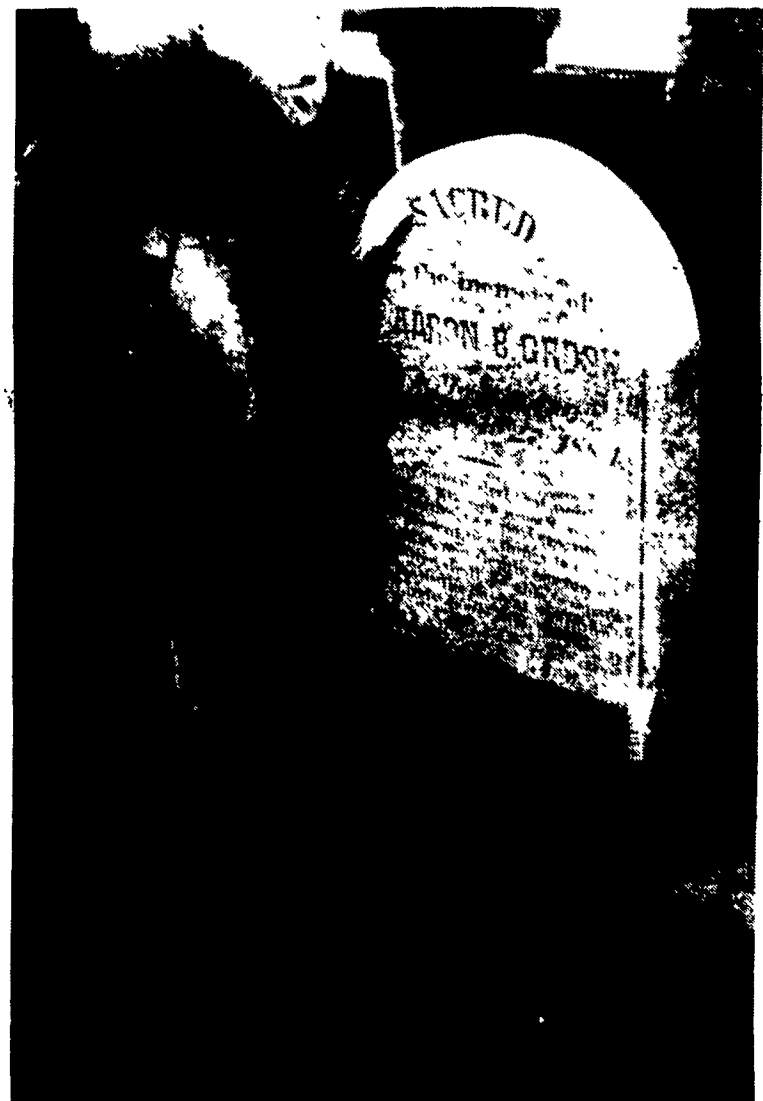
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Bill Buffington, a member of Kennet Grange No. 19, in Chester County, reads the inscription on the tombstone of Grange founder Rev. Aaron Grosh, while other national delegates look on.



National Grange delegates pose at the Devil's Den rock outcropping in Gettysburg National Battleground to recreate a photographic pose of delegates similar to one taken by national delegates during a trip to the battlefield on March 12, 1897.



This is the Marrietta gravesite of Rev. Aaron B. Grosh, one of the seven founding members of the Grange. Grange members in Pennsylvania for its 129th convention visited the Grosh gravesite, the Gettysburg National Battlegrounds and other sights of interest.