

Welcome 2017!

NEW BEGINNINGS FOR THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE AND THE COUNTRY..

Greetings Grangers, I hope this finds you all well. Now that it is officially 2017 we will sweeping changes to the political landscape, both on a state and national level. There will be lots of work going on and lots to pay attention to, as we begin the new year I wanted to provide you with some information so you can watch and listen for all the important issues our state and national leaders will begin dealing with.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AS THE LEGISLATIVE SEASON BEGINS

Here in Minnesota our legislators will be plenty busy...

- 1) The biggest priority for our state legislators will be the creation and passage of our bi-annual budget for the state
- 2) It's been in the news for a while given recent news of a possible special session but with the new legislature sitting things will begin to move quickly for Minnesota health care reform

Governor Dayton has proposed \$1.5 Billion dollars in state construction projects, many of which have an agricultural component or would have a direct impact on some of our MN Grangers, take a look at the attached document to see some of what has been proposed. If you have strong feelings about a particular project consider reaching out to your legislator to advocate for or against it.

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*No party has a monopoly on wisdom. No
democracy works without compromise.*





WHAT TO LOOK FOR CONTINUED...

Not surprisingly we can also expect new and important changes to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, and along with those will come new priorities. After years of divided government (Democrats controlling the White House and Republicans controlling the House of Representatives) the Republicans now have control of both the White House and Congress, which means changes could be swift in President Trump's first 100 days. As the U.S. Congress begins its work look out for some of the following upcoming national debates...

- 1) After years of symbolic votes to repeal Republicans now have Obamacare in their crosshairs and the votes to repeal. The big question now is what will they replace it with and how will this impact Minnesotans?
- 2) Priority number two...a new Supreme Court Justice. The seat left vacant by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia has been open for 11 months and Senate Republicans will act quickly to the nominee put forward by President Trump, but given the small margin Republicans control the Senate by (52 seats to the Democrats 48) they may find Democrats will block potential nominees.
- 3) Immigration and possibly building a border wall. This issue may cause a rift between Republicans as there have been some key members of Congress who have been vocal in their opposition to President Elect Trump's proposed border wall between the U.S. and Mexico, regardless of the potential fight this is likely to be one of the first issues brought up in Washington.

We believe that to err is human. To blame it on someone else is politics.—Hubert H. Humphrey

START WORKING ON YOU 2017 RESOLUTIONS NOW

It's never too early to start looking ahead. At state session in October Minnesota Grangers passed several resolutions which spoke to issues/opportunities Grangers saw at many different levels. Remember as we enter into the new year that Minnesota Grangers and encouraged to write resolutions about issues that matter to them—and resolutions do not always have to relate to local, state, or national politics. This year Grangers wrote and submitted resolutions that spoke to ideas or opportunities relating to: the State Grange of Minnesota, the National Grange, laws/regulations within the State of Minnesota, and laws/regulations that impact the United States as a whole.

Your ideas are important and your voice should be heard. As you or your Grange think of ideas and changes you would like made within our State or National Grange, or at the local, state, or national congressional levels take the time to write out a resolution that we can review and vote on at State Session in November.

Who knows, your ideas could go on to National Grange and become policy that the Grange advocates for on a national level!



MN LAWMAKERS GET TO WORK IN RENOVATED CAPITOL

After almost three years of work the capitol building has been restored and has reopened. The 112 year old building reopened after major structural enhancements and restoration of its century old aesthetics.

Take advantage of the recent restoration by taking a free guided tour from the Minnesota Historical Society.

Find tour times and information online at <http://www.mnhs.org/capitol/activities/tours>

HOW WILL YOU MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD?

In November Grangers across the country went to the polls to exercise their right to speak out and make their voice heard on important issues facing this country, but now that the voting is over will you continue to speak to your local, state, and nationally elected officials? In many ways the easiest part of our job as citizens has come to an end, we spoke at the ballot box, now the hard work begins. As our elected officials begin the work of governing it becomes more important for us to continue to exercise our right to speak and make our opinions heard. I challenge all of our Minnesota Grangers to continue to fight for those issues that are important not just to the Grange but to you on a personal level as well. Remember that all Grangers have the right and responsibility to keep our politicians honest and to advocate for what you think is right. Do this by:

- 1) Writing letters or emails to your representatives. Look for a new letter writing campaign in 2017, letters will be mailed to your Grange Master in early February. Keep in mind that the Minnesota Legislature sits from January—May so get your letters in early!
- 2) Join us at Minnesota Legislative Drive In Day. Grangers from across Minnesota will gather in Saint Paul on March 19th and 20th to meet with Minnesota Representatives and Senators. We will have the opportunity to speak face to face with key lawmakers and advocate for changes we would like to see in our state.
- 3) Put the word out. Is there an issue you feel passionately about that the legislature is dealing with, or you feel they should deal with? Tell your friends, encourage others to contact their representatives. In Minnesota the Grange, small as we are, represents an important voice and has a wide reach across the state. If there is something you feel passionately about enlist the help of fellow Grangers to contact their representatives, you might be surprised at how much of a voice our 100+ members can have when we speak together.

