



NATIONAL GRANGE

OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS

JUNE 2021 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

Infrastructure Debates Continue

President Biden's push for a large infrastructure package has taken significant steps forward in recent weeks. Democrats are now pursuing a two-track plan with one small bipartisan bill to be passed through regular order (where 60 votes are required in the Senate) and one larger bill to be passed through the reconciliation process (where only 50 votes are required in the Senate).

With regards to the bipartisan infrastructure package, progress was made this past week with a bipartisan group of 20 Senators agreeing to a \$953 billion framework for the bill, with \$559 billion being new spending. Details on exactly what infrastructure programs and mechanisms to pay for the bill have not yet been released and still need to be worked out between both sides. Even if this core group of 20 Senators is able to agree to a proposal with the White House, the bill is not guaranteed to become law. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has yet to indicate his position on the bipartisan bill, but if he comes out opposed to the bill then it is unlikely that the 10 Republican Senators currently negotiating the bill will all vote for it. At the same time, Democratic leadership is stressing that in order for this bipartisan bill to pass they must also pass a larger bill through reconciliation or else they may lose some Democratic votes from the progressive wing of the party.

Less details are currently available with regard to the second-track infrastructure bill which could pass on a party line vote through the reconciliation process. This bill would most likely include whatever elements of President Biden's \$4 trillion American Jobs Plan and American Families Plan do not make it into the current bipartisan infrastructure bill. However, some progressive Democrats like Budget Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (D-VT) are pushing for even more spending, such as expanding Medicare and Medicaid to cover dental and vision expenses and lowering the Medicare eligibility threshold to 60 years old from its current 65. While Senator Sanders' proposals are unlikely to make it into a final reconciliation package, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) is betting that by supporting a bipartisan infrastructure deal he can then persuade moderate Democratic Senators to support a larger reconciliation package as well.

Growing Climate Solutions Act Moves Forward

The Growing Climate Solutions Act, a bipartisan bill which would direct USDA to create a voluntary carbon credit system in agriculture, made significant progress this past week. The bill was passed in the Senate in a bipartisan 92-8 vote and now awaits action in the House.

Meatpacking Industry Scrutinized

On Wednesday June 23rd, the Senate Agriculture Committee hosted a hearing on the current state of the meatpacking and cattle industries. At the hearing Senators of both parties indicated that they were interested

in taking action to address distortions in the marketplace which have led to low cattle prices for producers but high beef prices for consumers. Specifically, Senators of both parties expressed interest in increased price transparency through the creation of contract libraries, increasing the percentage of cattle sales which are negotiated cash transactions, and potentially taking antitrust actions against big meatpacking firms. Senators have so far proposed a few bills to address current conditions in the meatpacking industry and USDA has begun to take executive action, and more comprehensive legislative and executive action is sure to come.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Keep Your Word on WOTUS

National Grange president Betsy Huber reiterated in a letter to EPA Administrator Regan that he promised to include farmers, ranchers, forest owners and other landowners in any revision of the current Waters of the U.S. rule. She also cautioned him to protect private property rights. The administration filed a motion in a case in Massachusetts to remand the rule without vacating it and announced plans to reconsider the existing definition of waters of the United States. The current rule will remain effect while the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers initiate rulemaking.

Grants for Small Independent Meat Processors

USDA will award competitive funding grants to small, regional and independent processors to help them meet federal inspection requirements or to operate under their state's Cooperative Interstate Shipment program. Greater processing capacity is needed throughout the country to meet local consumer demand. The National Grange strongly supported these funds in the 2021 appropriations act.

Stronger Enforcement of Meat Processing Regulations

USDA says it will initiate rulemaking under the Packers and Stockyards Act to protect farmers and ranchers from excessive concentration and deceptive practices in the poultry, hog and cattle markets. USDA will seek greater transparency and competition in livestock markets and the meat processing sector. Congress is getting involved as well. A hearing has already been held by the Senate Agriculture Committee and we anticipate the House Agriculture Committee to follow suit.

Judge Halts Minority Farmer Debt Relief

A federal judge has granted a temporary restraining order in a lawsuit filed by five white farmers challenging the constitutionality of debt relief payments to minority farmers. Under the American Rescue Plan enacted in March, minority farmers who hold direct or guaranteed USDA loans are eligible to receive 120% of their indebtedness.

