



NATIONAL GRANGE

OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS

FEBRUARY 2021 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

With the time and attention consuming impeachment trial of former President Trump now over, President Biden and Congressional Democrats are turning towards completing cabinet confirmations and moving forward their agenda.

COVID-19 Relief

The Democratic proposal for another round of COVID-19 relief is soon to face critical votes in both the House and Senate this week. In the House, a vote on the final package is expected on Friday the 26th or Saturday the 27th of this week. With a narrow majority, Democratic leaders have to walk a careful line in crafting the relief bill to not be too big or too small so as to scare off moderate or progressive members and ensure the bill makes it to the Senate. At the same time, members of Republican leadership in the House are actively pressuring their members to not support the bill. While current expectations are that the House bill will pass on a party line vote, with narrow majorities passage is not guaranteed.

At the same time, in the Senate a fight is brewing within the Democratic caucus over the bill's proposed \$15 minimum wage hike. On one side, moderate Senators like Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona do not support a \$15 minimum wage and would prefer a more moderate increase to something like \$11. On the other side, Senators such as Vermont's Bernie Sanders are adamant that the minimum wage must be increased to \$15 without compromise. At the same time, it is not yet clear if the \$15 minimum wage will be able to be included in this COVID relief package because the unique process Democrats are pursuing to pass the bill (called budget reconciliation) only allows for measures which directly effect the budget. The office of the Senate parliamentarian will have ultimate authority to determine if the \$15 minimum wage is allowed and a decision is expected to come at any time.

Confirmations

With more available time the Senate is also rapidly pushing forward nominees for President Biden's cabinet, with key hearings and votes schedule across the next few weeks. So far most of Biden's nominees have moved through the process without much trouble; however Biden's nominee to run the Office of Management and Budget, Director of the Center for American Progress Neera Tanden, will likely not make it through the narrowly divided Senate because Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia has announced he will vote no on her nomination due to her previous controversial tweets.

What's Next

Following COVID-19 relief and cabinet nominees the Biden administration has begun to signal their future legislative priorities such as immigration reform and infrastructure spending. While details of the timeline for future proposals are not yet clear, this is a space to be watching for the rest of the year.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Secretary Vilsack's Priorities

During his confirmation hearing before the Senate Agriculture Committee in early February, Secretary of Agriculture-designee Vilsack spoke about several of his priorities for USDA, including:

- Establish an agriculture carbon bank using the Commodity Credit Corporation spending authority to provide incentives for farmers and ranchers to participate.
- Assistance to develop a new local meat processing capacity by subsidizing small processors seeking to qualify for federal inspection.
- Expand agricultural trade.
- Take bold action to address discrimination in all its forms across USDA.
- Embrace sustainable and regenerative agricultural production practices.
- Expand food and nutrition assistance.

Grange Congratulates Vilsack

Following the Senate 92-7 vote February 23 to approve Tom Vilsack as Secretary of Agriculture, National Grange president Betsy Huber delivered a congratulatory letter to the Secretary pledging Grange support to advance policies which benefit rural America. She specifically pointed to rural broadband, rural health care and farmer-focused agricultural policies.

Hunger is a Pandemic Issue

The number of citizens relying on the federal government for food assistance jumped 14 percent in September compared to the same month a year ago. USDA said nearly 43 million people received help from the government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) compared to 37 million in September 2019. Endless lines at local food pantries are expected to increase as the pandemic crosses the one-year mark. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 23 million adults reported they sometimes or often struggled to provide food for their families.

Bill to Boost Locally Processed Meat Sales

Representatives Johnson (R-SD) and Cuellar (D-TX) have introduced the Direct Interstate Retail Exemption for Certain Transactions (DIRECT) Act to allow locally processed meat to be sold at retail across state lines when standards meet federal requirements. If enacted into law, the DIRECT Act will allow farmers, ranchers and smaller processors more options to market directly to consumers. The National Grange has strong policy supporting this concept and will work diligently to pass the DIRECT Act in the 117th Congress.

AG WORKFORCE/IMMIGRATION

Agriculture Takes a Hit

House Democrats have introduced a sweeping immigration bill, the U.S. Citizenship Act, backed by President Biden that would require farms and ranches to pay overtime, pay minimum wage and provide an expedited path

to citizenship for undocumented ag workers. Family members would continue to be exempt from overtime and minimum wage requirements. The Act does not expand the H-2A visa program to allow for year-round work by the experienced foreign workers that agriculture depends upon.

ENVIRONMENT/CLIMATE CHANGE

Capturing Carbon on the Farm

The Biden administration is targeting \$30 billion from USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to pay farmers and ranchers to implement sustainable practices and capture carbon in their soil. CCC money to create a carbon bank and facilitate emerging carbon trading markets does not need specific Congressional approval. The Depression-era CCC was created nearly a century ago and has the authority to borrow from the up to \$30 billion from the U.S. Treasury to help stabilize farm income and commodity prices.

Waters of the U.S. Rule Safe for Now

The Senate voted 51-49 in favor of preserving the Navigable Waters Protection Rule which more clearly defines wetlands, ponds, streams and rivers regulated under the Clean Water Act. The Protection Rule was finalized in 2020 with strongly support by farmers, ranchers, landowners and others. Senator Joe Manchin (D-WVA) joined Republicans to preserve the rule.

