



# NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

## View from the Hill



### POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS MAY 2023 WRAP-UP

## NEWS FLASH

### Supreme Court Rules for Landowners

On Thursday, the Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision that greatly narrows the scope of the Clean Water Act as interpreted by the federal government. This long-awaited WOTUS ruling says the law only regulates wetlands when they are “as a practical matter indistinguishable from waters of the United States.” The EPA and Corps of Engineers will need to rewrite their WOTUS rule that went into effect in March to reflect this new guidance and allow farmers, ranchers, forest owners and other landowners to move ahead with good management decisions.

### WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

#### Debt Ceiling Deadline Approaches

Debt ceiling discussion continues to dominate every conversation in Washington, D.C., with the federal government set to hit its borrowing limit as early as June 1st. As a reminder, the debt limit is a cap set by Congress on the amount of money which the federal government is authorized to borrow in order to meet ongoing fiscal obligations. It is important to note that the debt limit does not control future or new spending by the federal government, it only controls borrowing to meet existing spending authorized by Congress. Congress has never failed to raise the debt limit when necessary, and has done so 78 separate times since 1960 under Congresses and Presidencies of both parties. Should Congress fail to raise the debt limit before the cap is hit, then the federal government would default on its fiscal obligations, causing certain economic turmoil.

Despite months of negotiations between House Republicans, led by Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy, and Democrats, led by President Joe Biden, little progress has been made between both sides. From the onset, Democrats have maintained that the only acceptable outcome is a clean raising of the debt ceiling with no strings attached, arguing that Republicans had agreed to similar measures three times under the previous administration, that much of the debt has been accumulated by policies put in place by Republicans, and that using the debt ceiling as a bargaining tool is dangerous.

Meanwhile, Republicans have countered by laying out their priorities for any requirements for any potential agreement to raise the debt ceiling in the form of the *Limit, Save, and Grow Act* which we covered in-depth in last month’s edition. Since the release of their priorities, Republicans have also made clear that any debt ceiling deal must not include tax increases, cuts to defense spending, or cuts to social security and Medicare, leaving only approximately 15% of the entire federal budget available for potential cuts.

While both sides have sought to portray themselves as open to a reasonable deal on the debt ceiling, little progress has been made to close the gap. As a result, many have speculated that President Biden may decide to use executive power to nullify the debt ceiling, either by challenging its constitutionality in the Supreme Court by arguing that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment does not allow the government to default on its debt, or by using the powers of the Federal Reserve and the Treasury to create new revenue to pay off current debt obligations. So far, President Biden has not indicated an interest in using such measures, but he has also refused to rule them out when pressured. With only a limited time until the date of default, it is not yet clear if a deal will be possible on the debt ceiling.

### **Agriculture Appropriations Hearing Delayed**

The House Appropriations committee was set to hold a hearing on an annual budget bill which would have included significant cuts to a variety of USDA programs in late May before the hearing was delayed until discussions surrounding the debt ceiling are resolved. The Republican bill would amount to an \$8.7 billion cut in USDA program funding for fiscal year 2024, including cuts to conservation programs, energy programs, agricultural research, animal and plant health inspection services, and nutrition programs. As well, the bill would restrict USDA's use of the Commodity Credit Corporation, ability to set rules on anti-competitive practices, and establish new work requirements for nutrition assistance programs. While the initial hearing for the bill has been delayed, the contents of the legislation are a clear signal of Republican priorities going forward.

## **AGRICULTURE AND FOOD**

### **“Natural” Food Labels Mislead Consumers**

USDA’s Economic Research Service says consumers mistakenly assign health and environmental stewardship attributes to food labeled “natural”. However, the “natural” claim can be freely made with the stroke of a label printer. Neither USDA nor FDA have regulations that define the word “natural” on food. By contrast, “USDA Organic” and “Raised Without Antibiotics” label claims require audits and expensive production practices.

### **Free School Food for All?**

During the pandemic, a 2-year test run by USDA provided free school lunches to all students. Free school lunch advocates are now calling for states and the federal government to permanently stop charging kids for their school breakfast, lunch and snack meals. California and Maine have implemented free meals this school year. Colorado, Minnesota, and New Mexico will provide free meals next school year. Nevada, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Connecticut will implement temporary free meal policies during the 2022-2023 school year.

