

2010

Connecticut State Grange Legislative Handbook



This 2010 issue of the Connecticut State Grange Legislative Policy Book is the statement of the Grange on legislative issues confronting the rural and suburban segments of Connecticut's population.

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INTRODUCTION

The legislative objective of the Connecticut State Grange is to support the interests of rural and suburban Connecticut at the local and state levels of government. The Grange's legislative posture is based on 125 years of continuous concern for the problems of rural and suburban communities in a rapidly changing economic and social environment.

Grange policy changes summarized in this introduction are the result of resolutions from 60 Community Granges and 10 District Granges whose membership totals nearly 4,000. The Grange is very protective of its non-partisanship in the public forum. This positive force is used by the Grange in its approach to legislative matters and in the discussions of Grange legislative positions.

Grange policies draw upon an historic strength which, in changing times, has emerged to address the needs of the traditional family unit.

The Grange policies strive to support conditions in which all people can share all markets, either as a consumer or producer. These policies also support people who earn a just livelihood in proportion to their risks, their skills and their inventiveness.

The Grange reaffirms its present policies regarding past legislative action and urges additional action on subsequent proposals.

These include:

- Highway on/off ramp safety and improvement on interstate highway signs
- Farm signs in rural areas
- Better utilization of DOT weigh stations
- Low cost interest loans for farmers
- Regulating how long airlines can hold passengers on planes
- A national "Do Not Call" list for seniors
- Appropriate oversight of farm products

AGRICULTURE

The Grange continues to support the need for strong agricultural community and related businesses. The Connecticut Department of Agriculture has a vital role in maintaining our agricultural community and ensuring the quality of agricultural products to all residents of

Connecticut. Feeding Connecticut families should be the number one priority of the General Assembly and the Department of Agriculture as its operating arm.

Connecticut's farmers try to be good stewards of their land, crops and animals, for without them there is no agriculture. As government has grown, the licensing and regulation of farmers has increased to the point where merely applying for and obtaining all the necessary licenses and permits a farmer needs has become onerous. Farmers must obtain licenses and permits from the Departments of Agriculture, Consumer Protection, Environmental Protection, Health and Labor among others. In many cases those reviewing applications for the permits and licenses have little understanding of best management practices in agriculture and therefore unfairly deny the application or require the farmer to go through an extended hearing process, often resulting in the loss of the best time to implement the process or procedure for which the farmer is seeking a permit. The Grange believes farmers would be better served if the General Assembly revised the authority and mandated responsibilities of the Department of Agriculture to provide "one stop shopping" so that farmers could apply for and receive all necessary State licenses and permits through the Connecticut Department of Agriculture.

We continue to support the Experiment Station in New Haven, the Lockwood Farm in Hamden and the Valley Laboratory in Windsor. Larger farmers and backyard gardeners depend upon these establishments for guidance in the use of pesticides and for support of more productive crops.

The Greenhouse Farmers in Connecticut rely heavily on the availability of heating oil to the extent many have prepaid their heating oil costs. We are aware of some situations that, despite their pre-payment, for various reasons the oil was not made available to them. We urge the Connecticut General Assembly to explore the possibility of bonding fuel oil dealers in Connecticut that would prevent this from happening to other businesses and individuals who prepay for heating oil.

The Grange continues to support an efficient College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and urges the University of Connecticut to utilize all necessary funds to update the College of Agriculture and

Natural Resources to meet the state of the art requirements of the twenty-first century.

The Grange continues to support existing legislation to deny local zoning and planning commissions the authority to impose fees and restrictions on temporary protective structures used to improve production of agricultural products.

To support agriculture and the family farm concept, the Grange urges the State Legislature to define the family farm and to prohibit utility companies from charging commercial rates for the products they supply to the family farms.

The Grange feels that agriculture is the first and noblest of occupations. An important component of agriculture is gardening. In order to encourage gardening operations in Connecticut the Grange requests the State of Connecticut and each municipality to provide free plots of land for community gardening and to provide assistance in developing these plots.

Many towns have various commissions such as Inland Wetlands, Conservation, Planning and Zoning along with others that often take action affecting farmland and agriculture without having expertise in these areas. The Grange therefore seeks the passage of enabling legislation giving towns the authority to establish agriculture commissions empowered to give advice and author opinions to other local boards and commissions on agricultural issues.

The reintroduction of wild turkeys in Connecticut has been very successful in most areas with flocks now in excess of thirty birds in some areas. The wild turkeys are now becoming so numerous that they damage crops which the farmer depends upon for his livelihood and which are essential to feed our human population. Other wildlife cause similar problems to the farmer, but he can mitigate these damages by obtaining permission to hunt them under a crop damage permit. The Grange asks the General Assembly to add wild turkeys to the species which may be taken under a crop-damage permit so our farmers will be able to legally protect their crops and their livelihood from the damage done annually by these birds.

