



NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS APRIL 2023 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

Debt Ceiling Fight Moves Forward

In April, House Republicans offered their first concrete proposal to address the imminent debt ceiling default. The Republican proposal comes in the form of the Limit, Save, and Grow Act, which passed the House this past week. The Act would first address the debt limit default by waiving the debt limit through March 31st, 2024 or until a \$1.5 trillion increase in federal spending occurs, whichever comes sooner. In exchange for raising the debt limit, the proposal includes a variety of Republican legislative priorities which would total a decrease in federal spending of an estimated \$4.5 trillion over the next ten years. This decrease in spending would come from a reset of federal discretionary spending levels to fiscal year 2022, a 1% cap in discretionary spending increases over the next ten years, and a variety of targeted spending cuts.

Targeted spending cuts included in the bill represent a wide range of Republican policy priorities. To start, the bill would rescind an estimated ~\$100 million in unspent COVID funding and prevent President Biden's loan forgiveness executive orders from going into effect. The bill also repeals a variety of clean energy tax credits which were passed last year as part of the *Inflation Reduction Act*. As well, the removal of these tax credits would increase the deficit, though they are offset by wider spending decreases. Furthermore, the bill would remove increased funding for staffing at the IRS, which would similarly increase the deficit, not decrease it. Finally, the bill would increase work requirements for many federal welfare programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Proposals effecting SNAP could dramatically change dynamics surrounding this year's Farm Bill debates, where nutrition assistance programs are likely to be a hot topic.

Beyond spending cuts, the Republican proposal also includes several elements of the *Regulations from the Executive Need Scrutiny* (REINS) Act, a long-time conservative priority, and other legislative changes. The REINS Act would target executive branch authorities by requiring that any new regulation which would have an annual effect on the economy of \$100 million or more would have to be approved by both the House and the Senate before it could go into effect. This would represent a dramatic shift in the balance of power between the executive and legislative branches which has not been seen for decades. As well, other legislative priorities attached to the debt limit increase include proposals to increase domestic oil and gas production and streamlined permitting reform for a variety of infrastructure projects, both of which would increase the deficit.

While the bill has passed the House, this is just a first offering from Congressional Republicans and many of the key elements of the bill are nonstarters for the Democratic Senate and White House. However, with both Republican and Democratic parameters for a debt ceiling increase established, negotiations between the two sides can begin to move towards a compromise.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Milk Price Reform Takes Center Stage

USDA has received conflicting requests from milk producers and dairy processors to address problems with the way producers and processors are compensated through federal milk marketing orders. Milk marketing orders

were created about a century ago to establish minimum prices paid to farmers in a particular region and to ensure payments to farmers are accurate and timely. The International Dairy Foods Association filed a petition with USDA that proposes to update formulas used to calculate “make-allowances” which are rough estimates of the cost to turn raw milk into finished dairy products (cheese, Ice cream, yogurt, etc.). The National Milk Producers Federation is pushing for changes in the formula for pricing milk in addition to certain changes in make allowances. The Secretary of Agriculture must decide whether to deny the petition or issue an action plan that would include a 129-day hearing process. It’s been 15 years since the formulas for make allowances have been changed, but 23 years since Class I fluid milk prices have been adjusted.

Restore Work Requirements for SNAP

Houser Speaker Kevin McCarthy wants to restore and expand Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) work requirements for able-bodied adults in exchange for negotiations with President Biden to raise the nation’s debt ceiling. Work requirements were relaxed during the pandemic but are due to go back into full effect May 11 which will require able-bodied people 18 to 49 without dependents to work or be in a training program at least 20 hours a week. House Republicans are looking at expanding the upper age to 55 and including parents with children over 6.

Tracking Foreign Land Purchases

After a three-year gap in the disclosure of foreign purchases of U.S. land, the USDA has doubled the number of staff tracking these transactions and will take another look at past transactions. The department assessed no penalties between 2015 and 2018 and many bipartisan members of Congress want to know the current state of enforcement of the Agriculture Foreign Investment Disclosure Act.

Emphasis on Local

A bipartisan group of senators and representatives have introduced the Local Farms and Food Act. The bill reforms the Local Agriculture Market Program, the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. The aim is to build infrastructure for small and midsize farmers to sell at local markets and provide incentives for low-income households to purchase local foods.

