

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**February 5, 2001**

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LAST WEEK

SENATE CONFIRMATION OF CABINET-On Tuesday, January 30, 2001
 Gale Norton was confirmed as the Secretary of Interior by a vote of 75-24.
 Christine Todd-Whitman was confirmed as Administrator of EPA by a vote of 99-0.

SENATE OVERSIGHT HEARING – The Commission on 21st Century Production Agriculture (the Commission) presented the findings of its final report to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry (Chairman- Sen. Richard Lugar, R-IN) on Jan. 30, 2001. Keith Collins, USDA Chief Economist, and Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh, chair of the Commission, presented testimony. Dr. Flinchbaugh also gave a final report to the House Committee on Agriculture (Chairman-Rep. Larry Combest, R-TX) on Jan. 31, 2001. Other members of the Commission were present at both hearings to respond to questions from Committee members.

The Commission recommended continuing income support payments and to add new payments. They recommended continuation of the Conservation Reserve Program and to emphasize the buffers, filter strips, and field inclusions through a continuous signup program. They recommended full authorization of the EQIP program and to provide NRCS adequate funding for technical assistance to implement the program.

Questions related to conservation came from several Senators. Sen. Cochran (R-MS) asked whether the Commission considered WRP and WHIP. Commission member John Campbell (Nebraska) strongly endorsed the Conservation Security Program concept as an excellent way to provide income to all farmers that was de-coupled from market distortion, a priority of the Commission's recommendations.

Sen. Lugar (R-IN) was supportive of the Commission's recommendations on small and limited resource farmers, supporting Commission member Ralph Paige's (Georgia) efforts to help black farmers. Sen. Lugar emphasized that outreach efforts are needed to address this issue.

A copy of the Commission's full report is available at <http://www.usda.gov/oce>.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE

The following Bills of significance to NRCS and conservation have been introduced.

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
S. 20	Dashle (SD) and 15 co-sponsors	Would enhance fair and open competition in sale of commodities. Sec. 501 authorizes \$250 million for the Farmland Protection program from CCC funds
S. 130	Johnson (SD)	Would establish a flexible fallow program for set-aside acreage in conservation uses
S. 159	Boxer (CA)	Would elevate EPA to a cabinet level Department
S.Res.13	Dashle (SD)	Sense of the Senate regarding the need to enact a new farm bill during the 1 st session of the 107 th Congress

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THIS WEEK

NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT ROUNDTABLE – On Friday, February 9, 2001 Tom Christensen, Director, Animal Husbandry & Clean Water Programs, will participate in a meeting with the Senate staff and interested groups regarding nutrient management and nitrogen issues.

February 9

2:00pm

328-A Russell Bldg.

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