



# NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

*American Values. Hometown Roots.*

*View from the Hill*



## POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS MARCH 2023 WRAP-UP

### WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

#### Little Progress on Debt Limit

Nearly every ongoing conversation in Congress is colored by the looming threat of a debt limit default which could come this summer. Nevertheless, Congress and the White House have made little progress towards an agreement to raise the debt limit and avoid default. As a reminder from last month's View from the Hill, the debt limit is a cap set by Congress on the amount of money which the federal government is authorized to borrow in order to meet ongoing fiscal obligations. It is important to note that the debt limit does not control future or new spending by the federal government, it only controls borrowing to meet existing spending authorized by Congress. Congress has never failed to raise the debt limit when necessary, and has done so 78 separate times since 1960 under Congresses and Presidencies of both parties. Should Congress fail to raise the debt limit before the cap is hit, which is estimated to come sometime in the summer this year, then the federal government would default on its fiscal obligations, certainly causing serious economic turmoil.

In early March, President Biden released his budget request for the 2024 fiscal year, outlining a total of \$6.8 trillion in desired mandatory and discretionary federal spending, along with a number of proposed tax increases to help cover new spending. It is important to note however, that the President's budget is merely a proposal for Congress to consider when it comes time to write annual spending bills later this year. Considering the significant spending and tax increases included in this year's budget proposal, Republicans in Congress have made clear that they will not pass the budget as written, and instead intend to pursue spending cuts for many federal programs.

This discussion around the federal budget ties into ongoing conversations surrounding a debt limit increase, as Congressional Republicans argue that any debt ceiling increase must come with provisions that would require decreased government spending in the future. Democrats in the White House and Congress have thus far refused to agree to anything more than a clean increase of the debt ceiling, arguing that much of the debt accrued since the ceiling was last raised comes as a result of spending from the previous Presidential administration for which they raised the debt ceiling three times. As Congress goes on recess for much of the beginning of April, talks will continue over a potential debt limit increase with only a few months to go before a looming default.

#### Congress Takes First Legislative Actions

In March, Congress began to take its first serious legislative actions for the current session. With support from the White House and many Democratic Senators, a Republican bill to strike down changes to the DC criminal code passed, marking the first bill to become law this year. Furthermore, Congress has also set the stage for repeal of outdated Authorizations of Military Force for the 1991 US invasion of Kuwait and the 2002 invasion of Iraq with significant bipartisan support. Current issues in the banking and tech sector have also spurred calls for

potential new regulations to prevent future bank failures in the wake of a series of high-profile collapses early in March. Finally, a bipartisan consensus has emerged in support of some level of restrictions for the Chinese social media app TikTok, with many pushing for an outright ban.

## AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

### Focus on Dairy

The bicameral, bipartisan *Dairy Pride Act* has been reintroduced in Congress in an effort to combat the practice of labeling non-dairy products using dairy names. Senate cosponsors Risch (R-ID), Baldwin (D-WI), Crapo (R-ID), Collins (R-ME), and Welch (D-VT), and House cosponsors Joyce (R-PA), Kuster (D-WI), Van Orden (R-WI), Craig (D-MN) and Courtney (D-CT) say the Dairy Pride Act will require non-dairy products made from seeds, plants, and algae to no longer be mislabeled with dairy terms such as milk, yogurt or cheese. Meanwhile, the FDA has acknowledged the problem of nutritional differences and has drafted recommendations to prevent consumer confusion about the nutritional makeup of plant-based milk alternatives. Unfortunately, the guidelines still permit the use of the term “milk” on plant-based products and have not yet addressed labeling of cheese and yogurt.

### USDA’s New “Product of USA” Label

A proposed new rule would allow the voluntary “Product of the USA” or “Made in the USA” label claims to be used on meat, poultry, and egg products only when born, raised, harvested, and processed in the United States. The change would alter the current language which allows for meat derived outside the U.S. to bear a “Product of the USA” label if it is processed in an American facility. National Grange policy has long supported such requirements.

### More Free School Meals

USDA is proposing rule changes to allow more schools to offer free meals to all students regardless of income. Under existing eligibility provisions, schools can offer free meals to all students if at least 40% of the students have household incomes below the federal poverty line. Approximately 16 million students get free meals now under existing policy; the proposal would expand that number to 25 million.

### Equity Commission Interim Report

Interim recommendations have been received by USDA from its Equity Commission appointed to recommend solutions to alleged differences in equity treatment to those served by the Department. A final report is expected by the end of the year. Recommendations included land access funding for minority producers, relief for distressed borrowers, eligibility to participate in USDA programs for owners of heirs property, suggestions regarding elections and operations of Farm Service County committees and more.

## FY '24 APPROPRIATIONS

### Grange Supports Ag and Food Priorities

The National Grange joined other food, agriculture, conservation, and environmental groups to urge Congress to support funding of priority items in the fiscal year 2024 which begins October 1, 2023. These priorities include agricultural research, agriculture extension education, agriculture economics, research facilities, innovation, conservation, export promotion and development, disease control and prevention, pest control and more. The Grange is concerned that U.S. public food and agriculture research has fallen by a third since 2002. Cutting edge research is critical to America’s competitiveness and national security.

