

House Dems dig in on demands to change USMCA

Several House Democrats stood in the sweltering summer heat Tuesday afternoon with AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, pledging to gathered reporters and supporters there will be no vote on the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement until the Trump administration meets their demands.

That was shortly after a packed two-and-a-half-hour hearing in which Democrat after



Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore.

Democrat warned that USMCA could not be passed as it is written and agreed upon by the leaders of the three countries last year. That rubbed wrong the outnumbered Republicans on the Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee, who all urged that the trade pact be voted on and approved as soon as possible.

“Every day that we delay, American consumers, farmers and businesses lose,” said Rep. Adrian Smith, R-Neb. “The ink on USMCA is dry and the American people are urging Congress to act. Let’s take a vote.”

But many Democrats are nowhere near ready for that vote. Their demands include a complete removal of a provision under which Mexico and Canada agreed to extend patents for biologic pharmaceutical drugs to 10 years as well as the installation of new labor standard enforcement provisions.

Cutting the biologics patent expansion could be the easiest of the demands - if the administration agrees - because neither Mexico nor Canada had sought its inclusion. Adding new enforcements

for labor standards looks to be trickier and would need to be negotiated between all three countries.

Mexico’s legislature has already ratified USMCA and the country has even passed major labor reforms as called for under the pact. But Democrats don’t trust Mexico to actually implement the reforms that call for it to examine and rewrite about 700,000 labor contracts that were written under business-formed unions that gave workers little or no say in the process.

“If we were to pass the NAFTA agreement in its current form, we would basically have to take Mexico at its word or rely on a broken state-to-state dispute settlement mechanism that hasn’t been effective where the U.S. government has used it, and that has never been used to enforce labor obligations,” said Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore, chairman of the subcommittee. “The challenges presented by Mexico’s labor reform demonstrate the new NAFTA does not contain adequate tools to ensure that Mexico’s labor reform stays on track.”

Democrats will require the newly renegotiated North American Free Trade Agreement to be essentially renegotiated again in order to make changes to the core text of the pact, said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., who is one of the nine members on the Trade Working Group assigned by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to work with the White House on the trade pact.

There will be no side letter that can be tacked on to NAFTA 2.0 or simple “implementing language” that will satisfy Democrats, DeLauro said. If the Trump administration insists on either of those two avenues, they will be rejected, she said. And that was the message delivered to U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer Tuesday evening when he sat down with the working group, which is led by House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Richard Neal, D-Mass.

While the immediate ratification of USMCA is widely supported by the U.S. ag sector, many lawmakers, union leaders, auto sector workers, machinists and others still feel stung by NAFTA and the hundreds of thousands of jobs they say were lost when U.S. companies sent factories south of the border to take advantage of cheap labor.

Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Mich., still blames NAFTA for idle manufacturing plants. She says she is all in favor of a new pact with Mexico and Canada, but only if she can guarantee to her constituents that Mexico will live up to its pledges.

“I’m a car girl from a car state,” Dingell said, noting that NAFTA “shipped jobs to Mexico. I want those jobs to come home. My workers beg for a NAFTA 2.0 ... but my workers also say to me, ‘Don’t give us the shaft.’”

The shaft, Democrats fear, would come in the form of Mexico not living up to its promises to improve labor standards and wages – something they believe is a likely scenario given the country’s long history of allowing so-called “ghost unions” to dictate workers’ rights.

“Rather than representing the interests of workers, these trade unions work at service to the party and the state and enjoy a privileged position, maintaining vast control over labor relations in the country still ...,” said Gladys Cisneros, program director for Mexico’s Solidarity Center.

Testifying before the Ways and Means subcommittee, she stressed that the “vast majority of workers are covered by employer protection contracts, or secret agreements negotiated between a non-democratic union and a complicit employer without the knowledge or consent of the workers. In most cases, workers never know that a negotiation took place.”

But Republican lawmakers like Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Fla., say Mexico has more than proven it’s ready to change its ways.

“By passing its labor legislation and ratifying USMCA, Mexico has, in my view, demonstrated a clear commitment to vastly improving its labor conditions and to free and fair trade,” Buchanan said. “And the Mexican government has demonstrated its good faith to implement this new law thoroughly and effectively.”

Blumenauer, who stressed his desire to see USMCA ratified and agreed that time is a factor, said he believes Congress can approve the pact by the end of the year at the latest.

“I think there’s no interest on the part of our leadership ... to have this bleed into 2020,” Blumenauer said. “Our hope is that we can move with dispatch, get our concerns resolved, strengthen the agreement and move forward.”

RV promoting Farmers for Free Trade rolls into California

The Farmers for Free Trade campaign is encouraging legislators across the country to pass a U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement favoring farmers. After 10,000 miles of driving, the campaign’s decorated RV finally hit the Pacific Ocean.

In April, former Democratic U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln joined the #MotorcadeForTrade in Pennsylvania as the campaign’s spokesperson. She saw the road trip as a way to visit with farmers and share the importance of what they do.

“Those trade agreements are critical,” Lincoln told *Agri-Pulse* during a brief stop in Sacramento. “When you start tinkering with it haphazardly, there’s ramifications.”