NATIONAL MASTER BETSY HUBER'S OP-ED IN THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER FROM JANUARY 17, 2017

Rural issues have always been important to my family and me. I grew up on a dairy farm in southeastern Pennsylvania and I have seen firsthand the contributions people who live in rural areas make to our country. While they do not work the most glamorous jobs, the farmers and ranchers in every state are the proud backbone of the country and work very hard to ensure that there is food on the table for their fellow Americans. I have proudly been a member of the Grange for my entire life and I now have the privilege of representing rural America as the National President of the Grange.

For 150 years, the National Grange has worked to help solve the problems that our members face in their local communities – making sure that rural America has access to education, healthcare and infrastructure that is found in urban areas and championing civic participation, energy independence and trade policy that supports rural agriculture. As the new Congress looks to overhaul the Affordable Care Act, our job is to ensure the debate includes the current challenges around access to healthcare in rural communities and any new policy ensures we are taking steps toward solving these issues not making them worse.

Repealing the Affordable Care Act or "Obamacare" could severely damage the principal healthcare institutions of many rural communities — the local hospitals.

But there is a way to repeal the law that will not further endanger our local healthcare institutions. When Obamacare was passed in 2009, the federal government significantly cut Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals in favor of funding insurance coverage for uninsured patients. Should Congress proceed with repeal of the ACA, we must ensure the legislation includes the restoration of these reimbursements.

Rural Americans are statistically older and more likely to be a part of the nearly 50 million Medicare beneficiaries, making Medicare, and also Medicaid, functionality and preservation essential for rural residents.

In recent years, many community hospitals have had to shut down and many others have had to limit the services they offer to stay afloat. This problem will be exacerbated should the repeal of the Affordable Care Act not allow for the proper funding of hospitals through Medicare and Medicaid programs. According to an analysis by healthcare economics firm Dobson DaVanzo, if legislation for repeal is passed without restoring the \$400 billion in hospital cuts, it would result in the largest Medicare cut to hospitals in history.

A loss of this magnitude will have an immense impact in small, rural communities throughout the country, including the towns and communities of thousands of members of the National Grange, as nearly one-third of rural hospitals are already at risk of closure. The hospitals in these communities rely heavily on Medicare and Medicaid payments and they will be the first to close or cut back their services. These programs are the safety net for so many Americans and it will be devastating if they are not supported.

It is estimated that over 11 million patients in rural areas, representing a fifth of the rural population, will lose direct access to care if our community hospitals are not protected. This will not only have a large impact on the economy in these areas, but will ripple out to the rest of the country. Agricultural businesses may not be able to provide the rest of the country with the food to sustain everyone.

As our health priorities state, the National Grange believes that access to affordable healthcare should never depend on a person's geographic location. We ask that Congress work to ensure that rural America has the same level of healthcare coverage and services available to its urban counterparts. This is why restoring the Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals should be the top priority for Congress as it moves forward with healthcare reform. That is the only way that we, as a nation, can keep our local hospitals operational and able to serve their communities.

WHAT WILL MN LAWMAKERS DO ABOUT HEALTHCARE IN 2017

As National Grange President Betsy Huber acknowledged in her January 17th op-ed it is important to recognize that changes to the Affordable Care Act could have a drastic impact on rural communities, and it is important that Grangers keep up on changes to our health care system. Currently Minnesota lawmakers are discussing what should be done on the state level to offer relief to Minnesotans grappling with rising health care costs. Here are some of the current details:

- 1) The Republican lead state house approved a version of a relief package that will offer hundreds of millions of dollars in insurance rebates along with changes that will expand coverage networks, particularly in greater Minnesota.
- 2) Governor Dayton has proposed a plan that would provide financial aid through insurance companies without an income test. While the plan passed by the House and Senate would rule out anyone who makes more than eight times the federal poverty limit, or above \$194,000.
- 3) Currently the biggest difference between the two plans is who provides financial assistance, Governor Dayton's plan would have aid come from insurance companies while the plan proposed by the House and Senate would have the state send rebate checks.

Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future.
—President John F. Kennedy

WHAT HAPPENS IF OBAMACARE IS REPEALED?

The congressional Budget Office analyzed the repeal measure made by Republicans in 2016—which Republicans have cited as a starting point for their 2017 drive to dismantle and replace Obamacare. According to the nonpartisan budget office's report insurance premiums would soar and roughly 18 million Americans would lose health coverage. This is all assuming that when Republicans move to repeal Obamacare they have no replacement plan ready to implement, though they have produced several outlines for how they would recraft the health care law the party has never been able to unite behind one plan.

It will be important as the U.S. Congress and the President continue to negotiate plans for the overhaul to the nation's current health care laws for Minnesota Grangers to pay attention to the changes that are being proposed. Since the Grange has been instrumental in fighting for the rights of rural Americans for generations and the potential repeal of current health care laws will have an important impact on rural Americans it will be important for our organization to have a voice and a say in the reform process.

I challenge all MN Grangers to keep their eyes and ears open and don't be afraid to contact your Congressional Representatives and Senators!