In confined feeding operations, animals, usually in the pork and poultry industries, are raised on farms with limited space. Feed is not grown on the premises but is shipped in. These operations

create environmental hazards, usually in the handling of wastes. The Grange urges legislation to establish guidelines to protect our national resources on a state level. Although the federal government may also enact legislation, this legislation should not affect the rights of the states to regulate these industries.

Animal abuse continues to be a problem in Connecticut as evidenced by a number of recent cases. The Granges asks the State Legislature to monitor this situation and to impose stricter penalties involving animal abuse along with strict enforcement of such penalties.

Aquaculture is also an important food growing industry in Connecticut. More than 600,000 bushels of oysters are harvested annually in Long Island Sound by approximately thirty companies. These companies bring in approximately \$60 million dollars in business each year. Connecticut Aquaculture is second only to Louisiana in volume of production and is first in the United States in dollar value of the crop produced.

Many Connecticut residents cannot afford to purchase all of their food through conventional retail outlets. Last year more than 100,000 people throughout Connecticut obtained food through emergency food pantries, community kitchens, shelters and similar service providers. At the same time many farms and retail food outlets routinely classify food products as “rejects” because they are not of the near-perfect quality demanded by most retail consumers, even though they are of a nutritious quality. There are some private organizations such as Foodshare which attempt to distribute this “reject” food to the needy, but they are limited in what they can do by their own resources. The Grange urges the General Assembly to establish programs to enable and encourage the distribution of wholesome foods that are of less than near-perfect quality to the needy.

As Connecticut has no official state food, the Connecticut State Grange goes on record in favor of having the Election Cake named the official State Food.

Accidents involving farm equipment on public roads continue to be a problem. We support legislation which will encourage increased use of fixed and mobile rural road signs that warn of tractors or other slow moving farm equipment, especially in heavy Agricultural

traffic times (spring tillage, fall harvest) or locations (roads leading to rural storage facilities or markets).

FARM VIABILITY

The preservation of prime farmland is essential to Connecticut's agriculture industry. The State of Connecticut has had a program for the purchase of development rights to prime agricultural land to keep it available for agricultural production for more than 25 years. Still, many farms that should have been preserved have been irretrievably lost to development because there were no available funds to purchase the development rights. At present eight acres of prime farmland are being lost to development for every acre that is being preserved. The Community Investment Act will do much to provide additional funding through surcharges on documents recorded in the local land records, but it cannot provide all the necessary funding. The Grange urges the General Assembly to provide significant additional bond authorizations for the purchase of development rights to prime agricultural land. The Grange supports the efforts of municipalities, local land trusts and the Connecticut Farmland Trust to assist the State in preserving agricultural land throughout Connecticut.

Upon the death of a farm principal, high estate and farm succession taxes impose a burdensome financial drain on the heirs to the point where, in many cases, the farm is forced to go out of business permanently. The Grange seeks to resolve this problem through financial relief where needed.

Natural disasters in recent years have destroyed farmers' crops and lands. As a result, farmers are often forced to file bankruptcy or sell farm property to meet their financial obligations, resulting in the loss of farms and farmlands each year due to these natural disasters. The Grange urges the State Legislature to postpone the repayment of farm debts following a flood or other natural disaster. In these hard economic times farms are being lost because of financial problems. Affordable loans are hard to get. The Grange urges the State Legislature to set up a low-interest loan system to enable farmers to borrow funds to keep their farms solvent.

CONSERVATION AND ECOLOGY

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection has a vital role in protecting and preserving the quality of the environment and natural resources and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation throughout Connecticut. However, budget reductions and personnel attrition in recent years have reduced the efficiency of the Department of Environmental Protection to the extent that it can no longer fulfill its mission. The Grange supports a strong and viable Department of Environmental Protection and urges the Governor and General Assembly to restore the budget and authorize the hiring of sufficient personnel to enable the Department of Environmental Protection to fulfill its mission of protecting and preserving the quality of the environment and natural resources and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation throughout Connecticut.

The Grange supports the concept of municipal and multi-town greenways to provide opportunities for passive recreation such as walking, hiking, jogging, bicycling and cross country skiing. Greenways will also provide opportunities for alternative forms of transportation where they will not compete with motor vehicles on the public roads. The Grange urges the General Assembly to make grants available to the municipalities for the development of greenways as recreational facilities and alternative means of transportation.