### **Supreme Court Upholds California’s Proposition 12**

California’s animal housing law, known as Proposition 12, bans the sale of pork from facilities across the country that use sow gestation crates. The nation’s hog farmers had sought to overturn the law, arguing it violated the Constitution’s Commerce Clause. In fractured opinions, the Supreme Court disagreed and left the California law in place.

### **“Newbie” Farm Bill Drafters’ Learning Curve**

A majority of the House Agriculture Committee members (38 or 70%) and Senate Agriculture Committee members (12 or 52%) are facing the challenge of working on their first farm bill. Agriculture groups and other advocacy organizations are working feverishly to educate the new committee members about the details of such a large and complicated piece of legislation. Many new members are surprised to learn that over 80% of farm bill funds go to programs other than agriculture, farming and ranching.

## **CONSERVATION and ENVIRONMENT**

### **Conservation Reserve Program Refocus Proposed**

Bipartisan Senate legislation introduced by Grassley (R-IA) and Booker (D-NJ) would shift the CRP toward smaller, environmentally sensitive parcels and away from the traditional larger tracts. General CRP retires whole fields from production for 10-15 year periods while the Grassley-Booker bill would focus on continuous CRP that targets grass buffers, filter strips and grasslands that allow farmers to graze the land they enroll. Focusing on continuous CRP instead of general CRP will help increase the amount of land available for agricultural production while allowing farmers to enroll land around waterways and the edges of fields. The demand for acres to be enrolled in both continuous CRP and grasslands CRP has been steadily increasing in recent years.

### **New Emission Caps on Existing Power Plants Proposed**

The EPA is proposing new carbon pollution standards to restrict greenhouse gas emissions released by fossil fuel-fired power plants. Coal and gas plants would have to reduce or capture 90% of their carbon dioxide emissions by 2038 or be forced to close. If the rule is finalized, it would mark the first time the federal government has restricted carbon dioxide emissions from power plants and would become a major part of President Biden's environmental justice agenda.

## **HEALTH CARE**

### **Expand Rural Mental Health Services**

Bipartisan legislation (Farmers First Act of 2023) has been introduced by Senators Baldwin (D-WI) and Ernst (R-IA) to reauthorize the Farm and Ranch Stress Network in the farm bill, add more services, and increase funding from \$10 million to \$15 million. New funding would go toward hiring competent counsellors and creating support groups who understand the unique challenges of farmers and ranchers. The Grange strongly supports the Baldwin-Ernst bill and is pushing to expand the Agri-Stress Helpline (phone 877-897-2474, text 833 897) from its current seven states to nationwide coverage. The Helpline is a 24-7 dedicated hotline manned by trained farm, ranch and rural life professionals.

### **Access to Alzheimer's Treatment**

The National Grange filed a statement with the leadership of the House Ways and Means Committee and its Health Subcommittee for the hearing on Examining Policies That Inhibit Innovations and Patient Access. At issue is the fact that Alzheimer's treatment centers are only located in a few large metropolitan areas long distances from rural patients. The Grange has long advocated for Medicare to change its policy to allow treatments to be administered closer to rural populations. The Grange cited a University of Iowa study that found agricultural workers are almost 50% more likely to develop the disease than the general population, and an Emory University survey that found rural areas see nearly twice the Alzheimer's death rate of urban regions. The Grange also joined the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease and 50 cosigners on a letter asking Congress to urge the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to reconsider its coverage decision and expand access to FDA approved Alzheimer's treatments.

### **Support for Nurse Practitioners**

The National Grange joined the American Association of Nurse Practitioners on a letter to the leadership of the House Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce Committees in support of H.R. 2713, the Improving the Care and Access to Nurses Act. The bill would remove federal barriers to practice for advanced practice registered

nurses in Medicare and Medicaid programs and expand the medical services nurse practitioners are able to provide patients. Nearly 150 organizations are supporting the legislation.

### **HPV Vaccine is Important**

The National Grange joined Healthy Women and the HPV Cancer Alliance on a letter to the White House Cancer Moonshot team which emphasized the importance of HPV vaccine for cervical cancer reduction. HPV vaccination rates have been decreasing in recent years even though the CDC says vaccination could prevent more than 90% of HPV-caused cancer.

