

Memo from Vilsack awaits next ag secretary

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

When President-elect Trump gets around to nominating a secretary of agriculture — the last unfilled Cabinet position, to the irritation of many in farming and ranching — that person will find a memo waiting from Tom Vilsack, who held the job for eight years under President Obama.

Some excerpts:
“I have made it my priority to ensure USDA embraces all forms of production and producers of all sizes — from organics to conventional, from the smallest to the largest farms and ranches across the nation,” Vilsack wrote.

“Our support has empowered an explosion in the local food movement and significant growth in farmers’ markets and direct sales by farmers to schools, hospitals and other institutions. We have also focused on expanding access to healthier food, implementing the most significant updates to school meals in decades for our nation’s youth, making changes to our programs that ensure mothers and newborns have access to more nutritious food, and helping to reduce child hunger to the lowest level on record.”

Vilsack goes on to say ag exports topped \$1 trillion since 2009, “far and away the best stretch in our nation’s history.” He said exports make up 20

percent of U.S. farmers’ cash receipts, support more than 1 million U.S. jobs and have delivered a trade surplus every year since the 1960s.

Vilsack said USDA grants and investment programs improved life in rural America. He said median rural household income increased 3.4 percent in 2015, poverty rates dropped, rural counties added jobs and rural populations have stabilized and are beginning to grow.

The continued absence of an ag secretary nominee clearly bothered some producers attending the Jan. 7-11 American Farm Bureau Federation convention in Phoenix.

“It concerns us,” AFBF President Zippy Duvall of

Georgia said at a news conference. He said some producers interpreted the delay as a sign that “Mr. Trump does not have a whole lot of interest.”

Duvall said it might be there are many good candidates and Trump was trying to find the right person.

“I hope that’s it,” he said. “We’ve got to trust our new president.”

Duvall said he and representatives of more than 20 other producer groups met with six to eight members of the Trump transition team for 90 minutes the week prior to the AFBF convention. He said the meeting was held at Farm Bureau’s building in Washington, D.C., and resulted in good discussions.



Courtesy USDA
Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack left office Jan. 13 after eight years of service. He’s left a memo for the next ag secretary, who has not yet been appointed by President-elect Trump.

The good, the odd and the stern: A sample of AFBF policy

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

PHOENIX — The signature event of the annual American Farm Bureau Federation convention is the final day, when delegates vote on a 350-page book that states what the nation’s farmers and ranchers favor and what they oppose.

It is grass-roots democracy in action. Quick, efficient and simple “yes” or “no” votes. No grandstanding allowed, no long speeches. Courtesy is the rule. The votes are taken and then it’s on to the next issue.

Here’s a sampling of the Jan. 10 voting:

- Delegates favored a unified Farm Bill that includes nutrition programs and farm programs together. The vote is significant because some in Congress would just as soon remove SNAP food stamp programs, for example, from the Farm Bill.

- They want to rewrite the Antiquities Act, revoke a president’s ability to designate national monuments and give that authority to Congress. In Oregon, people are worried President Barack Obama will designate an Owyhee Canyonlands monument before he leaves office.

- Farm Bureau members favor transferring public lands from federal to state management, and administer them for multiple use such as logging and grazing in addition to recreation. That’s a big issue in the West, where the government manages vast swaths of forest and rangeland.

- The policy book says humans’ need for food, fiber, shelter and energy shall have priority over endangered and threatened species. Take that, spotted owl, gray wolves, sage grouse and more.

- Somewhat oddly, AFBF policy officially opposes any attempt by USDA to substitute yogurt for red meat in school lunches.

- Delegates oppose legalizing recreational marijuana use and believe there should be a quarantine on wildlife in Yellowstone National Park until they are cleared of tuberculosis and brucellosis.

Public lands transfer advocates seeking convention of states to amend Constitution

By JOHN O’CONNELL
Capital Press

SALT LAKE CITY — A leader of the effort to force the transfer of Western federal lands to state control believes calling a convention of states to change the U.S. Constitution is the best path forward.

Utah state Rep. Ken Ivory, R-West Jordan, said states’ rights advocates are already laying the groundwork for a convention.

The federal government owns nearly half of the land in the West, which Ivory believes has tied up resources and put the region’s states at an economic disadvantage. He contends public lands are also in poor health due to federal neglect.

Under Article 5 of the Constitution, two-thirds of states may call a convention, and proposed amendments must be ratified by three-fourths of state legislatures.

Eight states have already passed resolutions calling for a convention. Idaho has a bill in the works to join the list. Thus far, the constitution has been revised only through congressional action.

“Now millions of people are working to convene a convention of states,” said Ivory, who is a lawyer and was picked as the first senior legislative adviser to the Convention of States Project.

The project has volunteers working in all 50 states to “restore the checks and balances that were put in place on our federal government.”

Ivory and Idaho Rep. Tom Loertscher, R-Iona, participated in a simulated convention of states last September in Virginia, addressing a host of perceived



Capital Press File
Utah state Rep. Ken Ivory is working toward a convention of states to amend the U.S. Constitution and force the U.S. government to turn over federal land to the states.

federal overreaches.

Loertscher said the bill he’s drafting to codify Idaho’s support of a convention should easily pass the House of Representatives, and he’s seeking help in the Senate. He said the bill endorses a convention to address “fiscal matters, overreach of the federal government and term limits,” and it could encompass public lands transfer.

“With all of the federal lands in Idaho, we’re operating with one hand tied behind our back,” Loertscher said. “We don’t have the tax base for all of that land.”

Ivory’s home state is also pursuing litigation and congressional action to force land transfers. Utah has conducted a legal analysis and set aside \$5 million for a federal court battle, and Ivory hopes to “see a much more constitutionally focused Supreme Court.”

Ivory believes President-elect Donald Trump’s

selection of Ryan Zinke, R-Mont., for Secretary of Interior signifies a roadblock toward a congressional solution. Zinke, an avid hunter, has publicly opposed transferring federal lands.

“(Zinke) walked out on the Republican National Committee and declined to become a delegate because the transfer of public land was part of the GOP platform,” Ivory said.

Brian Brooks, executive director of Idaho Wildlife Federation, believes Idaho sportsmen overwhelmingly oppose public lands transfer, due to the threat of lost public access and the potential for states to sell the land. Idaho has sold 41 percent of its former state lands, he said.

Brooks believes any avenue toward forcing a public lands sale is a long shot, but

he’s taking the threat seriously, as advocates of the concept are well financed.

“I feel like there are inter-

ests who do not represent the majority of Americans who are going to surround Zinke,” Brooks said.

LEGAL Request for Proposal (RFP) AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT FEASIBILITY STUDY

Si View Metropolitan Park District seeks proposals for consulting services to conduct a feasibility study to evaluate agricultural and natural resource assets at Tollgate Farm, located in North Bend Washington, and to assess how those assets could support alternative scenarios for the redevelopment of the property in a manner that benefits community recreation, local farmers, strengthens the local food system, and increases the local community’s awareness of and engagement with local agriculture. Additionally include the potential opportunities for an agricultural or livestock incubator located on the property, and/or other roles for the property to play in local economic development with particular focus on and around agriculture.

For a complete proposal description go to www.siviewpark.org/contracting-process.html. Proposals are due no later than 12:00 Noon on Friday, January 27th, 2017. Questions regarding the proposal should be directed to Executive Director, Travis Stombaugh, 425-831-1900 tstombaugh@siviewpark.org.

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