Connecticut has long had a valuable recreational resource in the series of hiking trails maintained by the Connecticut Forest and Park Association commonly known as the "Blue Trail System" from the color of the blazes marking the trails. Approximately half of this trail system is on private land and exists only through the courtesy of the land owner. However, the continuing sprawl of both residential and commercial development threatens the continued existence of many sections of these trails. The Department of Environmental Protection has acquired several parcels of land to protect the Blue Trail System, but often the cost of purchasing a large tract of land is prohibitive. The Grange, therefore, favors the State purchasing rights of way or other permanent easements that will protect and preserve this valuable resource for future generations of Connecticut residents and visitors, similar to the purchases by the United States to preserve and protect the Appalachian Trail.

Under current statutes, the Commissioner of Transportation has the right to remove trees, shrubs and other vegetation situated within the right of way of any State highway to increase travel safety. Others, such as corporations and individuals, or a municipality, have the same opportunity to remove trees, shrubs and other vegetation by obtaining a permit from the Commissioner of Transportation.

The Grange is concerned that allowing such removal by others exposes drivers to commercial enterprises and advertising, all of which present a visual distraction to motorists and could create definite safety concerns. Proper vegetation would block these distractions as well as filtering particles and pollutants released by vehicle emissions. The Grange recommends modifying existing statutes to protect and preserve vegetation and open space along our State highways. The Grange further recommends the formation of a cooperative effort involving State and local government as well as private interests working together to sustain and improve open space and vegetation along both State highways and local roads.

The Grange has been a strong supporter of the open space policies that led to the enactment of the "490 Program." This program asks the local taxpayer to give benefit to the recipient of such tax relief. The Grange supports the right of the local community to be given the right of first refusal of land that has been so declared by the owner who decides to place such land on the market at a later date.

Over the years many people have donated easements on their property or cash that enabled a land trust to purchase an easement to protect the property and preserve the quality of life for all the residents of Connecticut, both now and in the future. The Connecticut State Grange believes these easements should be protected from takings by the towns through eminent domain to allow private development. Grange members throughout Connecticut urge the General Assembly to pass legislation to protect the easements that protect our open lands and the quality of life of all the residents of Connecticut.

To further protect the farm community, the Grange supports legislation that will relieve the farmer from liability for use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers that, when used in government approved applications, and are or were beneficial to agriculture,

have later become harmful through the urbanization of agricultural lands with their contamination of land and surface water. The local, state and federal government agencies which had approved the use and the builders who build upon these agricultural lands should be the targets for litigation and recovery of damages.

Many homeowners apply pesticides and synthetic fertilizers to their lawns and gardens in quantities far in excess of the recommended amounts. These materials can and frequently do pollute well water, rivers and streams in quantities sufficient to cause harm to aquatic life. The Environmental Protection Agency has determined that most pesticides used on residential lawns are probable or possible carcinogens. The Grange urges the development of educational programs and literature to inform and educate the public concerning the dangers of using pesticides, herbicides and synthetic fertilizers, particularly in excess of recommended amounts.

We reaffirm our encouragement of developing “replenish-able” fuels and developing hydroelectric sources of electricity in and for Connecticut.

We all have an obligation of protecting our resources for generations to come. This can be partially achieved by controlling fuel consumption. This is a major concern at the present time because larger vehicles, especially sport utility vehicles, were manufactured with little or no control on fuel consumption. The Grange supports legislation that would raise the standard for gasoline consumption to at least 45 miles per gallon for passenger cars and to at least 34 miles per gallon for sport utility vehicles and light trucks.

Connecticut is experiencing a large influx of cellular and digital communication which has brought about the installation of many towers throughout the State to accommodate these communication systems. Presently the Federal Communications Act requires that all towers be treated equally. Connecticut currently utilizes its State Siting Council while the various towns have their own local control over the towers which poses a conflict in the law. The Grange would like to see the towns have their own control of these towers if the towns are able to comply with the written Federal guidelines. Should the town be unable to follow the Federal guidelines, then such authority should pass to the State Siting Council.

SAFETY

Most Connecticut roadways and highways are safe when used in accordance with legal limitations. However, although the 1998 General Assembly authorized a 65 mile per hour speed limit on certain highways still most all speed zones are disregarded. The maximum speed limits are constantly being ignored. Stop signs are not obeyed. Suspension of a driver's license is still a license to drive without a license. The use of safety belts seems to be disregarded by the general public. Lights on when windshield wipers are in use and emission inspections done when due are also ignored by too many motorists. That there are serious flaws in our enforcement programs is obvious. We request that the General Assembly strengthen the enforcement of the very laws they enact and review the actions of our courts and, where applicable, make the required changes.

Since motor vehicles on our Connecticut highways are traveling well above the posted speeds, the results are more accidents, more fatalities and increased congestion while these accidents are being investigated. The Connecticut State Police has been using aggressive driving operations in several areas of I-95 such as in New London County and between New Haven and the New York State line in Fairfield and New Haven Counties. These aggressive driving operations have resulted in the issuing of many traffic tickets for speeding and other traffic violations. The overall result has been a reduction in vehicle speeding and hence, fewer accidents. The Grange urges the continuation of these operations on I-95 and suggests that the operations be increased to include other major highways such as I-91 and I-84.

