

Hastings sees hope for ESA, energy bills

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

PASCO, Wash. — As chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee for the past four years, Doc Hastings shepherded bills on Endangered Species Act reform and energy development through the Republican-controlled House only to see them die in the Democratic-controlled Senate.

It was frustrating, he said, but he doesn't view his work as being in vain. Instead, he believes it set the stage for the likely passage of similar measures this session. Republicans now control the Senate and the House.

If President Barack Obama vetoes them, it will highlight the differences between the parties for voters in the 2016 elections, he said.

"With our technology and resources, we have the potential to be the largest producer of natural gas and oil in the world. Why wouldn't we do that? The American people instinctively understand that," said Hastings, who just retired after representing central Washington state in Congress for 20 years.

His bills would have increased offshore drilling and streamlined the process for drilling on public lands onshore. The current reduction in gas prices is largely because of increased drilling on private and state lands in west Texas and North Dakota, he said. More oil could be accessed on public lands.

Already Congress is moving to pass the Keystone XL pipeline and with a court ruling in Nebraska in its favor, a key point of opposition has been removed, Hastings said.

"It has bipartisan support in both houses so this is the opportunity for



Former Congressman Doc Hastings stands in his home with a painting commissioned by private funds of him as chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee. The bust of Ronald Reagan, a gift years ago from his staff, was in his office in Washington, D.C.

Dan Wheat/
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granting legal status to some people was an overreach of executive authority, he said.

Federal debt

While radical Islamic terrorism is a threat to the United States, so is the national debt, Hastings said. The House repeatedly passed bills to reduce entitlement spending by giving people greater choices in health care and retirement, he said. That needs to happen, he said, noting that President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, and a Republican Congress balanced the federal budget for four years, creating surpluses and reducing the national deficit.

That was reversed by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks but the peak of annual deficits under Bush was half to a third what they have reached under Obama, he said.

Hastings faults the president for being unwilling to compromise or even engage in meaningful talks with Congress on many issues. "The most disappointing thing in my political life was 2012 when he was re-elected," he said.

Hastings won't say if he has a favorite for the GOP presidential nomination in 2016, but says it should be someone with executive experience, a governor.

He has an admonition for farmers.

People directly involved in agriculture don't have the political clout they did 100 years ago because now they make up only 3 percent of the population.

"That's why I encourage them to get involved in commodity groups and the Farm Bureau," he said. "They need to continue to speak as loudly as they can."

the president to join in the discussions," he said.

Obama is threatening a veto.

Endangered species

Several years ago a "mega settlement" between the U.S. Department of the Interior and environmental groups led to the potential listing of 750-plus species as threatened or endangered across the country, Hastings said.

From a mussel in Arkansas to a bat in Pennsylvania, it affected parts of the country never before impacted by the ESA, increasing concern in Congress.

Hastings' Endangered Species Transparency and Reasonableness Act would have made public the data used by federal agencies in determining ESA listings.

"It boils down to transparency," Hastings said. "This was to be the

presidency that was going to be the most transparent in history and it hasn't been."

The issue is critical for agriculture, especially in regard to fish, because that involves water and "water fuels agriculture," he said.

"I know there is strong interest in the Senate on this issue," he said. "We talked about ESA (for four years) and I don't think there is any question the momentum we created will have a positive impact in the Senate this session. I think that's true with energy policy also."

Immigration reform

Hastings said he was among those educating House colleagues on the need for immigration reform to include a better guestworker program for labor-intensive agriculture, such as the tree fruit industry in his district.

"There's broad agreement in the House and Senate that the issue needs to be addressed. That wasn't necessarily the case in (immigration reform efforts) 2005 and 2006," he said.

President George W. Bush was aggressive on immigration reform and Obama could have built on that momentum and passed something in this first two years when Democrats controlled the presidency and Congress, he said.

"But there wasn't a peep, not even a peep of immigration legislation. It didn't become an issue until after they lost the House in 2010. There had to be political motivation behind that," he said.

There's a chance Congress will pass immigration reform, but the question is whether the president will engage in give-and-take, he said. The president's executive order

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2014 YIA AWARD WINNER: Andres Parra

Andres Parra (left) receiving his award.

Andres Parra and Jennifer Sirangelo, CEO of National 4-H Council

By Danelle Sabathier

Meet Andres Parra: 2014 4-H Youth in Action (YIA) Award recipient.

Growing up as part of a Mexican immigrant family, Andres Parra experienced many obstacles in life, was overweight, unhealthy, and struggled to find the motivation to excel in school. He was introduced to the 4-H/United Healthcare Eat4-Health program and discovered a passion for nutrition and exercise, which led to more productive academic and personal health habits.

Through the program, Parra dropped from 200 to 146 pounds, and had an opportunity to lead community events and interactive educational activities, empowering other young people to pursue healthy lifestyles. As a teen ambassador, Parra taught more than 200 5th and 6th graders about nutritious eating habits and making healthy choices.

Andres credits 4-H for putting him on a path to success, and empowering him to have a similarly positive impact on his peers and community by teaching them the benefits of healthy eating habits, nutrition and a healthy lifestyle.

Why did you apply for the 4-H Youth in Action (YIA) Award?

Applying for the award was the next big step in my career. I needed to show my community, but most importantly the youth, that living healthy can literally turn your life around, and provides awesome opportunities to meet people that enjoy the same healthy living lifestyle as I do.

Where were you when you learned you were selected as the national 4-H YIA Award winner?

I was teaching youth in the morning at work and knew the CEO of National 4-H Council was coming to the Tucson Village Farm, a non-profit organization that connects youth back to food production and how to live healthier lives. We all took a seat once I finished teaching. Luckily, we already had food catered that day because we had lots of VIP's visiting the farm. I was anxious as to whether I had won the award or not and would check my email every 30 minutes, beginning to worry that I wouldn't receive a response. Soon after we finished eating, the CEO of National 4-H Council, Jennifer Sirangelo, stood up to make an announcement and personally announced the award to me. I was so excited, I jumped out of my seat and hugged her as tight as I could. I felt as though I was at the top of the world. Words could not describe my feelings of excitement that I managed to win the award. I later went home that day to tell my family that I had won and was extremely happy and proud of myself. The next thing that came to my head was that my efforts to live healthy actually resulted in a national award. I was so happy!

How did you feel about traveling to D.C. and participating in the awards event?

Traveling to D.C. was the best time I've ever had in my life because all the hard work I had been doing finally paid off.

What is your greatest memory about your 4-H YIA experience in Washington, D.C.?

My greatest memory was when I got the opportunity to tour D.C. on my own. I saw monuments and buildings, which coming from an immigrant family from Mexico, only seemed like a dream. I dedicated one whole day to jogging to all the monuments to see them up close.

How has your experience as 4-H YIA helped or inspired you in the past year?

Receiving the award has only made me want to push even harder towards getting my Ph.D. Sometimes people come to me and ask for advice or help and some teachers even ask me to give speeches at their schools to inspire the youth to make better life decisions.

Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California 4-H members aged 16-21 are encouraged to apply next year.

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