## CONSERVATION and ENVIRONMENT

### Climate Alliance Farm Bill Priorities

The Food and Climate Alliance is a coalition of ag, food, conservation, environmental and agribusiness groups, including the National Grange, that came together to propose a series of new farm bill provisions needed to help producers and landowners address climate change. The proposals include a broad emphasis on using USDA conservation programs to encourage farmers, ranchers, and forest owners to adopt practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, capture carbon and make operations more resilient to droughts, floods and other weather-related disasters.

## HEALTH CARE

### Breakthrough Alzheimer's Treatments Bypass Rural Patients

Alzheimer's disease kills twice as many people in rural America compared to urban areas. A recent editorial in the Kansas City Star by National Grange President Betsy Huber argues that Medicare coverage for breakthrough Alzheimer's treatments discriminates against rural Americans and should be reversed. Medicare covers only beneficiaries enrolled in studies run exclusively in a limited number of urban medical centers. Huber called for government agencies to ensure health equity for rural America by establishing study sites in more of the accessible parts of the country so rural Americans will not be left behind. Fortunately, expanding Alzheimer's coverage has bipartisan support in Congress.

### Urgent Need for RSV Vaccine

The respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) cases rose sharply during the fall and early winter of 2022 and proved to be a serious respiratory condition for infants and older adults. News outlets reported challenges the remaining rural hospitals faced as they tried to cope with the influx of patients needing care with no space to offer them. National Grange's Burton Eller recently testified before FDA's Vaccines and Related Products Advisory Committee and stressed the urgent need to approve a safe, effective vaccine to prevent RSV. When fall arrives this year, we could once again face a quadruple threat from flu, pneumonia, RSV and COVID.

### Continue Access to Pharmacist Services

During the recent pandemic, pharmacies were temporarily allowed to become front-line providers of COVID testing and vaccination. This was important because rural residents are generally closer to pharmacies than hospitals and clinics. The National Grange has joined patient, pharmacist, senior, rural, and other stakeholder groups in support of the bipartisan *Equitable Community Access to Pharmacist Services Act* (HR 1770) to enable pharmacists to continue providing care and to expand these services to include additional testing and treatment for flu, strep and RSV in addition to COVID and be covered by Medicare Part B.

## RIGHT TO REPAIR

### Case IH and New Holland Sign On

The American Farm Bureau has signed right to repair agreements with farm equipment manufacturers Case IH and New Holland. The memorandum of understanding is similar to the agreement signed with John Deere earlier this year. The MOU sets a framework for farmers and independent repair facilities to access manuals, tools, parts, product guides and other information to self-diagnose and self-repair machinery while protecting the intellectual property rights of the manufacturer.

## TAXES

### Support for Estate Tax Repeal

The National Grange joined 111 members of the Family Business Coalition and the Family Business Estate Tax Coalition in support of Senator Thune's (R-SD) *Death Tax Repeal Act*. The estate tax currently accounts for only one half of one percent of federal revenue. In addition, the tax forces family businesses to spend money on insurance policies and estate planning services instead of expanding their businesses and creating more jobs.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

### Rural Poles Slow Internet Buildout

The Wall Street Journal recently reported that high speed internet rollout to rural America is being delayed as cable companies and electric utilities battle over who pays when new utility poles are needed for internet services. The poles are owned by electric or phone companies that often aren't receiving public money to build out broadband. Broadband providers need access to these existing poles to run their broadband lines. Pole owners need to be compensated for "make ready" costs such as moving existing wires or replacing poles. Internet providers say they are experiencing high fees and foot-dragging from pole owners. The Federal Communications Commission has drafted but not released mediation guidelines that would help solve this problem. The National Grange has petitioned the FCC several times in recent months to release the mediation document.

## OF INTEREST

### Not in a Recession?

Recession or not, Americans say they are poorer today according to a Gallup poll. In fact, Gallup says in nearly 50 years of polling only once before have so many people reported dwindling fortunes and that was during the Great Recession of 2008 and 2009. The national credit card balance hit a record \$931 billion at the end of 2022. The national savings rate has hovered below 5 percent since the start of 2022, the lowest since 2009. The toxic combination of inflation and high interest rates means consumers will probably spend and invest less in 2023.

## PERSPECTIVE

“ We can live without our friends, but not without our neighbors. ~ **Thomas Fuller** ”

“ Everyone says I'm like the girl next door... Y'all must have really weird neighbors. ~ **Kelly Clarkson** ”

“ Good fences make good neighbors. ~ **Robert Frost** ”

“ Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners, and necessity has made us allies. Those whom God has so joined together, let no man put asunder. ~ **John F. Kennedy** ”

# GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY IN ACTION AWARD



*submit a minimum one-page written description  
of your Grange's grassroots advocacy action  
along with at least one photo*

**Deadline: September 1**

**More information: [bit.ly/23ngadvocacy](https://bit.ly/23ngadvocacy)**