While many drivers are speeding on Connecticut's highways, other drivers are using our Interstate routes and other expressways for short distances and therefore do not accelerate to the speed of other vehicles on the highway. These slow-moving vehicles are hazardous not only to themselves and their occupants, but also to vehicles traveling at higher speeds that are attempting to pass them. The Grange recommends that, in those areas where the posted maximum speed is at least 65 miles per hour, have the minimum speed increased from the present 40 miles per hour to 50 miles per hour. The Grange also urges the General Assembly to reorganize

a portion of the State Police to create a separate branch having as its primary function the task to police our highways to improve the safety aspect.

New laws and restrictions on teenage and older drivers must be changed. Learner permits expire at eighteen years of age. No testing is required for new drivers eighteen or older until a road test is taken. The Grange believes that the period of time between eighteen and testing is an unsafe time for those learning to drive. The Grange recommends that a special learner's permit program for new drivers eighteen years of age and older be instituted so that new drivers will safely operate motor vehicles.

Motorists are now required to stop for pedestrians in crosswalks. However, jaywalking outside of crosswalks continues to be a problem in high traffic areas, especially our cities. Children are frequently not aware of the distance between them and an approaching vehicle. As a result, many children are struck by motor vehicles as they cross streets and highways in both rural and urban areas. The Grange recommends that both State and local traffic authorities mark additional crosswalks in high pedestrian traffic areas and place warning signs for both motorists and pedestrians near buildings that children frequent such as schools, libraries and community centers. We urge a strong enforcement of the use of crosswalks in these areas to reduce the rising number of pedestrian accidents.

There are more bicycles on the roads today because of economic conditions. Bicyclists generally ride with the traffic and not always on the side of the road. With new advances in technology, many bicyclists wear ear phone and cannot hear approaching traffic from the rear. A rear view mirror on the bicycle or on the bicyclist's helmet would allow the bicyclist to see traffic approaching from the rear. The Grange urges the General Assembly to require the use of rear view mirrors by bicyclists who ride our county, town and state roads. (Bicyclists are prohibited from riding on major highways with controlled entrances and exits.)

Laws are passed in the General Assembly generally for a particular reason. However, over several years, some laws are abused and not enforced. Such is the case of the law allowing vehicles to turn right on a red light after a stop. This law was passed to speed up the flow of traffic at intersections. Vehicles today turn right on a red

light, but in most instances no stop is made. This creates a hazard for pedestrians in a crosswalk. Right turns on red are also made at intersections where green arrows permit opposing traffic to turn left, also creating a safety hazard. The Grange supports legislation which would prohibit a right turn on a red light where there is a green arrow for opposing traffic to turn left. We also encourage State and local police departments to take a more active interest in these situations and enforce the existing laws.

The State of Connecticut does not have a periodic inspection of vehicles using our highways except for ten-year-old vehicles being registered by a new owner or being registered in Connecticut from another state. Consequently, there are vehicles being operated on our highways in an unsafe condition which are involved in accidents or which are causing accidents. The Grange urges the General Assembly to adopt legislation making vehicle inspection mandatory before a vehicle can be registered. Vehicles five years or older would be required to be inspected every five years to ensure that the vehicle is safe to operate on the highways. These inspections could be patterned after the current inspections being used for older cars. Furthermore, the legislation should specify that no vehicle can be registered until it passes the required inspection.

The height of headlights on vans, sport utility vehicles (SUV's), trucks and pickups is higher than on passenger cars. At night these lights shine directly through the rear window of passenger cars and impair the driver's vision. The Grange encourages manufacturers of high profile vehicles to consider the safety interests of the drivers of smaller vehicles when designing, positioning and aiming the headlights on high profile vehicles.

Many new automobiles are being manufactured with driving lights in addition to the headlights. To keep pace, owners of older vehicles are purchasing driving lights and mounting them on the front of their vehicles. Unfortunately, the intensity of these lights are greater than the lights on the new cars and, in some instances, the intensity is greater than the headlights. This makes driving at night difficult because the brightness blinds oncoming motorists. The Grange urges the General Assembly to develop standards for these lights to limit the intensity and to determine the direction of the beam.

A large volume of motor homes and travel trailers operate on our highways across the country. These vehicles are involved in numerous and serious accidents due to the inexperience of a large number of drivers who operate them. The Grange requests that the State of Connecticut establish specific operator license categories for motor homes and travel trailers taking into account the various sizes and weights of these vehicles. We would like to see this set of practices in all states.

