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SHORTGRASS

Vice President Gore has been tossing around the phrase "reinventing government" in a manner that makes the likes of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe sound as if those august masters of political thought were suffering from empty ink wells and bad cases of writer's block. And tossing around the phrases isn't all the vice president has accomplished. In about four light-years worth of TV shows and hundreds of column-inches of press, he's flattened sheep and goat herders to record lows and hung a pall of gloom over Texas ranching towns.

Off out of touch at the ranch, I was more concerned over who wanted government reinvented than what was going to be submitted at the patent office.

Ross Perot was the last reformer we heard from who was going to remodel every phase and facet of government, from forming a joint committee on small talk to a big agency to investigate broken campaign promises.

Where the shortgrass country came into conflict with Mr. Gore, however, was the VP's mysterious obsession with ending the tiny wool and mohair incentive act funded by the tariff on imported fibers. Compared to the rest of the USDA's business, the wool and mohair program fits in with food stamps and crop insurance about like modeling the redistricting of Alaska on a plan to subdivide Rhode Island.

The full case on Mr. Gore hasn't come out yet. On the Sam Donaldson show, for example, he was denouncing the incentive program hard and heavy, monitored by the host, Ol' Sam. Mr. Donaldson, I've been told, files for wool and lamb incentive payments on his sheep outfit in New Mexico. Takes a lot of

talent to keep your private interests and your public policies separate.

Be just like a blabber-mouthed reporter out of Santa Fe or Albuquerque to blow the whistle on the talk show host. Not much ink would be needed to point out a lot of tacky things about double standards and such like, and become all sanctimonious, claiming Peter shouldn't keep secrets from Paul if they are going to be on the same show together.

In 1883, President Cleveland lifted the tariff on imported wool, causing a wool depression. Pioneer sheepmen lost so much money on their clips that one notable rancher close to San Angelo tried canning mutton to raise money.

My great grandfather was so moved at their plight, so the story goes, that he considered relenting on his claim that the free ranges were reserved for hollow horn operators. He must

have made some allowances. Later on after the sheep canner gave up, he and great grandpa became good friends. Chances are the woolie rancher must have forgiven great grandfather for his slight misinterpretation of the state's free range act, but the odds are he stayed out of sorts with President Cleveland, especially the president's policy on tariffs.

The last two year-old colt to break a leg in the Derby hasn't had as much bad luck as we have supporting the wool and mohair act. Friends have turned against us and our enemies seemed to have grown tougher. Thirty-nine words out of 40 in the news reports on the act have been incorrect, and

what's been written that's right has reached limited audiences.

Depending on the source, 300,000 to 350,000 jobs are involved in the wool and mohair business. Mr. John Sharp, the state's comptroller, further inflamed the job loss by tearing back from Washington extolling the

glories of the Clinton and Gore plan and receiving credit for calling lost employment "a small hit for Texas."

Folks out in the sheep and goat country overloaded the wires to his office, hoping to correct the comptroller's sense of dimensions. After the smoke cleared, it was explained that Mr. Sharp was talking about the end of 225,000 federal jobs on top of the 300,000 or 400,000 places threatened by the loss of the wool and mohair program.

Mr. Sharp will probably need to polish over the "small hit" portion of his statement before next election year. However, he may have a job in Washington by then.

Life has never been easy raising sheep and goats on desert and near-desert ranges, but for such a minute segment of the world, we can sure attract a lot of trouble...

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