

Some months ago, President Carter proposed that Congress pass a “windfall tax.” I was fascinated by his idea. For one whole century the sheep and cow industry had been driven by “windfall profit” dreams.

In the days of the big trail drives, when the cowboys and range bosses weren’t too tired to think, they dreamed of the time they’d be shipping huge herds to Kansas to reap thousands of gold pieces. Being inspired by these dreams, I think is the reason the Texas drovers turned into Texas ranchers. I don’t have to review the settling and homesteading of our state. The point I want to make is that without the windfall profit motive, I figure that the sheep and cow trade a hundred years ago, or at last week’s auction would be about equal to the interest on 21 days’ futures on bantam chicken eggs.

I’ve always said, and I’ve tried to convince my sons that the size of the herd or the size of the ranch is unimportant. Chattels don’t matter and the bank balances are a joke. All you have to do in our game to stay happy is to believe that a half-inch of spring rain will wash away every known encumbrance from the national debt to the deficit in the Social Security fund.

The spellbinders at conventions say we are windburned men of vision. I say that we are gullible grass merchants that keep believing year after year that thunderclouds and grama grass are going to bail us out of wrecks that’d make the outburst from Three Mile Island sound like those folks had spilled a can of lighter fluid in their backyards.

Four or five weeks ago, a big pipeline company wanted to lease an acre on the ranch. After about 40 hours of negotiating we were still \$780 apart on an \$800 deal.

You may think I told him that I was trying to keep his company from paying a windfall profit tax by asking \$800 a year for what he wanted to – pay 20 bucks, but I didn’t. I resisted that temptation, preferring to deliver a sermon for all times for all fossil fuel miners.

My exact quote is: ”Mister, my old grandpa left that acre of ground to grow sheep and cattle and grass on. His intentions were that, and our intentions are the same. Your company’s rapacious instincts to burn and poison that acre come dear in our book. I think that by fall, with cattle selling like they are, we’ll be able to pay the lease on a whole ranch at that price.

I am still waiting to see whether he’s going to fall for my line, \$800 a year would buy 100 sacks of cake with some left over for a little sack of salt. Land and taxes are high in the Shortgrass Country, but the term “windfall” applies elsewhere.