The RV first stopped for a reception with state Agriculture Deputy Secretary Jenny Moffitt, Governor Newsom’s trade advisor Bud Colligan and several state legislators. Lincoln and the team also visited the Farmer’s Rice Cooperative, meeting with farmers she remembered from her days as a senator representing Arkansas, another large rice producer.

They then motored over to San Francisco for what Lincoln described as a productive meeting with staffers for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

The RV pulled into Sonoma Monday afternoon, in time for a dinner ahead of the Summer Conference for the California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG).

“They’ve worked hard to build this industry,” she said of the CAWG board, adding that the members were anxious to see a trade deal, as well as an easement of tariffs.

Lincoln is hopeful the deal may be wrapping up soon.

“It’s time to start getting some things done,” she said. “You’ve already seen Mexico pass some of the labor standards that were being requested there. So, it’s moving down the pike.”

While the road ended at the beach, the campaign continues. Lincoln and the team were immediately off to meet with a Lodi apple farmer and have plans to drop in on more farm groups in the region.



The Farmers for Free Trade mobile home has been crossing California the last few days promoting passage of USMCA by Congress. The group in front includes FFT Spokesperson and former U.S. Sen Blanche Lincoln, the California Association of Wine Grape Growers board and a few guests.

The head of CalEPA says his news podcast is a “call to action”

In his free time, the head of the most powerful environmental regulatory agency in California produces a journalistic podcast that he equates with the nation’s top news outlets.

Governor Gavin Newsom appointed Jared Blumenfeld to secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency in January. Since taking office, Blumenfeld has continued to post a new episode every two weeks, a dozen in total. The podcast intersects with CalEPA’s mission of implementing and enforcing environmental laws and the topics Blumenfeld covers often overlap with issues CalEPA’s regulatory bodies are currently reviewing.

Blumenfeld launched his podcast, called “Podship: Earth,” in 2018, while running a private firm that advised clean tech companies on best practices. Some of the episodes touch on his background as regional administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for the Pacific Southwest for eight years and as director of the San Francisco Department of Environment for nine years under then-mayor Gavin Newsom.



The graphics for his podcast show Blumenfeld’s head superimposed on what appears to be a Lego astronaut.

In his first episode, Blumenfeld interviews his former boss Gina McCarthy, who served as U.S. EPA administrator under President Obama. He also

meets with San Francisco public officials, climate researchers, jailed activists and a Marin County “carbon farmer,” to name a few.

In the podcast summary, he labels Podship:Earth as “an environmental podcast” and describes himself as “a trusted source for environmental stories” who “appears frequently” in *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and NPR. To Blumenfeld, the podcast is “a call to action.” He has not updated the summary to mention his role in the governor’s administration. He does include that title on the podcast’s website and adds that he is “one of America’s most innovative environmental leaders.” He does not disclose whether the views reflect his own or that of the administration. The website is also copyrighted by Jared Blumenfeld and does not disclose details about private or nonprofit business licensing.

The podcast has also gained sponsors that include a retailer of “nontoxic” cleaning products and the audio books company Audible, which also sponsors NPR podcasts.

Also in the first episode, Blumenfeld explains his reason for launching a podcast.

“Most people are scared by the news and don’t know what the f is going on,” he said. “So, I decided to follow (my cousin) David’s advice and create a podcast.”**



CalEPA Secretary Blumenfeld launched his environmental podcast following a long backpacking trip.

In one episode, released on April 7, 2019, he discusses the regulation of neonicotinoids with the CEO of Pollinator Partnership, Laurie Adams. The nonprofit’s previous CEO, Val Dolcini, now works for Blumenfeld, as CalEPA’s deputy secretary for agriculture. Blumenfeld has also appointed Dolcini to serve as the interim director for the Department of Pesticide Regulation, a branch of CalEPA. Last year, DPR published a risk determination on neonicotinoids suggesting that future mitigation may be needed to further protect bees.

As secretary, Blumenfeld recently decided to enact the cancellation process for pesticide products containing chlorpyrifos, ahead of recommendations from the agency’s regulatory review process. The precedent grants Blumenfeld the authority to cancel neonicotinoid products as well.

Blumenfeld also discusses in his podcast the U.S. Endangered Species Act, which is central to regulatory decisions by the State Water Resources Control Board. He talks about vehicle emissions from shipping by trucks, trains and ships, which the California Air Resources Board regulates. Other topics include cannabis and hemp production, permaculture, plant-based burgers and Israeli food and water sustainability.

In a more investigative piece titled “Dirty Secrets,” Blumenfeld reports on one of Governor Newsom’s top priorities: cleaning up unsafe drinking water in California’s “agricultural heartland.” The California legislature passed a budget bill earlier this month that includes \$130 million for the Clean and Affordable Drinking Water Fund. A related bill in the State Assembly would appropriate all money in the fund to the Water Board. The longstanding and controversial

issue also spans several other CalEPA departments, boards and offices, including Toxic Substances Control.

