



NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS

JUNE 2023 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

Debt Ceiling Deal Becomes Law

In early June, President Joe Biden signed into law the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which raised the federal debt limit until 2025 and also included spending caps and cuts. The law represents a compromise between House Republicans and the White House that came after months of back-and-forth negotiations with a debt default looming.

The legislation addresses the debt ceiling issue by suspending the debt limit until January 1, 2025, crucially avoiding a default and moving the issue until after the 2024 election cycle. Furthermore, the bill includes a number of major Republican spending priorities. First and foremost, the law caps federal non-defense related spending at current levels for fiscal year 2024 and at an only 1% increase for fiscal year 2025. Addressing a potential fight looming in the Farm Bill process, the legislation also broadened work requirements for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) beneficiaries, increasing the work requirement age cap to 55. It is worth noting, that the bill also expands exemptions to work requirements for veterans, homeless people, and former foster youth who are eligible for SNAP. The bill also claws back previous spending on COVID-19 related stimulus and funds which had been allocated to the IRS to increase tax enforcement. Finally, the act requires the Department of Education to restart federal student loan repayments, which had been on pause by executive order since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Altogether, the compromise completes the important task of raising the debt ceiling while also curbing future government spending.

Appropriations Fights Loom

Beyond the topline measures of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the bill also included provisions intended to incentivize Congress to pass all twelve annual appropriations bills on their own (instead of the usual omnibus package) and on time before the end of the fiscal year on September 30th. These provisions would trigger automatic across the board spending cuts until the appropriations process is completed. These cuts would even target numerous Republican priorities such as defense related spending. As a result, the appropriations committees in the House and Senate have begun to move forward with the annual appropriations process.

However, clashes between the House and Senate are already looming, even as the more bipartisan appropriations bills such as defense spending and agriculture are begun. In the House, Republicans are seeking to cut funding levels to levels below the agreed upon caps in the Fiscal Responsibility Act, meanwhile in the Senate Democrats and Republicans are writing bills which would meet those spending levels. These spending disparities are going to set-up for some serious fights in the next few months, and Congress will not be able to kick the can down the road with continuing resolutions so easily this time due to the automatic spending cuts included in the debt limit deal.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Are You Ready for Lab Grown Chicken?

USDA has given the green light to two companies for the inspection, packaging and sale of cell-cultured chicken. Last Fall, the FDA deemed cell-cultured meat safe for human consumption. Cultivated meat is produced by growing real animal cells in a medium that provides appropriate nutrition for cell growth in artificial conditions in a laboratory environment. The cultured product tastes like naturally produced chicken but is very expensive at this point. Watch for future approvals to sell lab-grown beef, pork and fish. Several companies are seeking to commercialize products from this technology as a way to offer meat with a lighter environmental footprint. But a recent study by the University of California suggests the lab grown process requires a high amount of energy which could be worse for global warming than natural meat production.

America Grows Act of 2023 Introduced

S.1628, introduced by Senators Durban (D-IL) and Moran (R-KS) would increase funding for agricultural research by 5 percent annually on an inflation-adjusted basis at the four main agricultural research and statistical agencies at USDA for the next 10 years. The National Grange and 73 other food, agriculture and research organizations expressed their support for the Act in a letter to the Senate and House Agriculture and Appropriations Committees.

Validity of Food Label Claims to be Assessed

USDA will reexamine how it substantiates claims companies use to market meat and poultry. The agency plans to revise industry guidelines to strengthen the documentation submitted to back up those claims. Of specific interest are the animal raising claims for “free range”, grass fed” and “raised without antibiotics”. “Consumers should be able to trust that the label claims they see on products bearing the USDA mark of inspection are truthful and accurate”, according to Agriculture Secretary Vilsack.

Barriers to Ag Innovation

The National Grange and 26 additional groups interested agriculture innovation technologies were successful in getting language in the House ag appropriations FY24 report that directs USDA’s Economic Research Service to research and analyze the need for public financing to support new or significantly improved food and agricultural technologies such as large scale biofermentation facilities.

CONSERVATION and ENVIRONMENT

Waters of the U.S. Court Decision Gives Ag Guidance

The Supreme Court decision on the Clean Water Act restricts the federal government’s jurisdiction over “adjacent” wetlands which now gives more clarity to farmers, ranchers, forest owners and other landowners. It will be easier look at property and tell whether something should be regulated as a water of the U.S. The decision separated the terms “adjacent” and “adjoining” to mean only wetlands physically “adjoining”, not “adjacent” to, covered waters are to be regulated. The court also reaffirmed that states have the “primary” responsibility to prevent water pollution. The administration plans to incorporate the Supreme Court decision into its existing Waters of the U.S. rule rather than withdraw the rule and start over. The new rule will amend the rule issued in January that went effect March 20.