The Grange considers the high stacking of products to be sold to the public to be dangerous to the retail shoppers. Lumberyards, grocery stores, and many other retail stores stack materials as high as 30 feet above the floor. The Grange urges the passage of legislation which would mandate that shelves being stacked where the public is in some danger be limited to a reasonable height. The Grange also urges the passage of legislation which would require that shelves containing high stacked goods be secured by gates that would prevent large articles from falling from these shelves. The Grange urges a greater effort be made for safety in the workplace, with an emphasis on farm safety, as farming is second only to mining as the most hazardous occupation in the United States.

The telephone number "911" is generally recognized as the emergency number to summon assistance in any emergency. However, in many large offices and other facilities with extensive internal telephone systems, it is necessary to dial "9" or an access code to reach an outside telephone line before dialing the desired number, including calls to 911. Time is of the essence in most emergencies and considerable time can be lost while a person who is not familiar with a company's internal telephone system attempts to gain access to an outside line to call 911 for assistance. The Grange urges the State of Connecticut and the various providers of both internal and external telephone service to devise a means whereby dialing 911 from any telephone, regardless of its location, will connect the caller with the emergency dispatch operator and will eliminate the need to dial an access code when making calls to 911.

EDUCATION

The Grange believes every child is entitled to a quality education at public expense which will prepare him or her to become a responsible, productive member of society. This education cannot be provided by the schools alone, and therefore must also include the active involvement of parents, religious instruction, life experiences and social interaction. We therefore support programs which will integrate all of these diverse components into a comprehensive educational program for each child.

To receive the full potential of the educational program offered in the school, the student must be prepared with adequate nutrition. The Grange supports school lunch programs and, in those geographic areas where needed, school breakfast programs.

A lack of calcium in children's diets affects bone growth and can also affect the ability to learn. Calcium is the mineral most likely to be deficient in the diet. It is well absorbed only from dairy products. The Grange urges the establishment of a program to ensure that children have adequate calcium in their diets to both promote the learning process and to protect them from the many health problems in later years associated with a calcium deficiency.

Present economic conditions frequently result in children being in unsupervised situations for long periods at the end of the school day. We believe this is detrimental to the best interests of the child. The Grange supports after school programs which will enhance the total educational experience by encouraging students to pursue self-directed education, motivated by their natural curiosity.

The Educational Cost Sharing Formula, known as "ECS," by which the State awards funding to the cities and towns based on per-student attending the schools, is complicated and confusing. In some instances, the weighting factor used to award the funding is unfair to some of the rural parts of the state. The Grange supports the establishment of a Blue Ribbon Commission, created by the State Legislature, to do an in-depth study of the formula to guarantee a more favorable minimum amount per student for each city and town.

Some children require special education programs, often on an individualized basis, that are outside of or in addition to the normal educational programs offered in the public schools. The State has

mandated that each town provide whatever special education program is needed for each child, which often places a severe financial burden on the town, particularly in the smaller towns with a limited tax base. The Grange urges the General Assembly to relieve this burden on the towns by providing funding for those special education programs that are outside the normal school curriculum. The Grange encourages the continuing expansion of agriculture and aquaculture education programs in our secondary schools. It is at this level of education that many, entering our agricultural industry, discontinue their formal schooling. Recent changes in the funding of agricultural education programs may penalize towns by requiring them to pay higher tuition payments to the regional agricultural schools than the state per-pupil reimbursement they receive in accordance with the state aid formula.

The Grange supports legislation on educating our children on the dangers involved in the use of inhalants. Inhalants are being used by our young people at an alarming rate since these products are popular, easy to obtain and are an acceptable way to get high. However, our young people do not realize the dangers inhalants can cause such as brain damage, respiratory problems, liver and kidney damage and possibly death.

Our nation's public schools are no longer safe. Many crimes are being committed each year, including murder, assault, theft and vandalism, mostly by students with lethal weapons. Courts have handed down rulings relieving juveniles who commit felonies, while at the same time, ignoring the rights of the victims. The Grange urges enforcement of existing laws to prosecute juveniles as adults.

The Grange continues to urge the State Legislature to declare English as the official language of the state, and to establish programs so that all may become proficient to communicate adequately in the public forum and workplace. This support does not infer that we discourage competent use of a second language; rather we do encourage multilingual capability but also recognize that a common language capability encourages commercial, technological and even artistic development.

Believing that all children are entitled to a quality education, the Grange urges that deaf and hearing-impaired children be provided with an education in which teachers and all other personnel

understand the unique nature of the problems associated with deafness and are specifically trained to work with deaf and hearing-impaired children. We further urge that teachers and all others who have frequent contact with hearing impaired children be fluent in American Sign Language (ASL).

Southbury Training School has evolved from a training school into a complete village; a community offering varied employment opportunities for the residents as well as recreational opportunities and religious programs. We urge the State of Connecticut to continue maintaining Southbury Training School as an option for those persons for whom it provides the most appropriate environment.