FROM OUR NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

On January 26th our National Legislative Director, Burton Eller, sent information along to all Legislative Directors regarding the recent executive order on the Affordable Care Act that was signed by President Trump on Inauguration Day. Because the repeal, replacement, and transition of the ACA will take considerable time Mr. Eller has received many questions about what the executive order does and how it will affect individual Grangers. Please see an analysis of the executive order from the Council for Affordable Health Coverage below; the National Grange is a member of the CAHC.

On January 20, 2017 President Trump issues an executive order “Minimizing the Economic Burden of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act Pending Repeal.” The executive order establishes that the Trump Administration intends to use all regulatory mechanisms available within the law’s scope to provide greater flexibility and minimize burdens while Congress completes legislative repeal of the ACA. Specifically, the executive order directs the HHS Secretary and all other related departments and agencies “to exercise all authority and discretion available to them to waive, defer, grant exemptions from, or delay the implementation of any provision...that would impose a fiscal burden on any State or a cost, fee, tax, penalty, or regulatory burden on individuals.”

In other words, the executive order instructs the federal government to *begin* taking actions to shield individuals and families, employers, health care stakeholders, and states from all fiscal and regulatory burdens of the ACA “to the maximum extent permitted by the law.” The executive order does not yet enact specific policy changes. Those are expected to follow in subsequent department and agency actions. **What does this all mean?**

- The executive order signals that the Trump Administration’s priority is to rapidly roll back major provisions of the ACA that impose fiscal or regulatory burdens. Wherever possible under current statute, the Administration intends to deregulate and create greater flexibility.
- The executive order does not have specific or immediate policy impacts, those are expected to follow in subsequent executive actions and federal agency rulemaking.
 - ◊ In one sense, this executive order serves as a symbolic measure, allowing President Trump to claim he fulfilled his pledge to take action on day one to repeal the ACA.
- Given the emphasis on minimizing fiscal and regulatory burdens, the Trump Administration may stop enforcing the individual and employer coverage mandates.
 - ◊ Halting enforcement of the individual mandate may reduce the range of savings available to Congress in repealing the ACA. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that eliminating the individual mandate starting in 2018 while maintaining the ACA’s other provisions (including premium tax credits) would save \$416 billion between 2018 and 2026, under the assumption that fewer people would sign up for Medicaid or subsidized exchange coverage.
- The executive order may also contribute to uncertainty felt by consumers during the ACA’s still ongoing open enrollment period for plan year 2017 and insurers assessing their market participation and plan rates for plan year 2018, pending further action by the Trump Administration.



SGMN DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMMING

Born and raised in Minnesota Ashley Wyatt holds a B.A. from Bethel University in Business/Political Science and History and an M.A. in History from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Currently she works at the Basilica of Saint Mary in Minneapolis as their Coordinator for Stewardship, Volunteers, and Membership. She joined the Oliver Hudson Kelley Grange in 2015 and is excited to represent the Grange, alongside others, serving as a voice to strengthen communities and promote sustainable agriculture. Ashley can be reached at wyaash@bethel.edu.

PROTECTING MN WATERS

Governor Dayton recently signed a \$500 million dollar deal to protect the Minnesota environment. As a result thousands of acres of environmentally sensitive land in southwest Minnesota will now be converted to native plants and grasses. The aim of this new project is to protect Minnesota waters from polluted runoff. The money to fund the project will come from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (\$350 million) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (\$150 million).

This program is voluntary but targets 60,000 acres of farmland, including stretches of land along the Minnesota River—one of the country's most polluted rivers and a major contributor to the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. Approximately 100 square miles of land will be returned to native grass and wetlands. Native plants filter water, prevent erosion and provide critical habitat for a wide range of prairie species including pheasants, badgers, and pollinators such as the monarch butterfly.

The government expects farmers to apply in large numbers, thanks in part to a recent drop in commodity prices and a end to the boom in land prices, which sweeten the appeal of a conservation alternative. As we continue to watch the 2017 legislative year develop keep your ears and eyes open for other developments in Minnesota conservation and environmental legislation.

Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you.
—Pericles (430 B.C)

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE STATE GRANGE OF MINNESOTA'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMMING IN 2017

- 1) **Make sure to join other MN Grangers for Legislative Drive In on March 19th and 20th!** Come spend time in Saint Paul meeting with influential state lawmakers and having fun with other Grangers. Breakout sessions the night before will provide information on how to speak with representatives, how to lobby, and what the process is like. State Master TJ and Legislative Director Ashley will accompany grangers to meet with their representatives on Monday morning. Planning on joining us and interested in meeting with YOUR representatives? Contact Ashley at wyaash@bethel.edu or 952.412.1771 so she can try to setup a time to meet your representative. Interested in learning about possible financial help to attend, contact Ashley for details.
- 2) **Look for new letter writing campaigns, sample letters will be email and mailed out to your Grange master to be distributed to members.**
- 3) **Interested in learning how to write effective resolutions as a Grange?** Invite Director of Legislative Programming to one of your Grange meetings for a short fun workshop and a chance to write a resolution or two as a Grange that will be submitted at State Session and may go on to National Grange in November.