The conservative-leaning *Washington Examiner* singled out Blumenfeld in 2014 for potential conflicts of interest, having worked in environmental activism for the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, the National Resources Defense Council and the International Fund for Animal Welfare. On his website, Blumenfeld writes, in those roles, “he helped protect millions of acres for wildlife and held corporations accountable.”

In response to questions about the podcast, *Agri-Pulse* received emailed statements from CalEPA public affairs officials. **They confirmed that a conflict of interest review has been conducted, but found no wrongdoing.**

“The podcast does not take positions on particular issues,” the statement reads. “Rather, it is a platform to hear views from a wide range of experts on their perspectives. These views are not endorsed by Podship:Earth.”

In California, conflict of interest laws focus on financial considerations, such as disclosing gifts. CalEPA pointed out that the podcast “has not accepted any sponsorships or financial support” since Blumenfeld was appointed.

Meanwhile, the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development launched its own official podcast as a communications tool on June 14. In each episode to date, the podcast producers introduce themselves with their job title and the office they represent.

Podship:Earth is listed on Apple Podcasts and iTunes under the category of Science and Medicine and is rated five stars out of 196 reviews. One commenter calls it “a great alternative to the drivel on most news channels.”

Another listener, who describes herself as an environmental scientist and researcher, is more critical. She writes: The podcast is a “middle class and white...guy who went on a life-changing trip that enlightened him in so many ways and he somehow makes everything about him and/or about that trip.” She adds that the podcast is “playing a game of environmentalist stereotype bingo as well, with all the greatest hits, like idolizing other cultures, banging on about capitalism, harping on about GMOs with no scientific detail.”

Five questions with State Senator Jim Nielsen

Republican Senator Jim Nielsen of Gerber first ran for office more than 40 years ago. Nielsen spoke with *Agri-Pulse* about the changes he has seen over that time with agricultural issues at the capitol.

Nielsen was raised on the family dairy operation in Sanger. He switched to the west side of the valley to be a ranch foreman and then shifted to ag consulting in Woodland before running a cogeneration plant that burned rice hulls for electricity.

He said he took leave of his senses in 1978 and ran for State Senate, serving 12 years. He then raised “kids and cattle” and took over the toughest job he would ever have, as head of the state parole board. He served in the Assembly beginning in 2009 and returned to the Senate in 2013.

Among its 19 Northern California counties, Nielsen’s Senate District 4 includes the town of Paradise, home to the most destructive wildfire in state history in 2018. A year earlier, an emergency spillway on the nearby Oroville Dam began crumbling, leading to a mass evacuation. Nielsen related both events to the impacts wildfire and neglected infrastructure have on agriculture.

1. Can you compare the agricultural issues you worked on when you first came into office to now?

Agriculture was a diminishing voice then and it is still as diminished now. We fight back and fight hard and we succeed in some things and in some things we don't succeed.

Agriculture is not as revered and respected and certainly it's not as represented since 1964’s “one man, one vote” decision of the (U.S. Supreme) Court. It collapsed the balance of rural counties having fairly equal representation in the Senate.

I was elected the first time in the year that Jerry Brown was reelected (governor) the first time. We immediately began fighting over the medfly (outbreak) and the Peripheral Canal. He and I laugh about that. He smiled one day and said, “Well, you licked me on both of them.” I laughed and said, “**Well, yes, Governor, maybe for 35 years I've been ahead of you on it. But invasive species are still a problem and the Peripheral Canal is now the Twin Tunnels.**”

The biggest challenge for our industry now though is the regulatory morass that we have to contend with. And it's built up through many agencies, state and federal. **By the way, my motive to run for the legislature was driven by the fact that I realized my greatest problem to produce in agriculture was government.** It was not the weather. It was not bugs. It was not the cost or employees. It was the vicissitudes of government.

...Government now is a power unto itself. It is a fourth branch of government firmly ensconced in power. In this budget that has just passed, it gains more power beyond the control of the people and even their elected representatives... This is all agencies, not just those affecting agriculture. They proffer regulations, not through the administrative hearing process, which is a formal process that I helped invent some 40 years ago, where at least the public has some input. But rather just by edict. They put out a memo and that becomes effective law.

2. How have you seen your role as a senator change in the wake of the Camp Fire?

This has affected agriculture, particularly animal agriculture, on the forests and the wildlands, where we have lot of grazing. For decades, federal and state policy have dictated that you don't do anything to clean up or manage the forests and the wildlands – you just let them go.

Now we've paid the price. With the mass accumulation of fuel, the magnitude of the fires is so much greater.

The difference is these fires have gotten so huge and move so fast that they now have encroached on urban areas, like Northern Santa Rosa, like Santa Barbara. It used to be just a problem for the rural areas... Now it's moved into the cities. They've awakened and we now have some new allies.

...This destroys the watershed, the retention ability of the soils. It hurts long-term through erosion, not just for a few years. And, of course, it's hard on wildlife and habitat, grazing capacity, carrying capacity of the ranges and everything else.

You can't argue habitat anymore, because I've finally been able to disabuse the environmental community that they're helping wildlife. They're not. They're destroying wildlife. So that's been bringing forth a new ally.