30x30 Order to Triple Protected Lands and Oceans

President Biden has signed an executive order aimed to protect a third of the nation's land and ocean waters by 2030. Much of the President's goal of 440 million acres, a land area twice the size of Texas, can be accomplished on federal lands by restricting multiple use such as timbering, drilling, mining and livestock grazing as well as declaring more wilderness and monuments. Tools such as conservation easements might be used to bring private lands into the fold. More clarity will be needed for an on-the-ground definition of "protected."

INFRASTRUCTURE

The National Grange and the Rebuild Rural Coalition sent a letter with over 200 cosigners to President Biden acknowledging his Build Back Better in Rural America plan. The Coalition emphasized the state of our deteriorating rural infrastructure and thanked the President for including roads and bridges, locks and dams, broadband, health care, railroads, electrical and water systems, housing and land grant university research in his infrastructure plan.

HEALTHCARE

Exit Polling Targets Health Care

A national voter exit poll by Morning Consult indicates voters are most worried about protecting pre-existing conditions coverage and rising out-of-pocket costs. Voters said they want policymakers to deal with the real drivers of health care costs rather than simply shifting costs to consumers and the sickest patients.

Multi-Cancer Early Detection Screening

The National Grange, five state Granges and numerous patient advocacy groups sent a letter to Capitol Hill expressing support for bipartisan bills S. 5051 and H.R. 8845, the Multi-Cancer Early Detection Screening Coverage Act. This legislation will dramatically cut the time between the approval of a procedure by FDA and its

approval for Medicare coverage by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). New innovative multi-cancer early detection tests can now utilize a simple blood draw to find most cancers before they spread.

Ease Medicare Enrollment During Pandemic

The National Grange and 49 state and national organizations are asking the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to reinstate policies to help people sign up for Medicare amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Enrollment pathways were established last May but the enrollment flexibilities were allowed to lapse shortly thereafter despite clear and ongoing needs.

TAXES

Paycheck Protection for Ag Organizations

Nine agricultural organizations, including the National Grange, are asking the Senate and House leadership to include 501(c) 5 agricultural organizations in the next round of pandemic relief in budget reconciliation legislation. The groups stressed the importance of keeping ag-focused, non-profit organizations in business to serve as key resources for farming best practices, market information, educational outreach, farm and ranch life, youth in agriculture, rural life and pandemic-related assistance.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

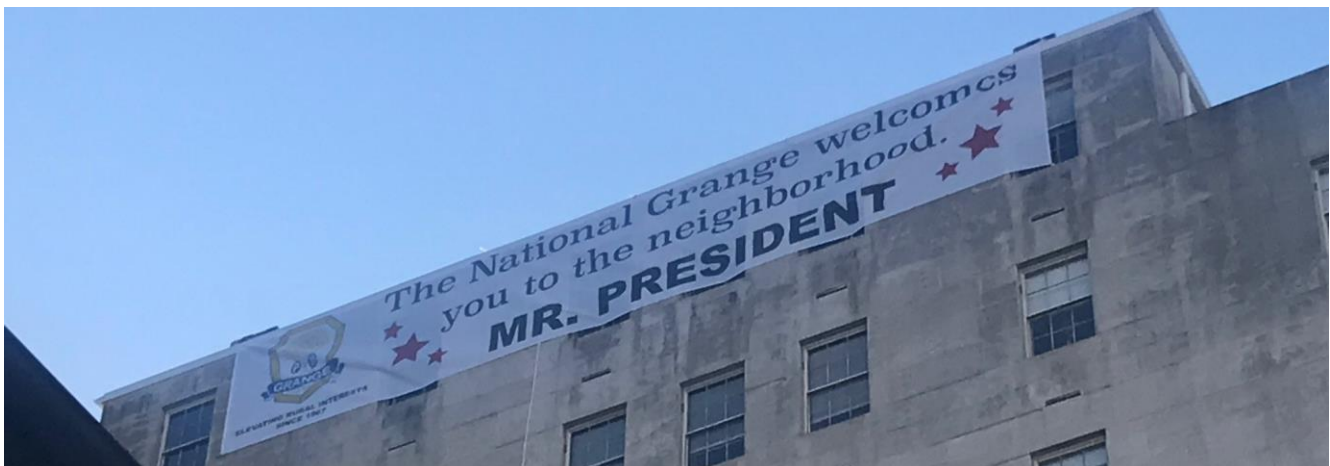
Broadband Network Traffic Spikes

Traffic on broadband networks has increased by 51% during the pandemic, according to OpenVault. Total broadband traffic was also driven by a 6.5% increase in subscribers. Extreme power users who consume more than 2 TB per month jumped 184% year over year.

FCC Should Reconsider Data Order

The National Grange filed comments with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to urge the Commission to reconsider its Lifeline Data Collection Order which was released without public comment. The National Grange has long maintained that it is the FCC's prerogative to review and, if needed, revise the Lifeline program, its services and its customer base. However, in the middle of a pandemic is not the time to change the program or to make new demands on Lifeline customers. Lifeline is a federally subsidized phone and internet service for the disabled, elderly, shut-in individuals and low-income households.

National Grange hangs banner facing the White House building welcoming President Biden





2021 NATIONAL GRANGE *Virtual* LEGISLATIVE FLY-IN



Save the Date, Wednesday April 7, 2021

Speakers from Capitol Hill, the Biden Administration, issue coalitions, National Grange leadership staff & more.
Visit the National Grange website for more information coming soon.