

March 21, 2005

Honorable Brian Schweitzer
Governor of Montana
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 200801
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620-0801

Dear Governor Schweitzer:

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of my experience in agriculture as a young kid from Denton, Montana. My father owned and operated a crop-dusting business and focused on controlling weeds in small grain crops and pasture land. While our family was never fortunate enough to own land for a cattle herd, we always had horses, and from the time I was a third grader in Lewiston, Montana, my job was to take care of the horses.

As I got older, I became heavily involved in Future Farmers of America. I participated in livestock judging, weed identification, and speech competitions all four years I was in FFA. I really enjoyed the time I spent with my FFA advisor, Ken Mapston, and enjoyed the people I met at the FFA competitions and conventions. This interest in agriculture prompted me to start working for farmers and ranchers in the Denton area as soon as I had a driver's license. One of my first jobs was for Vern Allen Land and Cattle Company. Vern is a diversified ag producer who grew small grains and raised a herd of cattle, mainly made up of Charolais. I helped Vern with both his cattle operation and his farming. I also worked for other farmers and ranchers in the area through high school and college, helping them with a variety of chores including calving, branding, feeding and general herd maintenance.

In 1991, I married a young lady by the name of Nada Glass (we divorced in 1999). Nada's family has farmed and ranched in the Denton area for five generations. Nada still owned a few cows from her high school herd when we got married. Unfortunately, we slowly had to sell these off so she could finish her college education. Prior to law school, I worked on this family operation. One of my main responsibilities was the cattle operation. Nada's grandfather, Floyd "Bus" Ellis, was one of those rare fellows who had a special way with all animals, especially cattle. I remember one winter morning when Bus and I were banding some new calves, he explained to me in great detail how a little extra kind attention at this time left a lasting impression on the animal. Interestingly, I think the interaction left more of an impression on Bus than it did on the animals, since he never was able to sell a single one of his grandchildren's 4H projects.

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I learned a lot about livestock and agriculture on farms and ranches from folks like Bus. From 1986 until early 1997, a year did not pass without me being employed by or directly engaged with agriculture. This involved tending to my own horses and helping friends and family with their operations. In fact, without my ag background, I would have failed in this business a long time ago. The lessons learned on farms and ranches and from folks like Bus are a great help in my law practice.

I left the agricultural world behind for a bit while I attended law school from 1993 through 1996. I did help with my wife's family operation when I had time, but time was limited in law school.

I returned to central Montana after law school and worked in Stanford, Montana for the firm of Hubble and Ridgeway. A large component of my responsibility was representing ag producers and drafting agricultural leases. I also assisted with the family operation which had been taken over by my then brother-in-law, Keith Glass. Even as a personal injury lawyer I stayed involved in cattle operations when I went to work for A. Clifford Edwards. Mr. Edwards is the owner of Edwards Angus, and while in his employ my duties often shifted to involvement in his registered Angus operation.

All my best to you and Nancy.

Sincerely,

Shane Colton

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