Over the decades, timber has been pretty well run out of California as a business. We've lost the capacity to harvest and process as well. The same has happened in terms of cogeneration, another good way to get rid of biofuel. We don't have the investment in infrastructure that we had long ago.



Sen. Jim Nielsen

3. What has been your role in water rights legislation and the Site Reservoir Project?

For the first time since the State Water Project, we are now going to be able to have some significant surface water storage.

Another thing that happened too is related to the Oroville Dam spillway failure, which was a product of 50 years of neglect of maintenance by the Department of Water Resources. Assemblymember James Gallagher and I have got legislation that requires the department to further test all dams in California.

If you do not have a conveyance system that works, then you may as well not have the storage... Over the decades, we've let habitat grow up and clog those very important facilities to store water. And it impedes their ability and jeopardizes the levees and can result in flooding.

...The 2009 Water Plan crafts policies that ensure that everything in water in California is not about the Delta. It had become, over decades, that everything related to water was solely about the fixing the Delta. That was a failed policy. Now we are recognizing it is not just the Delta – that is the heart of water. But the heart means little if you don't have the blood to go to the body, which is California... We're paying a lot more attention to the totality of the issue in this state.

4. What's your advice to new legislators coming into office?

To the Republicans, don't be dismayed by our low numbers. What you have got to do – and I say the same to rural representatives, both Democrat and Republican – is you just have to fight harder, fight smarter and you have to seek alliances. That's what we did in the Water Plan. We sought new alliances. For example, the farmworkers became great allies, from the standpoint of jobs and improved jobs for them.

There are fewer of us in the legislature who are from agriculture. There are only maybe three or four of us now in the Senate that have ag backgrounds or affinities. We still can be an effective voice. That's what we've had to learn to do. **We have to fight more expertly. We have to fight harder. And we have to seek out new alliances.**

5. Any other messages for California's farmers?

Each of us who care about agriculture need to spend some of our time every day being aware of the issues that affect us and standing up, being involved and doing something about it. Part of our agricultural day has got to be devoted to political awareness and involvement. That's what affects our ability – and will for generations – to be able to farm. We have to stand up and be counted.

Labor contractors can reduce burden on growers

With a full-time focus on managing labor, contractors can alleviate most of the strain in finding skilled and timely labor. That insight came from a panel discussion during the Summer Conference for the California Winegrape Growers Association on Tuesday.

“I tell my grower clients: ‘I’ll take care of your labor needs. You stick to the farming,” said Duff Bevel, who runs the contracting service Bevel Vineyard Management. “We both end up doing what we do best.”

The panel also included Earl Hall and Fred Beyerlein of Hall Management Corp and Mike Testa of Coastal Vineyard Care.

By turning farm labor contracting into a focused and specialized profession, the panelists said they were able to avoid complete labor shortages for farmer clients. The work required a full-time focus on arranging labor supply, while also anticipating farmer needs and timing.

To attract quality workforce farm laborers, the contractors would be creative with benefits. They would offer robust health care support, at a cost of about \$0.70 per hour, and consistent, high-quality work environments, with shade trailers and rest rooms exceeding the state-mandated minimums. This would establish a positive reputation for the contractors, as well as the farmers, attracting reliable and productive laborers.

Despite the higher costs, the farm labor contractors said the trade-offs were worth the investment. Regulatory changes like decreased hours and week allowances under the ag overtime law, along with the rising minimum wage will make the work increasingly difficult.

The contractors also invested in resources the workers may not have directly appreciated but would ensure an efficient operation. The contractors would organize the transportation to guarantee that the laborers reached the field sites on time.

They noted that the contingent of illegal workers in the California ag labor market has been continually shrinking. Some move to non-ag sectors for work, while others have difficulty finding housing. Following the Wine Country Fires of 2017, more than 5,000 homes were lost,



many of those being farmworker housing.

Regulatory compliance – record keeping alone – continues to be a steadily increasing burden for employers as well. Inadvertent, minor errors or omissions on a paycheck stub can quickly lead to costly class action litigation.

Labor contractor panel— left to right: Mike Testa, Coastal Vineyard Care; Duff Bevel, Bevel Vineyard Management; Earl Hall and Fred Beyerlein, both of Hall Management Corp

The panel concluded that while labor shortages are

significant challenges for farmers, contractors can reduce some of the burden through full-time and efficient management and economy of scale.

Pesticide industry appeals for tariff exemption, warning of price hit

Mike Massey, an executive with a small pesticide production facility in Louisiana, is already struggling to keep his glyphosate business as a result of California court judgments that blamed the herbicide for causing cancer in some people who applied it.

Now, with no end in sight to the trade war with China, **he’s worried President Donald Trump is going to slap a new 25% tariff on the critical glyphosate acid that his company imports to make glyphosate salt, the active ingredient in Roundup, which is widely used on soybeans, cotton, corn and other crops.** The U.S. tariff on the Chinese glyphosate is now only 3.7%.

Glyphosate is one of 28 pesticide product lines that are on a list of \$300 billion in Chinese imports that Trump is threatening to hit with tariffs of up to 25% starting next month, using the president’s Section 301 authority. Other commonly used herbicides on the list include atrazine, 2,4-D and dicamba.

