



NATIONAL GRANGE

OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS

JUNE 2022 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

Bipartisan Gun Bill Passes

On June 24th, Congress passed a bipartisan bill aimed at addressing a variety of challenges related to gun violence. The bipartisan bill is one of the first significant bills passed to address gun violence in decades, which came as a result of serious compromise efforts made by a group of Democratic and Republican Senators. The bill includes:

- \$750 million in funding to help states create and operate crisis intervention programs, which can range from red flag laws (laws which allow authorities to temporarily confiscate guns from individuals who are deemed to pose an imminent threat to themselves or others) to more general mental health and drug rehabilitation programs
- Ending the ‘boyfriend loophole’ which had allowed individuals convicted of domestic violence crimes against intimate partners who they did not live with, be married to, or have children with to own guns
- Increased requirements for gun sellers to register as Federally Licensed Firearm Dealers
- More stringent reviews of people aged 18-21 when purchasing guns
- Strengthened federal statutes against gun trafficking and straw purchasing (when an individual buys a gun for someone who is legally barred from doing so)
- Increased funding for mental health programs and school security

Supreme Court Makes Major Decisions

In June the Supreme Court released many highly impactful decisions which reflect the new balance of six conservative and three liberal justices which was created when Justice Amy Coney Barrett was appointed in the final months of President Trump’s term. As well, in late June Justice Stephen Breyer, who was appointed by President Bill Clinton, formalized his retirement from the court and Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, who was recently appointed by President Biden, took his place.

In the gun rights case *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association Inc. v. Bruen*, the court ruled that states did not have the right to deny law-abiding citizens the right to carry weapons outside the home for ‘ordinary self-defense,’ meaning that states must now allow some form of concealed carry permitting without onerous restrictions. In the abortion rights case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, the court overturned the historic cases which provided a right to some access to an abortion (*Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*) and so returned authority to set abortion restrictions to the states. Finally, in a case about federal regulatory authority, the court ruled in *West Virginia v. EPA* that the EPA did not have broad authority to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act and also forecasted a shift in jurisprudence away from broad

regulatory authority to interpret statutes. These cases all reflect the new ideological balance of the court toward more conservative jurisprudence, and will certainly have an effect on electoral politics.

Other Major News

Beyond the concrete news of gun legislation and Supreme Court decisions, a number of other major pieces of news have occurred in June. In late June, the roadblocks to Sweden and Finland formally joining the NATO alliance were finally overcome and both nations are currently poised to become members in a sign of the shifting balance of power created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Meanwhile, in Congress the bipartisan House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the US Capitol has begun to hold public hearings which have made serious political waves.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Cattle Markets Legislation on the Move

Grange-supported bipartisan market reform bills have advanced in the Senate and House. The Senate Agriculture Committee passed both the Meat and Poultry Special Investigator Act of 2022 and the Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act of 2022. The Special Investigator Act (S. 3870) will establish a special Investigator office in USDA to probe allegations of unfair marketing practices. The Price Discovery and Transparency Act (S. 4030) authorizes USDA to mandate minimum levels of cash cattle trading by region of the country, creates a library of marketing contracts, mandates box beef reporting, and requires packers to report the number of cattle scheduled for processing each day for the next 14 days. Chairwoman Stabenow hopes to have the bills on the Senate floor after the August congressional recess. The full House has approved the Special Investigator Act.

Meal Waivers for Kids Extended

A bill passed by Congress and signed by the President will extend a series of waivers to ensure meals are available for kids during the summer and upcoming school year. The bill allows for grab-and-go meals this summer and increases reimbursement for meals during the school year. Existing meal waivers implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic were set to expire June 30.

Comments Filed for White House Conference

In comments filed for the upcoming White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health, the National Grange urged full consideration of these issues as they affect rural citizens. Rural Americans face disproportionately higher levels of hunger, experience high poverty levels, lack convenient access to grocery stores and food banks, and are an older population compared to their urban and suburban counterparts. The White House was urged to include the facilitation of localized food systems, direct farm-to-consumer sales, localized meat processing opportunities, and mobile food banks in its conference discussions.

HEALTH CARE

Senate Committee Targets Drug Prices

The Senate Commerce Committee has advanced a bill designed to reduce prescription drug out-of-pocket costs for patients. The bipartisan Pharmacy Benefit Manager Transparency Act of 2022 (S. 4293) prohibits pharmacy

benefit managers (PBMs) from engaging in “spread pricing” by charging health plans, employers and other payers more for prescription drugs than they reimburse to pharmacies and pocket the difference. These rebates and discounts on drug prices are supposed to be passed to patients. Three PBMs, CVS/Caremark, OptumRx and Express Scripts, control roughly 80% of the prescription drug market. The Federal Trade Commission has solicited public comments on how PBMs are affecting drug affordability and access. Determining the effect PBMs have on patient drug costs continues to be a priority for the National Grange.

