

While Watching Moon Voyagers, Ranchers Became More Vulnerable

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Page 7

MERTZON — Shortgrassers fell into watching the lunar mission just like everybody else who had the chance. On the night of the landing, a band of house bandits could have ransacked every home in this area without fear of detection. It's a blessing the event didn't take place during Indian times, or half our citizens would have found themselves wearing redskin haircuts.

The city folks were justified in watching the spectacular mission. But as has been proven many a time, the outlanders were foolish for spending two whole days and nights caught in a televised trance.

Taking into account the many enemies that we have, veteran firewatchers ought to be brought in from the timberlands of the northwest to teach us to sharpen our eyesight. I don't know how the other senses should be improved, but I do know that the space age rancher living on a blacksmith and buggy era income had better stay in a state of alertness that'd make a corn-robbing crow think he had cataracts.

Just look what was happening up in Washington the week before the moon landing. While we were down here moon dreaming and worrying over tidbits like rivers going dry and grass fires burning off everything that wasn't coated with asphalt, the politicians were preparing a tax surprise for stock raisers. As you probably heard, the pols were considering ending capital gains benefits on livestock.

The House Ways and Means Committee was busy continuing what they called the closing of tax loopholes and what the ranchers would have called the difference between survival and getting your mail at the county poor farm. Included in the new tax chousing agenda was also a proposal to end the oil depletion allowance. This idea, if it passes, will give landowners and oil birds an opportunity to consider taking a shot at the scissor sharpening game or perhaps trying their luck at selling pencils around the move houses.

It was, and still is, a serious proposition. For one thing the whole scheme is a violation of a sacred principle of government. The Bill of Rights and the Constitution don't specifically say that Congress is prohibited from picking on rich people. The framers figured that anyone who had enough sense to line up a string of alphabetical blocks (and nearly all of the worthless in both houses have that much gumption) ought to know that certain privileges should be automatically granted the carriage class.

With that in mind, it's easy to see that the few big shots who have been exploiting the capital gains benefit and the oil depletion allowance are not only going to have their feelings hurt by the proposals, but are probably going to be downright indignant about the matter. As to the ranchers and the oilmen who need the tax advantage to make a living, and are going to be punished because less than one percent of the taxpayers involved are taking advantage of the exemptions. I think they should at least be given a 15-minute hearing on some slow day in the Congressional halls.

The other error in the tax reform involves an even more powerful force in the country — the recipients of welfare payments. Once they become aware that independent oil operators and ranchers are going to become a competitive force in their game, the reformers may be sorry they ever started this mess.

Hombres who thought they had an exclusive on federal and state handouts are going to be mighty displeased when new faces appear at the agencies. Old line families who have grown accustomed to three decades of priorities in the dole system aren't going to be too happy to see amateurs in the morning lineups at the payoff windows. When that day comes, the pendulum will probably swing back, and the government will be jumping all over itself trying to pacify the professional welfare. You don't have to be a senior sized replica of Thomas Jefferson to know that it's no sin to run rampant over the middle class; but as any legislator knows, you'd better watch your step when you start fooling around with the voters on welfare.

To date, the capital gains proposal is still in committee and the oil depletion allowance is on the floor. Men in the know claim that as far as the ranch people are concerned. We've got about as much chance of winning a sympathetic ear on the Potomac as we could in some monastery of Tibet.

I know that's overdrawn, because one time back when I was a kid I read that those religious orders in the mystic mountains of the East were softhearted. I've been reading things ever since then and I don't recall ever reading about a politician crying genuine tears over the plight of the outlanders.

With or without the capital gains benefit, the ranch business will last a few more years. Money to televise and outfit moon trips will have to come from somewhere. It may be all for the best. They may find something on the moon to tax to take our place.