The tariff on “glyphosate moves us toward a monopoly” by a single U.S. producer, which is Bayer, Massey told a panel convened by the U.S. Trade Representative’s office to review proposed exclusions to the list of targeted products. A series of hearings spanning seven days ended Tuesday.

CropLife America, which represents pesticide manufacturers and distributors, and RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment), a trade group that focuses on specialty chemicals, are appealing to USTR to exempt the pesticides from the tariffs, saying that a 25% duty would cost the pesticide industry \$393 million.

“Many of the chemicals subject to the new proposal are simply not available from American sources” and “many others are not reasonably available from sources outside of China in the volumes necessary and within a practicable time period,” the groups say in formal comments to the agency.

Chris Novak, president and CEO of CropLife, told the USTR panel, which included representatives of the Agriculture and Commerce departments, that the impact of the tariffs would ultimately trickle down to farmers and consumers, though he didn’t offer an estimate of the increased cost.

“We believe that imposing tariffs on key pesticides used by farmers and consumers will disproportionately burden US interests while having little effect on China,” he said.

He went on, “American farmers are already suffering in the wake of catastrophic weather events and reduced market opportunities. The proposed tariffs will only exacerbate these problems.”

Trump has not backed off his threat to impose the tariffs, although there are hopes that the trade negotiations with China could get back on track when Trump meets later this week with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan.

In a briefing on Trump’s plans for the G-20 meetings, a senior administration official emphasized Trump was **“quite comfortable with any outcome” of the discussions with Xi and that the U.S. economy hasn’t been hurt by the trade war.**



Chris Novak, CropLife

“As the President has said many, many times, and I’m sure he’ll make clear again, is that the purpose of these discussions is to rebalance the economic relationship in a way that protects U.S. economic prosperity and workers,” the official told reporters. “And of course, that also means the kinds of structural changes that would need to take place to protect intellectual property.”

The roster of 28 pesticide lines that could be hit with new tariffs has been expanded from a shorter list that was initially targeted but later excluded during a previous round of Section 301 tariffs.

According to the CropLife/RISE filing, Chinese products accounted for more than three quarters of the products that were imported for the 28 pesticide lines.

Chinese imports accounted for 90% of imports under the tariff code that includes triazine herbicides, including atrazine, used on wheat, corn, potatoes, soybeans and fruit crops. None of the triazine chemicals imported under that tariff code are available domestically.

Eighty-three percent of imports under the tariff code that includes glyphosate came from China. The glyphosate imports from China were valued at \$392 million in 2018, according to

CropLife/RISE. Imports from China of all the 28 pesticide lines, including glyphosate and triazines, totaled \$1.57 billion.

Massey, who is vice president of Ragan and Massey Inc. in Ponchatoula, La., told the USTR panel that environmental regulations and other regulatory barriers make it impractical for other companies to start manufacturing the glyphosate acid.

“We do not expect any new sources to invest to overcome these barriers to entry to provide domestic production,” he said in his prepared remarks.

Chinese delegation visits AMVAC Chemical Corporation

In an effort to foster collaborative research and technology exchange, a delegation from China’s Ministry of Agriculture toured the Los Angeles factory of American Vanguard’s agrochemical branch last week. The visit came as a welcome respite for the two parties from the volatile trade negotiations between the counties.

The delegation landed on the 40th anniversary of the USDA’s scientific exchange agreement with China, which created the program that brokered the visit.

AMVAC COO Bob Trogele said the delegation was interested in learning about the California regulatory environment as well as lowering the environmental impacts of emissions. His team provided an overview of both AMVAC and the industry of crop protection chemicals, before diving into details about their top products.

Trogele said the delegation was impressed by the accuracy and lowered environmental impact of an upcoming precision application system called SIMPAS. The AMVAC team also covered their portfolio of biologicals marketed under Zevo.

While Trogele found that the delegation “seemed very pleased,” nurturing this relationship would also benefit AMVAC.

“Agrochemical discoveries by Chinese universities is becoming more prevalent,” he said. “Our SIMPAS technology can also be used with Chinese drone technology. That’s an area where they’re leaders in the agricultural precision industry.”

Trogele added that his company also has technology agreements related to process chemistry with Chinese manufacturers.



American Vanguard CEO Eric Wintemute (front, right) sits next to Zhang Xingwang, director general of the Department of Farm Mechanization. Trogele stands (back, center) with division directors.

“We’re interested in helping them market their technology outside of China,” he said, “but also bringing some of our technology into China.”

Where do 2020 Dems stand on climate and agriculture?

If just one environmental issue comes up during the Democratic debates scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday, there’s a pretty good chance it will be climate change, a subject Republicans prefer to avoid but Democrats trip over themselves to talk about.

Most of them offer bold plans, but whether a Democratic administration could get climate change legislation passed is an unanswered question at this point, as it depends on the makeup of the House and Senate following the 2020 elections. If the Senate remains controlled by Republicans, which some pundits feel is a better than even bet, climate change legislation is likely a long shot.