Election Day, held in May in the 17th century, was an important holiday in Connecticut, second only to Thanksgiving Day. As early as 1660 people made special cakes on Election Day to celebrate the democratic ideals that were developing in the colony. This cake came to be known as Election Cake and is a significant part of Connecticut's heritage. The Grange therefore urges the General Assembly to designate the Election Cake as the State Cake and make it a symbol of Connecticut.

JUSTICE

Fraud is known to exist in the various public assistance programs. We urge the legislature to mandate a standard system of identification for all public assistance programs to minimize this fraud.

Waste, fraud and abuse in the Medicare system was an estimated \$48 million per day. Reducing these lost funds will allow the Medicare system to provide the same or better benefits in a more efficient manner. Civil monetary penalties on health care providers who defraud Medicare could be used to create a trust fund to support fraud and abuse prevention efforts. The Grange supports significant financial penalties for Medicare fraud and the establishment of procedures to assist in funding the Medicare fraud investigation unit. The Grange urges that all healthcare providers who defraud the Medicare system be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

The Grange opposes the release of prisoners from jail for reasons of overcrowding. This blatantly violates the idea that there is just

punishment for crimes. We also see the need for a clear definition of sentence parameters for alternative commitment to programs of community service in lieu of incarceration.

The Grange urges that the compensation for serving on jury duty be more in line with the cost of the times.

The United States Supreme Court found in *Kelo v. New London* that the taking of private property for economic development is a public use. In its decision the Court also said, “[T]hat nothing in our opinion precludes any State from placing further restrictions on its exercise of the takings power.” The Grange has long held the belief that everyone should be able to make the greatest legal use of their property with the minimum restrictions and intrusions by all levels of government. The Grange therefore urges the General Assembly to amend Section 8-193 of the General Statutes of Connecticut to provide that real property shall not be acquired by eminent domain for use in a development project that will be privately owned or controlled.

The Grange believes that all people should be responsible for their own actions. The Grange urges legislation to protect property owners from liability claims by trespassers.

The amounts now routinely spent on political campaigns make it impossible for all but the wealthiest citizens or those who can obtain substantial donations to seek political office. Both the Connecticut State Grange and the National Grange support legislation to establish realistic spending limits for political campaigns that allow the common person to seek public office.

The U.S. Constitution already requires any mid-term vacancies in the House of Representative be filled by special elections. Recent controversies have brought attention to Senate mid-term vacancies which can be filled by gubernatorial appointments. The Grange supports passage of an amendment to the United States Constitution which would require Senatorial mid-term vacancies to be filled by special elections instead of appointments.

TAXATION

In most states both income taxes and sales taxes are used for the same purposes. The United States tax code allows state income taxes or sales taxes to be deducted from income for federal tax

purposes, but not both. The Grange urges the General Assembly to petition the United States Congress to correct this inequity in the federal tax code and allow both state income and sales taxes to be deducted from income for federal tax purposes.

The Grange urges the General Assembly to pass legislation to allow deductions on the State Income Tax for dependents, social security and state sales tax.

In recent years, many new safety features have been added to motor vehicles which have saved many lives. The Grange believes safety should not be taxed and we therefore oppose taxing safety features on motor vehicles as personal property.

The value of land in Connecticut for non-agricultural purposes makes it difficult for the farmer to continue operating. Recognizing this difficulty, the General Assembly many years ago wisely mandated a program requiring municipalities to assess farm, forest and open space land for its value for these uses rather than its economical highest and best value. The Grange continues to support this program, commonly referred to as the "490 Program" after the public act creating it, and opposes any revisions which would weaken the preservation of such land.

The Grange also urges the passage of legislation mandating that land purchased by a Native American tribe remain on the tax rolls of the town where it is located, whether or not it is declared to be part of the tribal reservation.

The Grange urges the General Assembly to abolish the sales tax on all forms of labor. This tax has become especially burdensome since rates for most services now exceed \$80.00 per hour.

For many years Connecticut has relied on property taxes as a major source for funding municipal governments. As these taxes are significantly higher than similar taxes in other states, many businesses and industries are moving out of Connecticut. This has resulted in the loss of jobs for Connecticut residents. Many young professionals are locating outside of Connecticut because of our high cost of living. The Grange urges the General Assembly and government leaders at all levels to search for alternatives that will avoid excessive reliance on the property tax as the primary source of funds for municipal governments.

The State now grants sales and use tax exemptions to farmers

who can demonstrate gross farm income or gross farm operating expenses of at least \$2500 per year. The municipalities are mandated to grant tax exemptions for personal property used in farm operations if the farmer can demonstrate gross farm operating income or expenses of at least \$15,000 per year. To simplify the exemption procedure for both the farmer and the local tax assessor, the Grange seeks legislation that would allow the farmer to fully document his or her entitlement to a local property tax exemption by providing the local tax assessor with a copy of the farmer's sale and use tax exemption certificate. The Grange opposes any increase in the \$2500 threshold level for granting the sales and use tax exemption certificate.