CONSERVATION and ENVIRONMENT

WOTUS Rule Blocked in 26 Additional States

The Biden Administration rule defining “waters of the United States” is no longer in effect in 26 states as the result of a district court injunction issued in mid-April which stated the 2023 rule poses a threat to states’ sovereign rights and amounts to irreparable harm. An additional 24 states were covered by an earlier court injunction. Therefore, the WOTUS rule has essentially been set aside nationwide until the Supreme Court issues its decision in the *Sackett* case which is expected in June.

Proposed Emission Regulations to Promote Electric Vehicles

EPA is set to propose new tailpipe emission limits that are the strongest ever federal pollution standards for cars and trucks according to Administrator Michael Regan. The new standards will be difficult to meet unless manufacturers shift more of their sales toward electric vehicles. Regan estimates the new standards will stop 10 billion tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere and reduce oil imports by 20 billion barrels.

HEALTH CARE

Judge Strikes Free Preventive Services

A federal Texas judge recently struck down a provision of the Affordable Care Act that requires insurers and employers to cover preventive services such as cancer screenings and HIV drugs for free. The decision likely

jeopardizes access to treatment for approximately 100 million patients who use free preventive services annually. The Biden administration is expected to appeal.

Update Prescribing Information for Health Care Providers

The National Grange joined numerous health care industry entities in support of the bipartisan *Prescription Information Modernization Act of 2023*. The Act enables the distribution of electronic prescribing information which eliminates 8-12 months of preparation and delivery time for paper prescribing information. Prescribing information is complex scientific and technical information specifically for prescribers and pharmacists and is different from labeling information patients receive with prescriptions.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

USDA Promotes Rural Internet

The availability of \$20 million from USDA will target broadband technical assistance in rural communities and support the development and expansion of broadband cooperatives. The new Broadband Technical Assistance Program will support feasibility studies, network designs and financial assistance applications. USDA will partner with small towns, local utilities, cooperatives and private companies. Cooperatives must propose projects that support establishment or growth of broadband cooperatives that benefit rural communities. Funding comes from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

New Locations Added to Broadband Map

Nearly three million new broadband-serviceable locations have been added to the Federal Communications Commission's nationwide broadband map that indicates where fixed broadband could be installed. In addition, the FCC has processed over four million challenges to broadband availability shown on the first iteration of its map. This second version of the map is expected to be released later this spring. Map accuracy is critical because it will be used to fund projects funded by the \$42.5 billion Broadband Equity, Access and Development (BEAD) program.

TRANSPORTATION

Rail Safety Legislation

The National Grange joined members of the agriculture input supply chain to support the goal of bipartisan rail safety legislation currently being negotiated between Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee chair Cantwell (D-WA) and ranking member Cruz (R-TX). The prospective bill would:

- Increase rail car inspections and audit requirements
- Add defect detectors to identify defective equipment
- Increase funding for first responder training
- Increase funding for rail safety infrastructure
- Increase funding for tank car research grants

OF INTEREST

Big City Exodus

The retreat from urban centers that began during the pandemic is continuing. From 2020 to 2022, over two million people fled America's largest cities. Only a fresh influx of immigrants saved big cities from even more dramatic population declines, according to the Economic Innovation Group, a bipartisan public policy organization. The historic exodus, combined with chronic office vacancies and surging crime, could pose

profound challenges for America's large cities. One large scale survey released last year found that nineteen million people planned to move because of telework.

How Will the IRS Spend Its \$80 Million Funding Boost?

A large-scale refurbishment of the Internal Revenue Service is underway following an \$80 billion infusion to the agency in last year's Inflation Reduction Act. According to the Treasury Department's operating plan, the money will be spent over the next decade to hire tens of thousands of new employees, upgrade technology and expand its data and analytics capabilities. IRS objectives will be to restore a depleted IRS staff, crack down on tax evasion, close the "tax gap" (uncollected taxes), and boost compliance and analysis.

PERSPECTIVE

- “ The earth is a fine place and worth fighting for. ~ **Ernest Hemingway** ”
- “ The earth will not continue to offer its harvest, except with faithful stewardship. We cannot say we love the land then take steps to destroy it for use by future generations. ~ **Pope John Paul II** ”
- “ What's the use of a fine house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on. ~ **Henry David Thoreau** ”
- “ We have forgotten how to be good guests, how to walk lightly on the earth as other creatures do. ~ **Barbara Ward** ”
- “ A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself. Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people. ~ **Franklin D. Roosevelt** ”

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