Here, then, is a rundown on where some of the top-polling candidates stand on the environment, as gleaned from their websites, position papers and other sources.

Joe Biden

Despite missteps that have left the Democratic base perplexed and annoyed at times, the former vice president stands atop the polls at somewhere above 30%. He touts his long history with climate change, having cosponsored legislation in 1986 that did not pass but ended up in a funding bill the next year.

Essentially, it required the president, at that time Ronald Reagan, to address climate change mitigation.

“It was a plan to make a plan,” Josh Howe, professor of history and environmental studies at Reed College, told PolitiFact. “Which, of course, neither Reagan nor [George H.W.] Bush ultimately did.”

Now, Biden is endorsing the Green New Deal (GND), which also calls for development of a plan, this time with the goal of achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Biden adds a deadline of 2050 to that and says he wants to ensure the U.S. has a “100% clean energy economy” by that date.

Of interest to growers, **Biden says agriculture is “a key part of the solution to climate change.** Advanced biofuels are now closer than ever as we begin to build the first plants for biofuels, creating jobs and new solutions to reduce emissions in planes, ocean-going vessels, and more.” **He also wants to “decarbonize” the food and agriculture sector, and “leverage agriculture to remove carbon dioxide from the air and store it in the ground.”**



Former Vice President Joe Biden

Biden wants to invest in “climate-friendly farming such as conservation programs for cover crops and other practices aimed at restoring the soil and building soil carbon, and in the process, preventing run-off and helping family farmers deploy the latest technologies to maximize productivity,” according to his campaign [website](#).

“He will create new opportunities to support deployment of methane digesters to capture potent climate emissions and generate electricity. With these efforts, family farmers can benefit and help lead the Clean Energy Revolution.”

Bernie Sanders

The independent senator from Vermont, who built up grassroots support in an effort to win the Democratic nomination in 2016, is back again this time, stumping on the same issues that made him a surprise contender. He, too, is a [GND endorser](#) and specifically addresses farming and rural communities, making a pitch for **“comprehensive legislation to address climate change that includes a transition to regenerative, independent family farming practices.”**

In addition, Sanders [supports](#) a “transition to more sustainable management of livestock systems that are ecologically sound, improve soil health, and sequester carbon in soil.” **He also wants to compensate farmers for improving ecosystems and set up a program “to permanently set aside ecologically fragile farm and ranch land.”**

Sanders has fluctuated wildly in polls. A recent POLITICO/Morning Consult poll showed him with 19%, half of Biden’s share.

Elizabeth Warren

The Massachusetts senator has earned good reviews from the pundits recently, who have highlighted her frequent answer to questions on the campaign trail: **“I’ve got a plan for that.”** In most cases, she does. Her doggedness and ability to speak at length on a variety of subjects have contributed to her staying steady at number three among the candidates.

Warren wants to invest \$2 trillion over the next 10 years in “green research, manufacturing, and exporting — linking American innovation directly to American jobs, and helping achieve the ambitious targets of the Green New Deal.”



Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass.

Warren also [wants](#) to create a National Institutes of Clean Energy and provide adequate funding for the Agricultural Research Service and USDA’s principal grantmaking agency for research, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

In the non-environmental realm, Warren [pledges](#) to tackle consolidation the ag industry and guarantee farmers a right to repair their machinery.

Pete Buttigieg

“Mayor Pete” of South Bend, Ind., the breakout star of the 2020 campaign, has had to curtail campaign activities as he deals with the fatal shooting of an African-American resident by a white South Bend police officer. He nonetheless remains in the top five in polling, though well behind the frontrunners.

Buttigieg (pronounced Buddha-judge) provides fewer details on his positions than the other candidates. His website says **he wants to Implement a “Green New Deal with all available tools including a carbon tax-and-dividend for Americans, and major direct investment to build a 100% clean energy society.”** He also says he wants to “strengthen rural resilience and protect rural communities from environmental hazards.”

Kamala Harris

The California senator’s candidacy bears some resemblance to the one run by former president Barack Obama, who also was a first-term senator known for his oratorical skills. Harris has consistently been in the top five in the polls and looks to rise further if Buttigieg takes a serious tumble.

Her website is long on rhetoric but light on details. “While the climate threat is great, so is our opportunity,” she says. **“With American ingenuity and imagination, we can forge a Green New Deal to tackle the climate crisis, build a clean economy that creates good-paying jobs for the future, and confront environmental injustice head on.”**



Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif.

How does she plan to do that? By “modernizing our transportation, energy, and water infrastructure [and] accelerating the spread of electric vehicles, solar panels, and wind turbines.”

Beto O’Rourke

The former congressman gained nationwide recognition for giving Republican Sen. Ted Cruz a tough reelection bid last year, and then jumped into the presidential race in March. He has failed, however, to translate his support in Texas, where he got more votes as a Democrat in the state’s history, into nationwide backing, and is hovering in the low single digits in polls.