### **Pharmacy Benefit Manager Reform Needed**

For several years, the National Grange has advocated for transparency and accountability of pharmacy benefit managers. PBMs are companies that manage prescription drug benefits on behalf of private health insurers, Medicare Part D plans, large employers and other payers. The Senate Health, Education Labor, and Pensions Committee has passed the Pharmacy Benefit Manager Reform Act by a bipartisan vote of 18-3. The Act would increase transparency, mandate that rebates paid by drug makers be passed directly to patients, and ban spread pricing (i.e. The practice of charging payers like Medicaid more than is paid to the pharmacy for a medication and keeping the “spread”). PBM reform is a major component of reducing prescription drug prices.

## **TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

### **Release Rural Wireless Spectrum**

The National Grange and several rural customer groups have petitioned Federal Communications Commission Chairwoman Rosenworcel to release 2.5 GHz band spectrum awarded in the FCC auction last August. Grange is concerned that 90% of the auction licenses have still not been issued. Most of the available spectrum is located in rural areas and is needed to support expanded wireless services to rural communities.

## **OF INTEREST**

### **Charging Stations Coming**

The Biden administration has pledged \$51 million to create a network of 500,000 public electric vehicle charging ports across the country. The initiative to accelerate nationwide transportation electrification is part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda geared toward making EV networks accessible to everyone in the US.

### **New York Going Gas Free**

New York Governor Hochul has announced plans to ban the use of natural gas in new building construction beginning in 2025 for small buildings and 2028 for large buildings. The move will require new homes and businesses to run on electric appliances.

## PERSPECTIVE

“ Dreams are the seeds of change. Nothing ever grows without a seed, and nothing ever changes without a dream. ~ **Debbie Boone** ”

“ The greatest discovery of all time is that a person can change his future simply by changing his attitude. ~ **Oprah Winfrey** ”

“ Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything. ~ **George Bernard Shaw** ”

“ Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past are certain to miss the future. ~ **John F. Kennedy** ”

“ Only I can change my life. No one can do it for me. ~ **Carol Burnett** ”

# GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY IN ACTION AWARD



*submit a minimum one-page written description  
of your Grange's grassroots advocacy action  
along with at least one photo*

**Deadline: September 1**

**More information: [bit.ly/23ngadvocacy](https://bit.ly/23ngadvocacy)**

On **Sunday, June 11, at 7:00 PM**, the National Grange Policy Committee on Hemp & Cannabis, in coordination with the Connecticut State Grange Lecturer's Department, will host a live virtual webinar for any interested Grange members and their guests to better understand the current intricacies surrounding hemp and cannabis policy and discuss ideas on how this policy might evolve in the future. Last year at the 156<sup>th</sup> annual National Grange Convention in Reno, Nevada, the delegates voted to establish a National Policy Committee to study and propose ideas on how our National Grange policy positions can better reflect the needs of current and future members, particularly farmers. This policy committee has met virtually numerous times and created a presentation that will be presented at all 2023 National Grange Regional Conferences. Because there is not a Northeast Grange Regional Conference in 2023, this virtual opportunity has been created for anyone anywhere to better understand this topic. “Recently, when I was reinvigorating membership in a Connecticut community Grange, the number one question I was asked by perspective members was on the Grange’s position on hemp and cannabis,” said Dave Roberts, Connecticut State Grange Lecturer and member of the National Grange Policy Committee on Hemp & Cannabis. “So many people seem to have misinformation and are looking for the facts. This presentation hopes to help Grangers question and understand hemp and cannabis policy in a safe, friendly setting.”

[\*\*JOIN THE MEETING\*\*](#)



**CONNECTICUT STATE GRANGE PRESENTS...**

CT State Grange Lecturer's Department and  
National Grange Policy Committee on Hemp & Cannabis  
**JOINT VIRTUAL WEBINAR ON ZOOM**



# **JUST THE FACTS: HEMP & CANNABIS**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 11, 2023 • 7:00 PM**

**Featuring Special Guest Speaker Vince Scholten**

California State Grange Vice President, California State Grange Agricultural Committee Chair  
and member of the National Grange Policy Committee on Hemp & Cannabis

**Learn the truth about Hemp & Cannabis and the history behind it,  
including its various agricultural products and uses.**

Those interested in attending are asked to RSVP to Dave Roberts at  
[lecturer@ctstategrange.org](mailto:lecturer@ctstategrange.org) or [granbydavidroberts@gmail.com](mailto:granbydavidroberts@gmail.com),  
and each will then receive the Zoom Credentials via email.



Please RSVP to CT State Grange Lecturer Dave Roberts: [lecturer@ctstategrange.org](mailto:lecturer@ctstategrange.org) / 860-469-5067