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Governor James B. Hunt, Jr.

Governor James B. Hunt, Jr., was in Perquimans County last week for a pig pickin' political rally at Angler's Cove. Aside from meeting and greeting area Democrats, Hunt also

outlined a few goals and past achievements of his administration.

Hunt rallies in county

Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. was guest of honor at a fund raising rally and pig-picking attended by some 300 people at Angler's Cove Restaurant last week.

Hunt spent much of the afternoon shaking hands and meeting area Democrats who had paid \$10 each to show their support, then climbed on a folding chair and delivered a fiery speech touching on his past accomplishments as governor, and his vision of the future for North Carolina and the Northeast in particular.

Hunt said that his tenure as governor has been one of economic growth for the state of North Carolina.

Investments have increased steadily during his tenure as governor, he said, creating new jobs and a more diversified economy.

"Can't you just see that curve shooting upward," he said, with a dramatic swoop of the arm.

While admitting that the northeast hasn't received its share of the growth pie, Hunt said the picture may be about to change.

"It's on the verge of coming here," he said, noting that new industry is looking for clean water, clean air, and people who will work industrially, the kinds of assets the Northeast is well supplied with.

Hunt also spoke on public utilities, saying that his administration has been successful in holding down electric rates, except in the northeast, where the rates are 40 to 60 percent higher than the rest of the state.

"Rates in this part of the state not only make it hard to

pay the light bill but make it hard to bring in new industry," Hunt said, prompting a vigorous round of applause.

Much of his talk, though, was dedicated to rallying the forces. Hunt said that team work is the key to a successful campaign.

"Catfish Hunter was and is a great pitcher, but he'd be the first to tell you that the success of any team depends on nine players," Hunt said.

"Politics is a team sport," he said. "What we have to do is get everybody working together."

While his promises for the future centered primarily on more growth for the area, and a continued fight against high utility rates, Hunt presented a lengthy list of accomplishments during his present administration.

"We've done more to put real standards in our schools than has ever happened before," Hunt said.

In addition, he said he backed a speedy trials law which was passed by the legislature, as well as fair sentencing legislation and a restitution plan which allows for the victim's losses in some cases.

Hunt also pledged support for farming and the needs of farmers.

"I think the finest thing we do in this nation is to farm and produce farm products," he said.

In an earlier press conference, Hunt had promised continued support for the improvement of U.S. 17, though he made little reference to transportation in his speech.

Grain embargo squeezes area farmers

By MIKE McLAUGHLIN
The effects of the recently called grain embargo on Soviet expansionism are uncertain at present, but one thing is certain, the embargo will hurt area farmers. They are already feeling the pinch.

Last week the grain market responded to President Carter's surprise announcement of the embargo in a predictably negative fashion. Many Perquimans County farmers feel that the market will stay depressed at least for the present.

And while some have indicated support for the president's action, most agree that it will hurt American farmers worse than it does the Russians.

"If the Americans don't sell it to 'em the Canadians will," said Fenton Eure, a New Hope farmer who cultivates some 1,100 acres of corn, soybeans and wheat.

"There are so many ways they can get around this embargo," Eure said. "We saw the same thing happen with the Japanese embargo a few years ago. Soybeans dropped two dollars a bushel and Japan still got soybeans. The farmers got hurt."

Despite promises that the federal government would buy up the grain contracted to the Russians and gradually release it back to the market, grain dealers say that prices will remain down.

Broughton Dail, of Hertford

Supply, said that grain prices might recover to the harvest level by summertime, a season when prices are ordinarily at their peak.

"It appears that anybody who kept grain this year (in anticipation of higher prices) will have stored it for free," Dail said.

Dail said that the gradual release of excess grain by the government will keep the market from peaking, with supply continually outstripping demand.

This will mean a long run drop in bean prices of up to 25 cents per bushel and a drop in corn prices of 10 to 25 cents, Dail predicted.

The present impact, though, is more severe. As of Friday

morning, Broughton said that corn had dropped from \$2.90 to \$2.56 per bushel.

"The total impact is going to be severe in Perquimans County as far as the present time is concerned," Dail said.

Like most persons interviewed, Dail had his doubts about the embargo's impact on Russia.

"I feel that the president's hands are tied. He probably had no other option but that doesn't mean it's right."

As for the International Longshoremen's refusal to load grain bound for Russia, Dail said that the grocery stores should refuse to sell them bread.

Edgar Roberson, of Albemarle Chemicals,

predicted a mixed future for grains.

"I'm looking for corn prices to go down but I'm still looking for strength out of soybeans," Roberson said.