O’Rourke has a fairly robust environmental platform, pledging that the first bill he sends to Congress will call for “a 10-year mobilization of \$5 trillion ... **the world’s largest-ever climate change investment in infrastructure, innovation, and in our people and communities.**”

O'Rourke also offers a promise to “create unprecedented access to the technologies and markets that allow farmers and ranchers to profit from the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions they secure; leverage \$500 billion in annual government procurement to decarbonize across all sectors for the first time, including a new “buy clean” program for steel, glass, and cement; and require any federal permitting decision to fully account for climate costs and community impacts.”

Cory Booker

The New Jersey senator is no shrinking violet, recently calling on Biden to apologize for recounting how he was able to work with segregationist senators when he first came to Capitol Hill. (Biden did not apologize.) His campaign, however, has not caught on with voters, as polls show him treading water at around 2-3%.



Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J.

As a vegan — he says he eschews meat because of its environmental impacts — Booker may face some challenges in the Iowa Caucus. He has consistently criticized concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) for air and water pollution, as when he described a trip to Duplin County, North Carolina, last year.

“I saw pig waste being sprayed,” he said at an Environment and Public Works Committee hearing. “I saw how the wind was carrying the mist. ... I smelled what was a wretched, horrible smell standing hundreds and hundreds of yards away, and how that smell permeated the entire community. I heard heartbreaking stories from residents who said they too often felt like prisoners in their own homes.”

His website says he “**is committed to addressing climate change with an eye toward its impact on vulnerable communities**” but offers little detail.

Amy Klobuchar

The Minnesota senator has barely registered in polls, and it’s not clear how long she can remain in the race without getting a boost from her debate performance. And that will be tough to do with nine other candidates on the stage. Klobuchar vows, like many of the other candidates, to get the United States back into the Paris climate change accord.

On an issue near and dear to corn growers and ethanol backers, she says she wants to “**end the misguided overuse of secret [Renewable Fuel Standard] small refinery waivers that have been granted to big oil companies at the expense of farmers.**” Klobuchar would “completely overhaul the EPA’s small refinery waivers and greatly increase transparency, ensuring that RFS waivers meant for small refiners do not go to big oil companies like Chevron and ExxonMobil and that these secret waivers do not line the pockets of big oil companies at the expense of farmers.”

The candidates discussed above represent only about a third of all the Dems who have declared. Some other notables, who cluster near the bottom of the polls, include Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York (“We can get to a net-zero emissions economy by creating tax incentives to reward innovation and investment in renewable energy technology”); former HUD Secretary Julian Castro (climate change is “the biggest threat to our prosperity in the 21st century”); Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, who has made climate change the only issue in his campaign; Colorado Sen. Michael Bennet, who wants to conserve 30 percent of America’s lands and oceans by 2030; and Andrew Yang, whose big proposal is Universal Basic Income, a guaranteed \$12,000 a year for every American over the age of 18.

Lawmakers boost soil health initiatives across the nation

Agriculture groups, private industries, and federal and state legislators are driving soil health initiatives across the country, helping farmers and ranchers overcome obstacles in a win/win for producers and the environment.

“Soil health is a critical topic for this Subcommittee to address because it underpins so many of our other conservation efforts,” said Rep. Abigail Spanberger, the Virginia Democrat who chairs the House Agriculture Committee’s conservation subcommittee, during a hearing Tuesday.

“Soil health practices such as cover crops, crop rotations, and no-till or reduced-tillage have the potential to provide financial benefits to farmers by reducing input costs, increasing yields, and ensuring the productivity of crop land over the long term.”

Subcommittee ranking member Doug LaMalfa, R-Calif., echoed her sentiment, saying improving soil health **“can help optimize inputs, increase resiliency and improve yields, regardless of weather patterns” on a farmers’ operations.**

Soil health is measured by the amount of biological activity in the soil and the soil’s ability to hold water. The more organic matter a soil has, the more biological activity occurs in the soil allowing the soil to retain a higher water holding capacity.

Duane Hovorka, agriculture program director at the Izaak Walton League of America says soil health plans should **“encourage and feed the beneficial bacteria and fungi” in the soil because current practices are “starving the microbes” in the ground.** Reducing tillage and excess pesticide use, he said, would lead to more carbon and organic matter in the soil, “which makes that biology much more healthy in the soil.”

For example, a soil that has 1% of organic matter may hold less than one inch of rain. Once the soil meets its maximum holding capacity, the ground will become saturated. This leads to water running off a field, carrying nutrients and other fine particles away and causing nutrient runoff and the displacement of top soil. It can also carry manure and other chemicals that have not been absorbed by the plants into the water system. If that same soil had 5% organic matter, it may hold up to three and a half inches of rain, increasing the water holding capacity.

Wayne Honeycutt, president and CEO of the Soil Health Institute, shared how the Institute is working to help land managers **“look at themselves as not just crop producers but as carbon**

managers.” That way, when producers are making their management decisions they also base that decision “on the impact that it’s going to have on carbon.”

Hovorka and other witnesses identified five key practices stated to promote soil health: no-till farming; planting cover crops; diversifying and rotating plants; implementing integrated pest management practices; and adding livestock back on the land for grazing.

“How fast the change happens [seeing a return on your investment] depends on how many of those practices you implement and how you put them together,” said Hovorka.