Fund More Agriculture Research

The National Grange and 151 agriculture, food, research and university groups are urging Congress to include long-ignored ag research in any infrastructure legislation. Data from the past hundred years of agricultural research shows that every dollar spent on research returns \$17 in benefits to the public.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Act Moves

The National Grange and members of the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance wrote all members of the Senate to urge passage of S.1251, the Growing Climate Solutions Act of 2021. The bipartisan legislation by ag committee members Stabenow (D-MI) and Braun (R-IN) establishes a carbon market certification program at USDA based upon incentive-based programs and market-driven opportunities. The bill passed the Senate in late June.

Other Countries More Concerned About Climate Change

Morning Consult polled adults in Italy, France, Spain, Germany, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the United States to see if they believe the climate issue is a major threat. Of the eight countries polled, Italians were the most concerned (77%) while Americans were the least concerned (50%).

Carbon Market Questions for Landowners

As discussions about climate change abound, so do questions about carbon markets as landowners consider programs to create and sell carbon credits. A Farm Journal poll found the biggest reason why a landowner would not participate in a carbon market is the need for more information they can trust. Here are the most common questions asked:

- How much money can I expect to make? Many carbon markets today pay \$10-\$20 per acre.
- When do I get paid for participating in a carbon market? Lag time between program implementation and payment is a common deterrent for those who want to participate.
- Can I get paid for conservation practices I'm already using? Most programs are focused on changes you can make in the years ahead.
- How long should I expect my land to be tied up? Companies are requiring 1–15-year commitments.
- How do I transition to no-till when I don't have the equipment or the money to pay for it? Hire someone to no-till plant for you.
- Besides money, is there any other reason to give these carbon markets a try? It could be about increasing sustainability to make sure the operation continues to the next generation.

HEALTH CARE

Pharmacy Rebate Reform

The National Grange along with several patient groups sent a letter of support to Senate and House bipartisan cosponsors of S. 1909 and H.R. 3554, the Pharmacy DIR Reform to Reduce Senior Drug Costs Act. The bills could do much to reduce patient out-of-pocket costs at the pharmacy counter by bringing transparency and accountability to the drug supply chain. Studies have shown that about 30 cents of every dollar patients pay for prescription drugs can be traced back to supply chain middlemen called pharmacy benefit managers. This money is then used to lower insurance premiums for all their policyholders instead of passing that 30 cents along as savings to the patient.

Approve New Vaccines

The National Grange is urging the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices at the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to approve new Pneumococcal vaccines for use prior the coming flu and pneumonia season.

Emerging studies show that the impact of COVID-19 on the lung is significant, so we face an unprecedented time as the flu season begins and pneumonia cases begin to climb.

IMMIGRATION/AG WORKFORCE

Senate: Pass Ag Labor Reform

The National Grange joined other members of the Agriculture Workforce Coalition in urging Senate Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell to pass bipartisan agriculture labor reform legislation. Domestic labor shortage remains one of the greatest challenges for farmers and ranchers.

Supreme Court Rules on Landmark Ag Case

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that governments cannot require private property owners to allow union organizers onto their property without just compensation. The case, *Ceder Point Nursery v. Hassid*, struck down a California regulation that required agricultural employers to allow union organizers onto their property for up to 3 hours per day, 120 days per year. The Court ruled the regulation constituted a “taking” of property in violation of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the Constitution.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Treasury Right on Broadband

The National Grange filed official comments with Treasury Secretary Yellen in support of Treasury’s Interim Final Rule that implements funding from the American Rescue Act that can be tapped for broadband infrastructure projects. The Rule defines underserved areas as those without minimum speeds of 25/3 Mbps. This will give truly unserved and underserved rural areas the chance to catch up before funds are diverted to areas where networks already have gigabit speeds. The Grange is very concerned that without such direction, high speed broadband will never reach the “last mile” of country roads.

PERPESPECTIVES

- “ Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you’re a thousand miles from a corn field. ~ **Dwight D. Eisenhower** ”
- “ No race can prosper until it learns there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. ~ **Booker T. Washington** ”
- “ Even if a farmer intends to loaf, he gets up in time to get an early start. ~ **Edgar Watson Howe** ”
- “ Agriculture is the most beautiful, most useful and most noble employment of man. ~ **George Washington** ”
- “ The farmer is the only man in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways. ~ **John F. Kennedy** ”
- “ The farmer has to be an optimist or he wouldn’t still be a farmer. ~ **Will Rogers** ”