Farmers who must sell grain to meet January note payments will be particularly hurt by the embargo, but Roberson said that the effects would be more lasting.

"The farmers are the ones to suffer first," Roberson said, "but it's going to filter right on up."

"For the next couple of years things are going to be a lot bleaker around here than they have been," he said.

Robert Sutton, who along with two son-in-laws, farms some 1400 acres in the New Hope section of the county, agreed that the situation is bad and said that he hopes it will get better.

He said he didn't know whether or not the grain embargo would impact on the Russians.

"And what I'm afraid of is that somebody else don't know," Sutton said in reference to President Carter.

"With all the good help he's got I sure 'n God hope he knows what he's doing. If he don't he's hurting a lot of people for no reason," Sutton said.

VEPCO defends rates at chamber meeting

Armed with charts and diagrams, two upper level Virginia Electric and Power Company officials invaded the Perquimans County Chamber of Commerce meeting Monday night in an effort to justify the utility's electric rates.

Southern Division Vice President Randolph D. McIver held the floor for the night while district manager Clayton Gentry, based in Elizabeth City, offered support.

Organized efforts to get the

utility out of Northeastern North Carolina have been launched through the Chambers of Commerce of affected areas, and Monday night's visit was part of a campaign to counter those efforts.

McIver reiterated prior VEPCO statements that the utility has no intention of leaving North Carolina, gave a detailed background on the reasons for rate discrepancies, and outlined a plan designed to bring VEPCO

rates in line with those of North Carolina utilities in the mid 1980's.

In cost of service, McIver said, VEPCO is lower than the N.C. utilities. The difference comes in fuel cost. VEPCO is heavily dependent on expensive oil, whereas the N.C. utilities are more coal-dependent.

In 1965, the company produced 95 percent of its power with coal. This, however, was unpopular with the environmentalists, and the

threat of acid rain made it unpopular with agricultural concerns as well. So the company converted to oil.

In 1974, with the Arab oil embargo and soaring prices, it began to look profitable to go back to coal, but the utilities couldn't get any definitive regulations from the Environmental Protection Agency on emission standards.

McIver said the company could not justify the expense of conversion, which he

estimated at from \$5 to \$10 million, unless it could be certain the unit would be acceptable to EPA.

It was 1979 before the utility got the information it needed, and in November of that year, an oil-fired station in Portsmouth, Va. was converted to coal. Two more such conversions are scheduled in 1980 and another in 1982.

While oil prices and uncertainty over EPA requirements kept the cost of fossil fuel generated power inflated, VEPCO's nuclear units were being strafed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, McIver said.

First, seismic studies closed down Surry I and eventually its sister unit, Surry II, then Three Mile Island affected the North Anna units.

North Anna II, a unit McIver described as complete and ready to go on line, has been caught by the licensing moratorium that came in the wake of the near disaster in Pennsylvania.

"1979 was probably one of the worst years VEPCO has ever had," McIver said. "I'm not coming in here giving excuses," he said but I'm trying to explain why fuel costs are so high."

In regards to a petition drive urging VEPCO to sell out to an N.C. power company, McIver said there is a faster way of petitioning for lower electric rates in North Carolina.

"A petition you could sign to get the best and fastest results for our customers is a petition to the NRC telling them to let us put North Anna II back on line," he said.

Aside from conversions to coal, the company is looking to get its nuclear units back on line, and anticipates utilizing a 2,100 megawatt pumped

storage unit in 1983, a unit McIver said produces about two and a half times as much power as the standard nuclear unit.

In response to a question from a chamber member, Gentry displayed a chart which showed the fuel cost per kilowatt hour of oil generated power to be more than twice that of producing nuclear, with coal generation falling in the middle of the two.

"If we can eliminate fuel cost we can get competitive with our neighbors," McIver said.

But VEPCO's long range plan was met with skepticism from at least one chamber member.

"We've heard a lot of 'we hoped to but it didn't work out'. Now you say you hope to be competitive with Duke in the mid-1980's. How do we know this?" asked Lee Brabble, of the Bethel community.

McIver said that consultants had projected a plan by which the company could become more competitive.

"Where were those consultants the last 10 years when you've been bleeding our pocketbooks?" Brabble asked.

In response, McIver said that the utilities commission had found earlier decisions to go with oil generation to be sound, and that the utility had no way of foreseeing the Arab oil embargo.

In answering further questioning from chamber members, McIver said the utility makes between 6 and 7 percent profit, less than the maximum allowable of some 9 percent.

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Late afternoon graze

An old barn frames this horse grazing in the late afternoon off State Road 1980. (Photo by MIKE McLAUGHLIN)