

Hank Deschenes, Testimony on House Bill #319, 1975, and Charles Bradley, Testimony on House Bill #319, 1974

February 8, 1975

My name is Hank Deschenes. For the past ten years I've been a ranch and land broker out of Missoula. I'm here to voice total opposition to . . . the Agricultural Protection Act which as we know when stripped of its misleading title, is nothing more than another subdivision moratorium. . . .

My concern is that this bill completely neglects the caretaker of the land that its proponents claim they want so badly to protect and, in doing so, defeat the alleged intention of this bill. I submit to you that a great number of the backers of this bill . . . [have no] knowledge of or interest in agriculture. . . . This bill . . . constitutes another burden on agriculture as well as being a definite obstacle to man's God given right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

When you tell a man he can't do something and cause him economic hardship at the same time, you take . . . his incentive. Heart and incentive on the part of the American farmer—have been the backbone of this country since its beginning. . . . Most . . . people are in agriculture because they chose it as their means of [making] a living. . . .

Here again its going to be the little guy, the family farmer who is going to be hurt the most, whether all or part of the family income is from that farm. Traditionally agriculture has been far from the best way of making a living money-wise because of low profit margin. The only time this man really gets paid for his labors is when he sells his farm or part of it. How much he gets paid is of course determined by the value of the land. This bill is going to devalue [the] land. . . . The lessening of value results in less

collateral for loans . . . loans this man is operating on while producing food and fibre. . . . If he cannot get enough operating capital, he goes under and you have lost a farmer. . . .

If more financing is not possible he might be able to sell a 10 acre piece of the place off for a homesite which will enable him to go on. Under this act he can't! And this is common practice today!

Presently agriculture needs every advantage it can get to survive, let alone prosper. We must consider the man who is caring for the land, for without him the land cannot flourish to feed and furnish some of these people who want to protect it so badly. . . .

There is some rancher support of this bill and I sympathize with some of their thinking and I hope they were honestly informed of all of the implications of this thing. But I have to ask myself how many of these are the Montana rancher as we know and respect him and how many are the rich eastern kid whose daddy bought him a chipmunk farm up the Blackfoot Valley and calls himself a rancher?. . . Many of the proponents just got here from some place else. Why don't they learn first how we live before trying to tell us how? The majority of the ranchers I have talked to don't want this kind of bill. We're going to get into land-use controls, but I hope carefully and intelligently by knowledgeable people. Please keep the politicians and government out of agriculture and we will find our own way out of our troubles as we always have! I love and want to protect Montana. . . . But the only snow job I want is that which I can see by looking out of the window! I sure thank you.

Bozeman, Montana
February 11, 1974

Mr. Arthur Shelden
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
House of Representatives
Helena, Montana

I am appearing in support of H.B. 875. . . . As a boy I just happened to grow up around people who considered land ownership to be a privilege, not a right. This was before the day when “land stewardship” had become a popular cliché. When I was a young man I had the privilege of working on a Montana ranch over on the Boulder. Among the important things I learned was that there were two kinds of ranchers. There were those who worked with the thought of passing the ranch on to their children. And then there were those whose life style consisted of buying a ranch, mining it for a few years and moving on. I suppose the moral of this is that it sharpens your vision of the future to know and love the person who will have your land when you are gone. . .

Today we are a much more crowded nation. Land is suddenly terribly precious. What we as individuals do to it has much farther reaching consequences for the public than it used to.

I am quite aware that H.B. 875, though aimed at a specific land problem, will, if passed, become a precedent for further limitations on private property rights. In supporting the bill I wish there was no conflict between my idealism and

the pragmatic side of my make up. My idealism shrinks a little from another proposal to erode another increment of my personal freedom and put it in the hands of the state. My pragmatic side notes the truth of subdivisions. . . . They are growing like a cancer on some of our best agricultural land, our most scenic areas, areas of primary resources. They are growing without regard to long range public values. They are growing without concern for the fact that they often wastefully and unnecessarily compound the resource shortages that are facing us today and will deepen tomorrow. . . .

The pragmatic side of me also notes that while wisdom is not yet wholly concentrated in the state, by and large there is a persistent and growing attempt on the part of government to do a better job of involving and representing the whole public rather than just the corporate interests. . . .

The same cannot really be said for developers, well-meaning though some of them are. There is no denying any longer that the sum total of what the developers do has a profound, lasting, and often detrimental effect upon matters of public interest and consequence. . . .

Charles C. Bradley

Source: *Montana Legislature (44th: 1975) Records, 1975. Legislative Records 44* [box 4 folder 8] and *Montana Legislature (43rd: 1973–1974) Records, 1973–1974. Legislative Records 43* [box 12 folder 10]. Montana Historical Society Research Center Archives. Excerpted in *Not In Precious Metals Alone: A Manuscript History of Montana* (Helena, 1976): 278–80.