

## **Rural America does not need this kind of federal ‘help’**

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=5371>

When I was at the University of Illinois in the mid-70s, I took a part-time student job doing drafting at the University’s Digital Computer Lab. One of my co-workers was Stan Zundo, a man in his early sixties who had lived through World War II in his native country, Latvia. Stan (short for Stanislaus) was one of the most fascinating and intelligent individuals that I have ever met. He had been trained as a surveyor before the war, and could add a long column of numbers in his head faster than I could add them on a calculator. He spoke six languages fluently, including Russian.

During the war, Stan was drafted by the Latvian army, then the Latvian army was drafted by the Russians. He knew the culture of the Russians well.

One day we were discussing the fact that Russia was buying grain from the United States because they were unable to produce enough for themselves. Knowing that Russia was a very large and fertile country, I thought it odd that they would have to resort to buying grain from an avowed enemy.

Stan said the reason was simple. He said, (I’m paraphrasing) “In the United States, farmers work until the job is done because they get to keep what they earn. In Russia, a farmer starts driving his tractor at eight in the morning, and quits at five in the afternoon. He doesn’t care if the job gets done or not because he won’t earn any more or less if he only works eight hours a day.”

As a result, the Russian people were facing starvation. The government was unwilling to allow capitalism, but they were certainly grateful that there was an American surplus available. Ironically, the Russian people probably never knew where their bread was coming from; for all they knew it came from their wonderfully efficient collective farms.

Rural communities in America have taken a real economic beating over the last two decades. Once the source of low-cost labor for manufacturing, many small towns have lost their industrial base to Mexico, China or India. Many small farms have gone out of business as young people have moved to urban areas for work.

Recently the U.S. Postal Service announced that it would close 3,600 post offices, most of them in rural locations. Some believe that rural communities are receiving fewer federal funds, favoring grants in urban areas, which could affect maintenance and construction of roads, as well as federal funding for airports in rural areas.

But the federal government, especially under the Obama Administration, is very interested in “helping” rural communities. In fact, the federal government is so interested that it has been investing in rural land for some time. For example, it already owns 91.9% of Nevada and it owns

about 55% of land in the western states; one report says that it owns a total of about 635 million acres of the entire United States, which amounts to about 30 percent of all U.S. land.

Last April, Obama wanted Congress to double its budget for a conservation fund to allow for land purchases of about \$900 million per year. The 45-year old Land and Water Conservation Fund has already spent \$6.1 billion to purchase 4.5 million acres.

According to a Washington Post article, “in his first months in office, he (Obama) signed legislation that designated 2 million acres of wilderness, including more than 1,000 miles of wild scenic rivers and three national parks. He wants the impact of his new plan to be felt nationwide. It calls for creating ‘a new generation of safe, clean, accessible great urban parks and community green spaces.’”

A few weeks ago I wrote about Obama’s recent Executive Order, “Establishment of the White House Rural Council,” which in part states that it “establishes a council to better coordinate Federal programs”, will generate recommendations on “streamlining and leveraging Federal investments in rural areas” and will “coordinate Federal efforts directed toward the growth and development of geographic regions that encompass both urban and rural areas.”

And recently, the federal government backed off of a proposal that would have required farmers to hold a commercial drivers license, which would have effectively put family farms out of business.

When they are done “helping” rural America, what are the chances that we will be able to feed the world as we have done for the last century? In a time of “it’s never happened before in America,” will we someday need to buy grain from Russia?

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