



NATIONAL GRANGE

OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS

OCTOBER 2021 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

Infrastructure and Social Spending Bills Move Forward

After months of debate, the end is finally in sight for two of President Biden's signature legislative items – the \$1.2 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package and a larger \$1.75 trillion Democratic reconciliation bill which includes a hodge-podge of climate and social spending. While the bipartisan infrastructure package passed the Senate with significant support from both parties back in August, it has been held up in the House by progressive Democrats who have threatened not to support the bill unless moderate Democrats also support the larger Democratic package. This impasse has remained firm for the past few months as moderates and progressives have jockeyed over the size and scope of the package, but few details remain to be settled.

In its near-final form, the Democratic reconciliation bill will include a total of \$1.75 trillion in spending with \$400 billion for child care and pre-k, \$150 for home care, \$200 billion for the Child Tax Credit created in the American Rescue Plan passed earlier this year, \$555 billion in clean energy and climate investments, \$130 billion in Affordable Care Act credits, \$35 billion to expand Medicare coverage for hearing, \$150 billion for Housing, \$40 billion for higher education and workforce training, and \$90 billion in other miscellaneous investments. It's important to note that some of these amounts may change before the bill is ultimately passed, but this is a good picture of what the final bill will likely contain. To offset all of this spending, Democrats also plan to include revenue raising provisions which are estimated to capture up to \$1.9 trillion. These provisions include a 15% corporate minimum tax, a stock buybacks tax, reforms to prevent firms from offshoring jobs and profits so as to avoid US taxes, an adjusted gross income surcharge on the top 0.02% of earners, closure of select Medicare tax loopholes, investments in the IRS to capture more tax revenue, and changes to how the government purchases prescription drugs. Importantly, changes to step-up in basis which were originally proposed do not seem likely to be included in the final bill.

With these details established, it is now only a matter of finalizing the bill text, passing the larger Democratic bill in the Senate, where moderate Senators Joe Manchin (D-WV) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) have been the largest holdouts, and then passing both bills in tandem in the House of Representatives. As of writing this article passage of both bills seems likely in the next week or so, but nothing is guaranteed until President Biden signs the bills.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Supply Chain Woes

Whether it's backlogs at ports, congestion at railroad hubs, or slowdowns at manufacturing plants, the American public is seeing supply delays and rising prices. The National Grange and 49 agricultural producer, commodity, agribusiness and food-related national organizations filed extensive comments with the Department of Transportation and the President's Supply Chain Disruptions Task Force, detailing extensive recommendations to support resilient, diverse and secure supply chains. Recommendations included transportation policy, infrastructure, container shipping, inland waterways, rail service and climate policy.

World Food Prices Reach 10-Year High

Food prices worldwide are highest in a decade. On a year-over-year basis, prices were up 32.8 % in September.

Cattle Contract Library Legislation

The House Agriculture Committee voted unanimously to pass the bipartisan Cattle Contract Library Act of 2021 (H.R. 5609) in late October. The Act would establish a library of contracts for USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service to report terms of alternative marketing agreements between packers and producers. Its intent is to add more transparency and competition to the cattle market. The legislation was championed by the American Farm Bureau, National Farmers Union, Livestock Marketing Association, U.S. Cattlemen's Association and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

Disaster Funds Approved

The stopgap funding bill to keep the government operating this fall includes \$10 billion in disaster aid. Funds are intended to respond to recent emergencies such as hurricanes, storms, wildfires, extreme heat and severe droughts.

HEALTH CARE

Surprise Medical Bills Rule Issued

The Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, Treasury and the Office of Personnel Management have issued an interim final rule with a 60-day comment period to further implement the Grange-supported No Surprises Act. The rule details a process that will take patients out of the middle of payment disputes, provides a transparent process to settle out-of-network rates between providers and payers, and outlines requirements for health cost estimates for uninsured self-pay individuals. The rule is slated to go into effect January 1, 2022.

IMMIGRATION/AG WORKFORCE

Workplace Raids Halted

Immigration and Customs Enforcement will no longer conduct mass raids on workplaces where undocumented immigrants are employed. The announcement was made by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. Mayorkas emphasized that farmworkers would not be subject to arrest and deportation.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

National Grange Calls on House to Pass Infrastructure

The National Grange and 42 organizations representing agriculture, education, health care, veterans, technology and small business are calling on the House of Representatives to pass the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Along with monies for roads, bridges, ports, waterways and other hard infrastructure, the legislation makes \$65 billion available to close the digital divide and prioritizes connecting the unserved and underserved to high-speed broadband service first.

USDA Targets \$1.5 Billion to Rural Broadband

The Department of Agriculture's ReConnect program will have an additional \$1.15 billion to equip rural areas with high-speed internet. To qualify for funding, applicants for grants must commit to providing download and upload speeds of 100 megabits per second to all locations in its suggested service area.

Emergency Connectivity Program Gets Second Wave of Funding

The Federal Communications Commission has committed more than \$1.1 billion to support an additional 2,471 schools, 205 libraries and 26 consortia. The first funding wave last month committed \$1.2 billion to support 3,040 schools, 260 libraries and 24 consortia. Funds can be used to buy broadband connections, laptops, tablets, WiFi hotspots, modems and routers.

New FCC Chair Named

President Biden has chosen Jessica Rosenworcel to head the Federal Communications Commission, a position she now fills on an acting basis. She has been a commissioner since 2012 and will be the first woman to serve as chair. The position gives Rosenworcel a lead role over the nation's telecommunications policy and oversight on issues ranging from broadband coverage maps to cable company mergers and rural broadband expansion. The National Grange congratulated the new chair and is looking forward to continuing to work with the FCC to connect more Americans.

PERSPECTIVES

“ The greatest treasures are those invisible to the eye but found in the heart. ~ **Judy Garland** ”

“ Truth is the property of no individual but is the treasure of all men. ~ **Ralph Waldo Emerson** ”

“ The most luxurious possession, the richest treasure anybody has, is his personal integrity. ~ **Jackie Robinson** ”

“ Knowledge is the treasure of a wise man. ~ **William Penn** ”

“ God, as Truth, has been for me a treasure beyond price. May He be so to every one of us. ~ **Mahatma Gandhi** ”