

GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

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Republican Majority Shrinking

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Republican Majority Shrinking

House Republicans only have a two-vote majority, shrinking to 219-213 in the House of Representatives. There will be three open seats in Congress with the retirement of Representative Bill Johnson (R-OH-06). Rep. Johnson resigned from the House on January 21 to become the president of Youngstown State University, announcing last November he'd accepted the university post. The other two vacancies in districts formerly held by ex-Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA-20) and George Santos (R-NY-

03). Additionally, House Majority Leader Steve Scalise's office has announced that he will work remotely until returning to Washington in February as he recovers from a stem cell transplant.

—AmericanHort's Capitol Wire & JZ

Farm Bill: Yes or No in 2024?

The 2018 Farm Bill is now set to expire on September 30, 2024. Things became interesting in December when Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee Rep. David Scott (D-GA-13) criticized the lack of a 2023 Farm Bill, upsetting committee staff and Republican members.

"The Farm Bill is critical to farmers and the families they feed," Scott said in a statement. "It is shameful that the House Republican leadership does not seem to share in our commitment to advancing the interests of agriculture and rural America."

A House AG GOP lawmaker called the statement "a joke," but this also revealed Farm Bill frustration in the House. GOP aides and lawmakers say Ranking Member Scott has said in private that he wants to work with House Ag Chair G.T. Thompson (R-PA-15) on a Farm Bill, but the Georgia Democrat and his staff have not engaged with Republicans since putting forward a list of possible spending offsets for the Farm Bill. Some House Republicans do not believe House Democrats want to pass a Farm Bill this year, arguing Democrats would rather push the bill into 2025 when they could retake the majority.

—AmericanHort's Capitol Wire

A Change to CAD This Year

The Society of American Florists is changing the way they do their annual Congressional Action Days (CAD) for 2024. Calling it “CAD 365,” they’ve re-engineered the event to include multiple targeted meetings instead of just one day on Capitol Hill.

According to SAF President Oscar Fernandez, this will help ensure that more value is added to members’ time spent with their representatives.

“During those targeted meetings, floral professionals will visit Washington D.C. and meet with congressional offices that influence the issues they care about during the most opportune times of the year to discuss them,” he said. “For instance, early spring is a great time to talk to Congress about appropriations, so we’re going to set up meetings with key congressional offices and floral industry constituents to make a case for why we need continued floriculture research funding.”

For more information, go to safnow.org/events-education/congressional-action-days. —JZ

No More Wavering on Visa Waivers

AmericanHort’s collaborators at the National Council of Agricultural Employers (NCAE) report that a deal has been struck between the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State that interview waivers will continue to be available for H-2A visa beneficiaries. There’s no termination point for the extension of this authority at this time. First-time H-2As will be eligible for waivers, however, the State Department will be required to collect fingerprints of potential beneficiaries. The Department is fast-tracking this authority in its Mexican consulates and anticipates availability in other consulates as well. An important step for timely visa processing as demand strains capacity.

—*AmericanHort’s Capitol Wire*

AmericanHort Signs Letter on Rail Border Issue

AmericanHort joined over 40 agricultural groups in a letter to the Department of Homeland Security requesting the immediate opening of the El Paso and Eagle Pass international rail crossings. This closure of the rail crossings is costing the U.S. supply chain and having negative impacts on the U.S. economy and the movement of North American freight. You can read the letter to Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas [HERE](#).

Highlights From the Annual NAPPO Meeting

Craig Regelbrugge of AmericanHort received well-deserved recognition in December during the North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO) annual meeting in Merida, Yucatan, Mexico. Established in 1976, NAPPO serves as the leading phytosanitary standard-setting organization for North America, fostering collaboration among public and private sectors in Canada, the United States and Mexico.

Its primary mission is to facilitate safe trade while ensuring regional protection of plant resources and the environment. Craig was acknowledged for his remarkable leadership over the past 25 years as the head of the Industry Advisory Group.

Other highlights from the NAPPO meeting included Dr. Mike Klopmeier, President of Ball FloraPlant, presenting industry perspectives on whether or not novel tobamoviruses should be regulated as quarantine pests. Mike described the extensive efforts breeders and growers undertake to keep host plant crops free of tobamoviruses

generally, and how the industry responds in rare cases where there are outbreaks. He argued that the industry essentially self-regulates and that traditional quarantines could actually complicate timely, market-driven response to outbreaks when they do occur.

There was also a session on emerging threats in the region that spotlighted three pests: boxwood tree moth, spotted lanternfly and citrus leprosis.

As outgoing chairman of the U.S. Industry Advisory Group to NAPPO, Craig provided a U.S. industry update, discussing emerging pests, as well as progress toward the adoption of plant certification systems approaches. —
JZ

Talking Seasonal Workforce

AmericanHort members from North Carolina (**Bert Lemkes**, Tri-Hishtil, LLC; **Ariel Montanez**, Pender Nursery; **Art VanWingerden**, Metrolina Greenhouses; and **Gary Whitehurst**, Worthington Farms, Inc.) met virtually with Bubba White, Legislative Director for Rep. David Rouzer (R-NC-07), in December to discuss workforce needs, the Adverse Effect Wage Rate and the H-2A program in general. The meeting took place as the House Agriculture Committee-Agricultural Labor Working Group continues to work to advance constructive solutions for H-2A, agricultural and seasonal worker needs.

—AmericanHort's Capitol Wire

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