



NATIONAL GRANGE

OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS

NOVEMBER 2022 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

Midterm Elections:

On November 8th, voters across America took to the polls to vote in the 2022 midterm elections. Despite the expectations of pundits, after all the votes were counted Democrats were able to maintain their control of the Senate, and potentially gain a seat pending a runoff election in Georgia, while Republicans only narrowly gained control of the House. As a result, the next Congress will face serious challenges passing legislation without broad bipartisan support. In the House, Republicans have signaled an interest in increasing oversight of the executive branch and certain members have expressed an interest in holding up must-pass legislation such as government funding, increases in the debt ceiling, and the National Defense Authorization Act unless certain concessions are made. Meanwhile, Senate Democrats are likely to continue confirming President Biden's executive and judicial branch nominees.

Congressional Leadership Changes:

In both the House and Senate, leaders in both parties faced serious challenges following the 2022 midterm elections. In the House, Republican Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) was forced to make significant concessions to the more conservative wing of the party including decreasing the power of leadership and increasing the influence of individual members. Currently, McCarthy has secured the votes to remain leader of the House Republican Conference however it remains to be seen if he will be able to secure the required 218 votes to become Speaker of the House when the next Congress is seated in January next year. Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) also faced a challenge to his leadership in the Senate from Senator Rick Scott (R-FL), however he was able to maintain his position without making concessions.

Finally, after more than two decades leading House Democrats, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) announced that she would not seek a leadership position in the next Congress. Democratic Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and Democratic Whip Jim Clyburn (D-SC) also signaled that they will no longer hold their current positions in the next Congress. The most likely successors for each of these long-time leaders are Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), Rep. Katherine Clark (D-MA), and Pete Aguilar (D-CA), respectively. This represents a generational shift in House Democratic leadership as Pelosi, Hoyer, and Clyburn had led the caucus for the majority of this century.

Lame Duck Session Begins:

With control of the House of Representatives switching hands in the next Congress, Democrats are rushing to pass legislation on a variety of priorities before they lose total control of legislation. These efforts began quickly as the Senate took a bipartisan vote to pass the Respect for Marriage Act, a bill which codify many of the protections created for gay marriage which emerged from the Supreme Court decision *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

Other headline priorities for the lame duck period include passing government funding, the National Defense Authorization Act, raising the debt ceiling, continuing aid funding to Ukraine, elections reforms, a ban on congressional stock trading, and executive and judicial branch confirmations. Of interest to the National Grange, legislation on issues such as concentration in cattle markets, railroad shipping troubles, voluntary carbon credits in agriculture, expanded coverage for early cancer detection through Medicare, and more.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

USDA Funds Processing Capacity Expansion

Projects in 21 states are set to receive funding to expand the number of processing facilities available to livestock producers. The \$223 million from the American Rescue Plan will be distributed in the form of loans, grants and technical assistance for small to mid-size plants to expand beef, pork and mixed processing capacity at the local level. The National Grange has long advocated for local processing capacity expansion.

CONSERVATION/CLIMATE CHANGE

Major Food Companies Commit to Regenerative Agriculture

A consortium of twelve food companies including PepsiCo, Mars, and McDonalds will promote practices that encompass regenerative agriculture as a climate change mitigation tool. Converting to regenerative practices is a financial risk for farmers and ranchers who may have to buy new equipment and additional seed, fuel and labor. The current commodity market does not provide incentives to incur that cost. The consortium is looking at buying, perhaps at a premium, only commodities that have been grown using sustainable production practices such as cover crops, no-till and other carbon-capture methods.

Carbon Capture Pipeline

Several companies are planning thousands of miles of pipelines to transport liquid carbon dioxide throughout the Midwest to carbon sequestration sites. Companies report steady progress in obtaining voluntary easements, but the projects still face fierce opposition from many property owners along the proposed routes. In Iowa, 80% of the state's residents oppose the use of eminent domain for carbon dioxide pipelines. An Iowa State University study last year indicated yields on pipeline ground were down 25% for soybeans and 15% for corn during the first two seasons compared to undisturbed fields.

You Want to Tax What?

Farmers across New Zealand have taken to the streets to protest government plans to tax the methane gas and nitrous oxide coming from both ends of 10 million beef and dairy cows, 26 million sheep and other ruminants. The new "burp tax" is part of the New Zealand government's plan to tackle climate change. The prime minister said money collected from the levy would fund research, new technology and incentive payments to farmers.

HEALTH CARE

New Antibiotics Needed

The National Grange joined patient groups and the medical community to urge Congress to pass the PASTEUR Act in an end of year legislative package. Under PASTEUR, the federal government would enter into contracts

with innovators to develop a reliable supply of novel antimicrobials to counter antibiotic resistance. The government would only pay for development of successful FDA approved treatments to combat super bugs. For several years, the medical community has been concerned with the growing crisis of antibiotic resistance. New antibiotics are urgently needed to counter resistance.

Extend Telehealth Benefits

A popular provision in the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security Act expires at the end of this year. It allows employers and health plans to offer telehealth services pre-deductible. The National Grange, employers, patient advocates, health care companies and consumer groups are asking Congress to extend this benefit in a year-end legislative package. An impressive total of 358 groups have joined this effort.

National Rural Health Day

The National Grange celebrated National Rural Health Day November 17 at its annual convention in Sparks, Nevada. Events included interviews with NBC and Fox News, and a presentation by Jeff Winton, founder and CEO of Rural Minds on rural suicide prevention and rural mental health awareness. The Biden administration reaffirmed its commitment to helping those in rural, Tribal and geographically isolated regions get access to high-quality, equitable medical care.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

New Broadband Coverage Maps Available

The Federal Communications Commission has released new broadband availability maps meant to more accurately show actual broadband coverage across the country. These maps will replace the census maps data previously used to determine broadband availability which erroneously presumed internet was available in many areas of the country that were actually dead zones. State Granges are urged to contact their state broadband agency for copies of these maps to share with their local Granges to assess map accuracy at the local level.

Some Providers Leaving Rural Broadband

The Federal Communications Commission \$20 billion Rural Digital Opportunity fund drew intense bidding from startups and well known carriers alike. However, several startups have been dropped from the winner's list because of financial problems or the inability to supply high-speed internet access. Some of these include Starry, Geolinks, SpaceX and Cal.net. Other providers are expected to step into the gap.

TRANSPORTATION

Grange urges Congress to Avert Rail Strike

The National Grange and 192 members of the Agricultural Transportation Working Group urged Congress to take swift action to avert a threatened rail strike or lockout. Since enactment of the *Railway Labor Act*, Congress has intervened 18 times. Unfortunately, one major union has rejected the tentative agreement outright and another rejected the agreement but will work through December. Of the 12 unions who have to ratify the tentative agreement, 7 have ratified, 3 have voted against ratification and 2 are still outstanding. Should a strike occur, it could pull up to \$160 billion from the economy, trigger the loss of 700,000 jobs and spike inflation.

PERSPECTIVE

- “ Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies. ~ **Mother Teresa** ”
- “ True friends challenge us and help us to be faithful on our journey. ~ **Pope Benedict XVI** ”
- “ If you’re going to be a good and faithful judge, you have to resign yourself to the fact you’re not always going to like the conclusions you reach. If you like them all the time, you’re probably doing something wrong. ~ **Antonin Scalia** ”
- “ Only the person who has faith in himself is able to be faithful to others. ~ **Erich Fromm** ”
- “ A faithful friend is a strong defense; and he that hath found him hath found a treasure. ~ **Louisa May Alcott** ”