



NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS FEBRUARY 2022 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

Congressional Funding Delayed Again

Democratic and Republican Congressional leadership again failed to agree to a long-term government funding bill, but averted a government shutdown by passing a continuing resolution extending current funding levels to March 11th. Key issues which continue to be at dispute include matching increases in funding for social programs with increased defense spending, negotiations over longstanding policy riders such as the Hyde Amendment (which prohibits federal funds from going to organizations which perform abortions), federal vaccine mandates, new coronavirus spending, and increased aid to Ukraine. By failing to pass new spending bills for the 2022 fiscal year, which were originally meant to be passed in September of 2021, Congress is hindering federal agencies from implementing new programs or providing sufficient support to programs which were meant to be targeted with increased funding. Leadership in both parties has expressed optimism that a deal will be completed by the new March deadline, however similar optimism has proven incorrect with regard to previous deadlines.

Russia Invades Ukraine

On February 23rd, Russia officially began an all-out invasion of neighboring Ukraine following months of troop build-up, threats, and the recognition of contested regions which have been occupied by Russian-backed separatists since 2014. This invasion constitutes the most significant war in Europe since World War II, has defied the post-Cold War global security framework, and will certainly cost many thousand lives, including civilians. The United States, along with European and other allies, has begun to initiate significant sanctions against Russian government institutions, individuals, companies, and more, along with providing military and economic support to the Ukrainian government with more steps soon to be announced. Beyond the tragic consequences for Ukraine, the invasion has led to significant economic shocks with the price of oil rising dramatically, stock markets across the globe going down, and commodity markets across the board shifting dramatically following significant increases in wheat and corn prices as Ukrainian exports are cut off. It is unclear what the ultimate outcome of the Russian invasion will be, but it has already had major short-term effects for the global economy and American agriculture, and it is certain to have long-term effects on the European and global security framework which have allowed American agricultural exports to thrive for many decades.

Biden Administration Announcements to Come

On March 1st, President Biden will address a joint session of Congress for his first State of the Union speech. It has been expected that President Biden will seek to use this speech as an opportunity to not only tout legislation passed in the previous year, but also to reset expectations and propose a new path for some of his stalled legislative agenda such as the Build Back Better Act. It is unclear with recent events in Ukraine how much time he will allocate to foreign policy, and if this will take away from the momentum he would like to build for his

domestic agenda. As well, in early March President Biden plans to name his intended appointment to succeed Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer who has announced his intention to retire this summer.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Price Discovery Divides Cattle Industry

When Senators Grassley (R-IA) and Fischer (R-NB) along with 15 bipartisan Senate cosponsors from 13 states introduced their Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act back in November, they had the support of just about everyone in agriculture. Now following their annual meetings, the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association have withdrawn their support. The flashpoint is language that mandates percentages of cash trade in different regions throughout the country. The Iowa/Minnesota/Nebraska cattle feeding region typically has a high percentage of cash cattle sales while the Texas/Oklahoma/New Mexico region predominantly trades cattle on negotiated contracts that have no price transparency. The Senators say they will continue to push for passage of their bill. The National Grange delegates voted last November to support the Grassley-Fischer bill.

Farmers and Ranchers Can Report Anticompetitive Practices

The USDA and Department of Justice have launched an online tool to anonymously report potential unfair and anticompetitive practices in the livestock and poultry sectors. The portal is meant to have the DOJ and USDA collaborate rapidly to enforce the law vigorously, according to USDA. [Click here to visit the portal.](#)

Grange Urges Research Support

The National Grange joined 51 food, agriculture, scientific and education organizations on a letter to the appropriations subcommittees on the Hill requesting full funding for agriculture research, education and extension programs in the final appropriations package. These funds are necessary to ensure agricultural resilience, nutrition security, and food systems sustainability.

CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENT

USDA Funding Climate Pilot Projects

The administration has launched the application process for a \$1 billion pilot program to find ways farms can profit from low-carbon commodities produced through practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Partnership for Smart Commodities is taking applications for pilot projects from local and state governments, soil conservation districts, tribal organizations, 501(c)(3) groups and educational institutions. The voluntary, incentive-based projects will run from three to five years and must measure greenhouse gas reductions and carbon sequestration results. USDA justifies funding the initiative from the Commodity Credit Corporation because of statutory language authorizing CCC to facilitate the marketing of farm products. Agriculture commodity groups for the most part endorsed the program and its objective to promote climate friendly farming practices. Several lawmakers have questioned whether the climate initiative is really a commodity program that qualifies for CCC funds.

President's 30x30 Plan a Tough Sell in Rural Areas

Last year the administration's goal of conserving 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030 was welcomed by the environmental community. Now those working to deliver on the President's target find themselves working

to allay concerns among rural residents that they could face heavy-handed mandates. Rural counties across the country are passing resolutions opposing 30X30.

Carbon Pipelines Concern Farmers

Three planned Midwest CO₂ pipelines will capture carbon from ethanol plants and permanently sequester it in underground locations from Bismarck, N.D. to Springfield, Illinois. Pipeline companies say they are signing miles and miles of easements every day. However, landowners and farmers are raising questions about the projects and are concerned about long-term yield losses due to compaction and slow crop yield recovery.

HEALTH CARE

Grange Urges Reconsideration of Alzheimer's Treatment

The National Grange is urging the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to reconsider its determination not to approve Medicare coverage for a promising Alzheimer's treatment following its approval by FDA. Research has shown that the mortality rate for Alzheimer's and related dementias is higher in rural areas than urban centers. One reason for this difference is thought to be the lack of access to health care professionals with experience in treating Alzheimer's and dementia.

POSTAL SERVICE REFORM

Reform Legislation Moving Through Congress

The National Grange has been a long-time proponent of reforms to the United States Postal Service. Rural America depends upon postal delivery. Finally, that priority may become a reality. The House passed H.R.3076, the Postal Service Reform Act of 2021, on a bipartisan vote of 342-192 in mid-February. The Act does the following:

- Eliminates the requirement to prefund retiree health benefits
- Requires six-day integrated mail and package delivery
- Expands special rates for local newspaper distribution
- Requires regular congressional reporting on operations and financial performance
- Other important provisions.

A companion bill, S.1720, has been cleared for action in the Senate where there appears to be sufficient bipartisan support for passage. The Grange is in contact with several key senators to shore up their support.

The Postmaster General Louis DeJoy has requested a meeting with the National Grange in early March.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Broadband Has Money. Now What?

National Grange president Betsy Huber authored an editorial in Washington's Agri-Pulse newsletter that focused on the next steps to accomplish the mission of deploying high-speed internet access to unserved and underserved residents in rural areas. Betsy's key points were:

- Project funds must prioritize unserved communities first and the underserved next
- Avoid overbuilding in some areas while other regions lack fundamental connectivity
- Update broadband availability maps quickly
- Create strong public-private partnerships to target broadband funds to local needs
- Use a technology neutral approach to most effectively and affordably establish connectivity
- Ensure fair and equitable rights-of-way and pole attachment access to all broadband providers
- Assure project coordination between the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and USDA's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) on funds distribution and project coordination.

States Gear Up for Broadband Funds

The bipartisan infrastructure package enacted last fall earmarked \$65 billion for broadband expansion which will augment \$9.8 billion provided earlier through the American Rescue Plan. The largest portion of the funds, \$42.45 billion, will be distributed by the NTIA directly to states. Each state will initially receive \$100 million of this funding. More will be available on a priority needs basis. States are actively mapping internet deficit areas and developing 5-year action plans to distribute the most federal aid ever allocated to broadband expansion.

PERSPECTIVES

“ Nostalgia is the file that removes the rough edges from the good old days. ~ **Doug Larson** ”

“ We are homesick most for the places we have never known. ~ **Carson McCullers** ”

“ Nothing is ever really lost to us as long as we remember it. ~ **Lucy Maud Montgomery** ”

“ What is the charm that makes old things so sweet? ~ **Sarah Doudney** ”

“ One is always at home in one's past. ~ **Vladimar Nabokov** ”