Bipartisan Majority of the House Supports Early Cancer Detection

The majority of the U.S. House of Representatives have cosponsored the Medicare Multi-Cancer early Detection Screening Coverage Act (H.R. 1946) introduced by Sewell (D-AL-7), Arrington R-TX-19), Ruiz (D-CA-36) and Hudson (R-NC-8). The bill allows Medicare to cover multi-cancer early detection tests as soon as approved by the Food and Drug Administration. Under current law, it could take several years after FDA approval for Medicare coverage to begin. Detecting cancer early can result in less invasive treatments, reduced costs and better outcomes for patients. This legislation is a long-time priority for National Grange.

Waiving Intellectual Property Protections Dangerous for Future Medical Development

The World Trade Organization and the Office of the United States Trade Representative are prioritizing efforts to improve COVID-19 vaccine access and equity around the world. However, that must not come at the expense of waiving intellectual property protections in the United States. That was the message from the National Grange and several patient groups in a letter to United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai. Compromising intellectual property protections would have unprecedented effects on future medical development. Today, vaccines are plentiful and available. The barriers hindering the ability to adequately distribute COVID-19 vaccine to vulnerable communities are patient education and vaccine hesitancy along with health care infrastructure challenges in many parts of the world.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Access to Utility Poles Lynchpin for Rural Broadband

Nearly one-fourth of rural residents still don't have high-speed broadband and as many as 29 percent of farms and ranches still lack any access to broadband. In most rural areas, the easiest, most cost-effective way to deploy broadband to remote families is to use the existing utility poles which carry electricity and telephone services. Unfortunately, that may require attaching to many poles just to reach one family, farm or ranch. The National Grange filed comments with the Federal Communications Commission to support guidelines that will help ensure fair, equitable, cost-effective and timely access to poles, as well as expedited resolution of pole owner and attached disputes and timely processing of applications seeking access to poles.

National Strategy Needed to Close Digital Divide

A new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report to Congress says federal broadband efforts are fragmented and overlapping with more than 100 programs administered by 15 federal agencies. The U.S. broadband efforts are not guided by a national strategy with clear roles, goals, objectives, and performance measures. Programs may have differing definitions of eligible areas, populations, and broadband speeds. GAO recommends that the National Telecommunications and Information Agency (NTIA) identify key statutory limitations to program alignment and develop legislative proposals as appropriate. GAO also recommended the Executive Office of the President develop and implement a national broadband strategy.

TRANSPORTATION/SUPPLY CHAIN

Ocean Shipping Reform Implemented

Empty shipping containers are no longer able to leave U.S. ports without American goods. During the pandemic, ocean carriers raised prices as much as 1,000% and often refused to load containers with U.S. food and ag commodities back to Asia. The Ocean Shipping Reform Act, supported by the Grange, passed by Congress and signed by the President, has changed that. The Act authorizes the Federal Maritime Commission to broadly regulate ocean shipping to ensure timely delivery of American goods.

Rail Improvement Not Good Enough

The Surface Transportation Board (STB) has told four major railroads (BNSF, CSX, Norfolk Southern and Union Pacific) their plans for improving shipping delays are inadequate and ordered them to provide more key information. As grain elevators sit full, the freight rail network is fraught with delays, disruptions and staggering rate increases.

Livestock Exemption Extended

The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration has extended the hours-of-service exemption for livestock haulers until August 31. The exemption will allow longer driving hours to accommodate the health and well-being of animals in transport during the summer heat.

PERSPECTIVE ON SUMMER

- “ To see the summer sky is poetry, though never in a book it lie--true poems flee. ~ **Emily Dickinson** ”
- “ Like a welcome summer rain, humor may suddenly cleanse and cool the earth, the air and you. ~ **Langston Hughes** ”
- “ Summer has a flavor like no other. Always fresh and simmered in sunshine. ~ **Oprah Winfrey** ”
- “ Summer is our best season: it is sleeping on the back screened porch in cots or trying to sleep in the tree house; summer is everything good to eat; it is a thousand colors in a parched landscape. ~ **Harper Lee** ”
- “ Summer bachelors, like summer breezes, are never as cool as they pretend to be. ~ **Nora Ephron** ”