HEALTH CARE

Medicare Should Pay for Cancer Screening

With one blood draw, the Multi-Cancer Early Detection (MCED) screening test can detect dozens of cancers very early in their stages of development. The five-year survival rate is almost 90% higher when the cancer is found in its early stages according to clinical trials. As soon as these tests are approved by FDA, Medicare should add MCED to its payment schedule because Medicare beneficiaries are the most at-risk for cancer. A bipartisan bill to accomplish that, S.2085 the Medicare Multi-Cancer Early Detection Screening Coverage Act, has been introduced by Senators Crapo (R-ID), Bennett (D-CO), Scott (R-SC), and Cardin (D-MD). The National Grange and 26 state Granges joined over 500 national and state patient groups, health care providers, and others to send letters of support to the bill sponsors. A similar bill, H.R.2407, has been introduced in the House.

Continue Rural Stress Hotline

The National Grange joined the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture and several other agricultural and rural groups to urge Congress to continue funding for the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network. In a letter to the House and Senate appropriations committees, the groups noted the success of FR SAN to address mental health and prevent suicide among agricultural producers. National Grange and Rural minds are further asking Congress to dedicate part of this funding to expand the 24-hour crisis hotline staffed by trained ag and rural counselors.

Lessons from the Pandemic

The Washington newsletter *Real Clear Health* published an editorial by National Grange president Betsy Huber that noted America is changing post pandemic and we have the opportunity for our health care system to change with it. One way to do this is to leverage every tool such as immunization that helps prevent common illnesses from developing into serious complications for older adults and those with chronic illness. We'll need public policy support for improved rural citizen access to health care information, facilities, services and technology according to Huber.

Give Us Clear Guidance

National Grange's Burton Eller presented testimony to FDA's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee at their June meeting. He said that it is encouraging to note that the latest COVID-19 vaccine could become available on an annual basis. He also encouraged FDA to give clear guidance on immunization practices to help rural and small-town residents understand what we need, when we need it, and to make immunizations available where we live and work.

RSV Vaccines Needed for Older Adults

Eller also testified before the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices in June. He stressed the need for RSV vaccine approval before the fall respiratory disease season begins. Last year, news outlets across the country reported rural clinics and hospitals were challenged with an influx of patients needing care with no space to offer them.

RIGHT TO REPAIR

More Agreements Inked

Two more equipment companies have signed right-to-repair memorandums of understanding with the American Farm Bureau Federation. With the addition of AGCO and Kubota, about 70% of the ag equipment sold in the U.S. is under the same umbrella of agreement. The agreement gives equipment owners and independent repair facilities access to manuals, tools, product guides and information to self-diagnose and self-repair machines while respecting the intellectual property rights of the manufacturers.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Broadband Funds Released

The Department of Commerce has announced it will distribute high speed broadband deployment funds to all states from the \$42.5 billion Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program. BEAD was created in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and is administered by Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). All states will receive funding allocations based upon their connectivity needs and deployment plans. These funds are in addition to other funding sources like the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), Digital Equity Act, Tribal Connectivity Program, Middle Mile Program, Reconnect Program, Capital Projects Fund, Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds, and Emergency Connectivity Fund. Funding for high-speed broadband deployment across the country now stands at \$92.95 billion.

PERSPECTIVE

- “ Where liberty dwells, there is my country. ~ Benjamin Franklin ”
- “ Patriotism consists not in waving the flag, but in striving that our country shall be righteous as well strong. ~ James Bryce ”
- “ Patriotism is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime. ~ Adlai Stevenson ”
- “ Patriotism is supporting your country all the time and your government when it deserves it.”
Mark Twain ”
- “ This nation shall remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave. ~ Elmer Davis ”
- “ You have to love a nation that celebrates its independence every July 4, not with a parade of guns, tanks and soldiers ... but with family picnics ... You may think you have overeaten, but it is patriotism. ~ Erma Bombeck ”



Connecticut State Grange Virtual Webinar
"Just the Facts: Hemp & Cannabis"

Enjoy this video of the [Connecticut State Grange](#) Virtual Webinar from Sunday, June 11, 2023 titled "Just the Facts: Hemp & Cannabis" presented by the CT State Grange Lecturer's Department and the National Grange Policy Committee on Hemp and Cannabis. This event featured special guest speaker Vince Scholten, Vice President of the California State Grange and Chair of the

California State Grange Agriculture Committee. [WATCH IT HERE](#)

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