



What's ahead for Washington this week: jobs & green jobs

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Washington, Feb. 7 – It's a safe bet that when he addresses journalists Monday at the National Press Club, Agriculture Secretary Vilsack will have more to say about green jobs. That's because this is the week when Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) hopes to save his own endangered job by having the Senate pass a bipartisan jobs bill. . . necessarily bipartisan because the arrival of Sen. Scott Brown (D-MA) means that Senate Republicans now have the 41 votes needed to block legislation with filibusters.

Democrats hope that their jobs bill will include enough in tax breaks for small business to attract the Republican support needed to pass the legislation.

Sec. Vilsack will be on the national stage again Tuesday when he takes part in First Lady Michelle Obama's formal launch of her new – hopefully bipartisan – program to combat childhood obesity. A key part of the overall effort will be rewriting the authorizing legislation this year to focus USDA's nutrition and food assistance programs to feature more fresh fruits and vegetables and more low-fat dairy products – as much as possible locally sourced.

Despite DC expecting even more snow this week, Sec. Vilsack and Deputy Sec. Kathleen Merrigan will be busy with one-year-anniversary People's Garden events, encouraging more grow-your-own efforts. That's probably the only aspect of agriculture that won't be covered in USDA's "Agricultural Projections to 2019" report being released Thursday. This annual report covers agricultural crop and livestock commodities, agricultural trade, and aggregate indicators such as farm income and food prices through 2019. The report assumes that the 2008 Farm Bill will remain in effect through 2019, that international trade rules will remain unchanged, and that there will be normal weather throughout the projection period.

Further afield, USDA hosts a free public workshop Tuesday in Blacksburg, VA on the joint USDA/Commerce broadband grant and loan programs.

In a sign that the Democrats' healthcare bill is not entirely dead – or perhaps in a sign that the Democrats have given up all hope of passing the bill and therefore will add more provisions to attract public support, knowing the bill will be blocked by a GOP filibuster

in the Senate – this week the House plans to consider legislation to end the health insurance industry's exemption from antitrust laws.

In congressional hearings this week:

Tuesday Feb. 9

- Senate Budget Committee hearing on Economic Outlook and Risks for the Federal Budget and Debt
- Senate Energy Committee hearing on financial transmission rights and other electricity market mechanisms, witnesses to include FERC Chair Jon Wellinghoff, & CFTC Chair Gary Gensler

Wednesday, Feb. 10

- Senate Banking Committee hearing on Equipping Financial Regulators with the Tools Necessary to Monitor Systemic Risk
- Senate Budget Committee hearing on Setting and Meeting an Appropriate Target for Fiscal Sustainability
- Senate Energy Committee hearing on the proposed budget for the Department of the Interior, with Interior Secretary Salazar
- House Agriculture Committee hearing To review U.S. agricultural sales to Cuba

Thursday, Feb. 11

- Senate Energy Committee hearing on U.S. Department of Energy's Loan Guarantee Program
- Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions Committee hearing on A Stronger Workforce Investment System for a Stronger Economy
- House Agriculture Subcommittee hearing To review implementation of changes to the Commodity Exchange Act contained in the 2008 Farm Bill.

USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) reports will cover:

- Tuesday, Feb. 9, Cotton Ginnings, Crop Production, Weather-Crop Summary
- Wednesday, Feb. 10, Broiler Hatchery
- Friday, Feb. 12, Dairy Products Prices; Crop Values; Farms, Land in Farms, and Livestock Operations; Peanut Prices; Potato Stocks

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