TRANSPORTATION

The Grange seeks to have the State set a timetable that would rebuild the secondary roads to the quality of the current highway specified requirements as defined by the State Department of Transportation. The Grange does not recommend that new rights of way be purchased or the highway alignments be altered. We request that the roads themselves be updated.

Interstate 95 in Connecticut is one of the most congested and outdated stretches of highway in our State. The Grange asks for, and will support, the much needed improvements to I-95 that will make it a safer highway to travel.

High occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes have been added to some of our highways in an attempt to promote car pooling and the use of mass transit, but these lanes carry only moderate volumes of traffic. During off-peak hours they carry so little traffic they are jokingly referred to as "hardly one vehicle" lanes. Other nearby states have successfully implemented programs whereby their HOV lanes are open to all cars regardless of the number of occupants during off-peak hours. The Grange urges the State of Connecticut to adopt a similar program that will allow greater use of the existing HOV lanes to reduce congestion on our major highways.

The Grange supports the concept of mass transit to reduce congestion on our highways, reduce air pollution from automobile exhaust and reduce consumption of petroleum products.

Existing legislation requires the Department of Transportation to

give priority consideration to the effects of proposed construction on the environment. The Grange supports this legislation and seeks its expansion to include similar priority consideration and the effect of highway construction on both agricultural land and agricultural production.

Connecticut depends heavily on trucks to move many commodities in both interstate and intrastate commerce. Unfortunately, some of these trucks are overloaded and are not in condition to be safely operated on our highways, as evidenced by several recent accidents which resulted in property damage, injuries and loss of several lives. Weigh stations exist along our highways where these trucks could be inspected and weighed, but most are opened much less frequently than weigh stations in other states. The Grange urges the State of Connecticut to open the existing weigh stations for both weight and safety inspections on a regular basis to make our roads safer for everyone.

HEALTH CARE

Some health insurance carriers are now unwilling to write coverage in certain counties in Connecticut, routinely referring their former customers to other insurers. These other insurers are, in turn, utilizing background checks on the new customers and, should any medical problems be disclosed, these insurers are declining coverage. The Grange therefore supports a state-run health insurance program, similar to the Husky Program, that would offer coverage to these individuals at competitive rates and which may not be refused due to any pre-existing conditions.

In many parts of Connecticut ambulance service is provided by a volunteer corps which does not provide the services of a licensed paramedic. In such instances the paramedic services are provided by an emergency response company which is separate and distinct from the volunteer ambulance corps. Medicare will pay for the services of both volunteer ambulance corps and the licensed paramedic, but Connecticut is one of several states where the emergency response company is prohibited from billing Medicare. The Connecticut State Grange urges the General Assembly to enact enabling legislation to allow emergency response companies to enter into billing agreements with Medicare and to receive

payment directly from Medicare for services rendered to Medicare recipients.

We would like to see legislation enacted that would guarantee insurance coverage for hearing aids through Medicare and Medicaid systems. The National Grange has a Deaf Awareness Program nationwide and recognizes how hearing loss interferes with normal daily activity.

Home healthcare employees are not required to be certified or licensed. The Grange requests legislation requiring a minimum of 75 hours of training in a State approved program before individuals may be employed as home health care aides.

The Grange requests legislation by the Connecticut General Assembly which would require each individual who applies for work as a caregiver in a nursing home or any health care program funded by the Department of Social Services undergo a criminal background check and to disqualify an individual from such employment if they have been convicted of a felony. We support the creation of a national background check system to prevent long-term care facilities from hiring convicted criminals to care for frail seniors.

Members of the pharmaceutical, cosmetic and detergent industries are using small domestic and farm animals in indiscriminate testing under the guise of research. Many of the industries participating in the testing programs are located in Connecticut. The Grange urges legislation to limit and/or prohibit the use of these small animals in such tests. We ask that the Department of Agriculture be designated as the regulatory agency in this matter.

CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND RIGHTS

It is the inalienable right of every person to be secure in their homes. Many of our elderly citizens who reside in government subsidized housing complexes live in fear for their personal safety. We urge the General Assembly to enact legislation to provide improved supervision and security to our senior citizens.

The Connecticut State Grange would prefer that television program sponsors, who advertise male and female products

that can be purchased only by prescription, schedule these advertisements at times other than periods of family programming. Family programming would be weekdays from 4:00 to 7:00 P.M. and weekends during the day and early evening when children are watching television programs.

