



NATIONAL GRANGE

OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS

AUGUST 2021 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

House Passes Budget Resolution

Earlier this week, the House briefly returned from its long August recess to pass a resolution authorizing up to \$3.5 trillion in spending through budget reconciliation, a process which will allow Democrats to pass the bill without needing any Republican support in the Senate. While the resolution ultimately passed with unanimous Democratic support on Tuesday, a small group of moderate Democratic representatives almost threw the vote into contention.

This group of moderate Democrats began the week by demanding that a vote be held on the smaller \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package passed by the Senate in early August before the House proceeded to vote on the \$3.5 trillion budget resolution. These moderates argued that Democrats should take the quick win on the bipartisan package, and that waiting could jeopardize support for the bill and decrease the number of Republicans willing to support its passage in the House. Ultimately, the group of moderates buckled under pressure from Democratic House leadership, and they voted to support the budget resolution because Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) agreed to place a soft deadline to vote on the bipartisan package by September 27th, regardless of the status of the reconciliation package at that time.

With the vote authorizing the creation of a \$3.5 trillion reconciliation package out of the way, the House is set up to have a very busy September. In September, not only will the House have to draft and pass a reconciliation package and pass the bipartisan infrastructure agreement, but deadlines will also come to raise the debt limit, extend government funding, reauthorize the federal highway program, reauthorize the National Flood Insurance Program, and reauthorize the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. As well, key pandemic supports such as expanded unemployment insurance and expanded SNAP benefits end in September, and many progressive House Democrats will surely call for them to be extended. Complicating all of this, the House does not intend to return from recess until mid-September, leaving even less time to work through all these issues.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

African Swine Fever Threatens U.S. Pork

The disease that decimated China's pork industry and is spreading through Asia and Europe has been discovered in the Dominican Republic. Why is that important? If ASF makes the short 83-mile boat ride from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory, countries around the globe can use international standards to ban American pork. The World Organization for Animal Health provides no difference between a country and its territories when determining ASF status. USDA and Customs and Border Protection inspectors with dogs are checking for pork carried by passengers between the two countries.

"Buy American" looks at School Lunch

President Biden's "Buy American" executive order has prompted USDA to review its current enforcement on buying domestic products. Buy American was added to the National School lunch Act in 1998 but two exemptions may have allowed schools to sidestep the requirement and buy foreign food products. The exemptions allow schools to buy commodities like bananas and pineapples that aren't widely produced in the U.S. and to choose foreign commodities when the same domestic commodities are more costly. However, numerous instances have been documented where schools have purchased 60% of their apple juice from China and 60%-70% of fish sticks from fish caught on Russian vessels.

USDA Raises SNAP Benefits

Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack says recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Program will receive 40 cents more per meal as the result of a reevaluation review. This is a 27% increase of about \$36 per month to an average of benefit of about \$169 per month. These were made in response to increased food prices and expansion of food choices. Recipients will begin receiving the larger benefits in October.

Surplus Dairy Products to Needy Families

USDA has put \$400 million into the Dairy Donation Program which is funded from the coronavirus relief package passed by Congress in December. Dairy cooperatives and other processors who provide products to food banks and other feeding services can get reimbursed for the cost of milk and some of their manufacturing and transportation costs. Dairy producers will also receive an increase in their feed cost formula under the Dairy Margin Coverage program.

CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENT

WOTUS Listening Sessions in Progress

Waters of the United States regulations are back on the table. The EPA announced its intent to craft a "durable definition" that can survive court challenges and be accepted by future administrations. Farmers, ranchers, rural residents, and other interested parties have been invited to provide input via online listening sessions in August and September. The agency says it is reverting to the WOTUS rule

before the Obama administration changed the definition. The change caused an uproar for farmers, ranchers, and landowners. Courts ruled against the Obama Administration and the Trump administration changed the rule. The pre-Obama rule will be the basis for crafting the new rule. National Grange is monitoring the listening sessions and will submit written comments.

Grazing Reduces Carbon Footprint

Ruminant animals like cattle contribute to healthy soil and proper grazing management can reduce agriculture's carbon emissions and overall carbon footprint, according to Texas A&M research. Cropping and grazing management protocols are needed that can regenerate soil systems and ecosystem functions previously lost by neglect and destructive management practices. Permanent cover of forage plants is highly effective in reducing soil erosion and increasing soil infiltration. Ruminants consuming grazed forages under appropriate management results in considerably more carbon sequestration than emissions, according to lead researcher Richard Teague.

HEALTH CARE

Voters Want Bipartisan Fix to Costs

The Health Care Landscape National Study in July produced some interesting polling on health care costs such as:

- Voters want bipartisan solutions to health care reform. Consumers saw the success collaborative efforts produced during the COVID-19 pandemic when all stakeholders (Congress, government, private industry) worked together.
- Reducing the cost of health care premiums and copays is more important than reducing the cost of prescription drugs according to two thirds of respondents.
- Nine in ten voters believe health care out-of-pocket costs should be low enough to not prevent needed patient care.

Rural Telehealth Gets Boost

The Biden administration has committed to more than \$19 million in grants to expand telehealth in rural and other underserved communities. These funds are to train primary care providers, pilot new telehealth services and research the effectiveness of telehealth in rural geographics.

TAXES

Elimination of Stepped-Up Basis Threatens Future Family Farmers

Stepped up basis is a tax term that applies to the value of property when a benefactor dies and leaves a property to a beneficiary. In other words, the beneficiary receives the property at its current value, not the original value or basis. That's important because if the property is later sold, capital gains taxes will be charged on the gain in value from the time the beneficiary acquires the property until it is transferred to a family member or sold. Many lawmakers mistakenly think only the very wealthy get snagged by capital gains taxes, but it's families who

have spent lifetimes building farming, ranching and other small businesses who will be hit the hardest. Former House Agriculture Committee chairman Collin Peterson, a Democrat from Minnesota, says the elimination of the step-up basis is the worst idea that has been proposed in terms of its impact on agriculture in his lifetime.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Infrastructure Bill Promises Broadband to the Unserved

The massive infrastructure package passed by the Senate and awaiting action in the House in September is promising to connect high-speed internet to unserved and underserved communities across the country. Most of its \$65 billion broadband allocation (\$42.4 billion) will be routed through states for implementation on a formula-based grant program and does not favor any specific technology. Projects will have to provide minimum service speeds of 100 megabits per second download and 20 megabits per second upload. The projects also must serve unserved areas before serving underserved areas. Unserved areas will be defined as currently having speeds of less than 25/3. The bill also sets aside \$1 billion for middle mile infrastructure which will provide connectivity to end-user providers. Another \$14.2 billion is allocated to a new Affordable Connectivity program which is an extension of the existing Emergency Broadband Benefit program. Now, how will all this get implemented and who will hold states and localities accountable to the unserved and underserved priorities? After two decades of rural broadband deployment efforts, the National Grange will be monitoring this closely.

PERSPECTIVES

- “ I am always ready to learn although I do not always like being taught. ~ **Winston Churchill** ”
- “ Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn. ~ **Benjamin Franklin** ”
- “ The mind once enlightened cannot again become dark. ~ **Thomas Paine** ”
- “ Intelligence plus character - that is the true goal of education. ~ **Martin Luther King** ”
- “ A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn no other way. ~ **Mark Twain** ”