The Grange supports a definition of “Made in the U.S.A.” to mean all parts of a product have been fabricated and assembled within the United States of America. When components are manufactured in foreign countries for final assembly in the United States, the Grange recommends the item be labeled as “Assembled in the U.S.A. from Foreign Parts.”

Handicapped parking regulations are routinely violated by people who are not handicapped with no fear of prosecution. The Grange supports stronger penalties for violations of handicapped parking regulations and stricter enforcement of existing laws regarding handicapped parking.

The Grange supports legislation requiring the automobile industry to make full-size spare tires available for all cars and to design the trunk or similar space such that it is capable of storing a fully mounted and inflated spare tire.

The territorial rating of auto insurance in Connecticut has recently come under scrutiny. Currently people living in highly populated areas are paying higher rates due to their added accident exposure. Rates are lower in less populated areas. The Grange favors the continuation of territorial rating. We do not want to see rate increases spread into the rural towns in order to have one rate exposure for the entire state.

The Grange supports legislation limiting the release of home addresses by the Department of Motor Vehicles unless authorized to do so by a court of law.

Credit Card companies have disclaimers within their agreements with both customer and merchants stating that unless the credit card is actually scanned and the signature of the cardholder is obtained, the sale is “at risk” even when the issuing card company or bank approves the sale with an authorization number. As a considerable amount of business is transacted by using credit cards

with telephone, mail order and internet sales, the Grange believes legislation is necessary to mandate that the credit card companies are ultimately responsible for all transactions where they have issued an authorization number, even though a written signature was not obtained.

Several corporations with retail stores in Connecticut have gone into bankruptcy and eventually closed their stores. Apparently there is no set policy on severance pay for the affected employees. Although the corporations claim there is no money available for severance pay, the contents of their stores are liquidated, thus generating income to pay debts. If the corporation does provide severance pay, it frequently requires that employees work until the final closing of the store to be eligible for the severance pay, thereby prohibiting them from accepting other employment after they are aware of the imminent termination of their present employment. The Grange supports legislation making severance pay mandatory for any employee with ten or more years of continuous service and that it be paid to all eligible employees whether or not they are still employed at the store on the date the store closes.

Existing regulations require auto insurance companies to report the names of people whose motor vehicle insurance policies are canceled or not renewed to the Department of Motor Vehicles which suspends the registrations of uninsured motor vehicles. Despite these sanctions, many people continue to operate uninsured and unregistered motor vehicles on the public roads throughout Connecticut. The Grange recommends that the General Assembly pass legislation to empower and require the Department of Motor Vehicles to seize and impound uninsured motor vehicles until the owner secures insurance coverage meeting the statutory minimum requirements.

Aircraft passenger carriers have, on several occasions nationally, sat at the gate or on the tarmac from one to eleven hours. In some of these cases, the conditions on the planes became unsanitary and physically stressing. Also in some of these cases, passengers were unable to seek other airline flights to get to their destinations. The Grange recommends the General Assembly pass legislation

limiting time that an aircraft passenger carrier, or airline, can hold passengers before allowing them to deplane.

LEGISLATION

The large volume of bills introduced at each session of the General Assembly makes it impossible for all to be acted upon on the floor of the Senate and the House. The General Assembly has wisely provided through its committees a system whereby bills of a similar nature may be combined. The system also provides a means whereby germane amendments may be added to bills when they reach the legislative floor. Unfortunately, some amendments are added to bills at the eleventh hour which have conflicting language and serve only to create confusion in the original bill, often significantly changing the bill so that it no longer accomplishes the sponsor's original intent. The Grange urges limits on amendments accepted on the floor of the Senate and the House to matters that are closely related to the original bill and which will not change the original intent of the proposed legislation.

The Grange supports strict enforcement of election laws and stricter limits on campaign contributions. We support a proposal to expand the disclosures of the financial support received by each candidate for public office. We ask that active fund raising and campaigning for public office be limited by statute to the last twelve months prior to the election. The Grange supports a requirement that all office seekers file financial reports electronically and that these reports be made available to the general public via the internet.

Many languages other than English are spoken in Connecticut, but only one other than English is printed on voting ballots. Rather than discriminate against other languages, we suggest that election ballots be printed only in English which is the predominant language in this state.

IN CONCLUSION

Among the various sections, in this booklet, The Grange's emphasis: is the strong support of the agricultural community, of the

maintaining of prime farmlands in Connecticut, supporting vehicle safety, the maintaining of a safe transportation network in the state, and recognizing citizen rights.

The Grange with its 300,000 members throughout the United States continues to be the voice of our rural and suburban citizens.

Our Grange members take an active part in local, state and federal laws being enacted.

The Grange supports the policies and programs that allow each individual the right to pursue their interests with a minimum of restrictions while at the same time protecting the interests of the general public as consumers to ensure they are offered quality products at fair prices in a truly competitive economy.



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