Shefali Mehta, executive director of the Soil Health Partnership said the partnership's goal “is to meet the need of our farmers and continue to add more tools to their tool kit to ensure they have more economic diversification.”

Both Hovorka and Mehta said these practices “are in no way a silver bullet” and must be adopted according to the goals of the farmer and in accordance with what works best in certain parts of the country. Adopting these practices are not as easy as it may seem when you consider potentially higher input costs, equipment changes, and changing attitudes about soil health, they pointed out.

USDA has numerous resources that can assist with improving soil health, starting with a test kit guide.

IWLA’s Hovorka said government funds should go towards transition not maintenance.

“We don’t see the need to pay farmers forever to plant cover crops, even though they are delivering a lot of public benefits,” Hovorka added. “We think that structuring our incentives as transition incentives will help get people into an economic way of farming.”

The IWLA recently published a report that highlights different local and state soil health initiatives that are already in place or close to be.

“We wanted to highlight the different kinds of proposals,” Hovorka said. “Some states are taking a statewide approach like California and some places are focused more on providing incentives for specific practices. That is what they are doing in Iowa with a discount on your federal crop insurance for farmers who plant cover crops.”

Among the state initiatives detailed in the report was the **California Healthy Soils Initiative**. That initiative, launched in 2015, is in collaboration with seven state agencies and departments and promotes the stewardship of healthy soils. In 2016, the state legislature created and funded the Healthy Soils Program, which provides producer incentives to producer to adopt greenhouse-gas-reducing soil health practices such as: compost and mulch application, cover cropping, reduced tillage, planting windbreaks, riparian buffers and hedgerows, and the implementation of silvopasture, an integrated intensively managed system that combines trees, forage plants, and livestock together.



Shannon Douglass, California Farm Bureau

Shannon Douglass, 1st Vice President of the California Farm Bureau Federation, said CFBF has outlined three principles on soil health that legislators should consider when looking at soil health practices: Flexibility and the need "to ensure soil health practices and growers are not one size fits all," a point she emphasized by pointing out California's 400 commodities grown within its borders; Continued research and the discovery of "new technologies that have the potential to improve soil health;"

Legislators also need to take into consideration, "other on-farm practices"

such as those required by the Food Safety Modernization Act and be thoughtful of the "intersection of practices required by law to ensure the best practices under NRCS are not harming the food safety and other regulations," she said.

News Briefs:

Land O'Lakes, Dutch co-op announce Chinese venture. U.S.-based Land O'Lakes and Netherlands-based Royal Agrifirm Group will be partnering in China for a dairy animal feed project, forming the new company AgriLakes. The joint effort aims to provide high-level service to dairy farmers and feed producers there. Agrifirm is a company with over 100 years of experience in the feed and dairy business, with 20 years in the Chinese marketplace, while Land O'Lakes Inc. uses subsidiary businesses of Purina Animal Nutrition and WinField United to help Chinese dairy businesses. It also operates a training facility in China, the Dairy Farming Institute, in partnership with Nestlé. The new joint venture will begin based in Agrifirm's Tianjin location, a port city in the northeastern part of the country. The companies plan to expand a dairy premix and specialty plant on the adjoining property. "Thanks to Agrifirm's established infrastructure and reputation in China, paired with Land O'Lakes' strong research and technology expertise, we are confident this new joint venture is well-positioned to help grow both companies," said Jerry Kaminski, executive vice president and chief operating officer of Land O'Lakes. Both companies' boards of directors have authorized the creation of AgriLakes pending appropriate antitrust and regulatory approvals.

NPPC launches new campaign on regulating gene edited livestock. A newly launched campaign aims to promote USDA regulation of livestock gene editing when breeding animals for food. The "Keep America First in Agriculture" campaign launched by the National Pork Producers Council Tuesday suggests the Food and Drug Administration hand over regulatory authority of gene editing in animals produced as food to the Department of Agriculture. Gene editing differs from the transgenic method seen in certain crops where foreign DNA is introduced. FDA currently holds regulatory authority over gene editing in animals produced as food. The group would like to see USDA oversee this process because it already has a review process in place for genetic editing in plants under its Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Producers also argue gene editing faces a lengthy and costly

approval process under FDA. "Gene editing is a huge step forward for America's farmers," said Dan Kovich, NPPC's deputy director of science & technology. "It offers a powerful new way to combat animal disease." Kovich fears the U.S. runs the risk of falling behind other countries like Canada, Brazil, and Argentina, who are moving quickly to advance this type of technology. He said NPPC is actively working with Trump administration officials, USDA, FDA and interested offices on Capitol Hill to figure out a path forward.

4-H, Google announce new computer science collaboration. The National 4-H Council is partnering with Google in a \$6 million grant to expand the Computer Science (CS) Career Pathway to 4-H youth with limited access to the technology. The partnership between 4-H, one of the largest youth development organizations in the nation, and Google builds on a previous \$1.5 million grant in August 2017. Google CEO Sundar Pichai, announced the grant at a recent 4-H event in Prior, OK. 4-H members in rural populations and lower incomes will have access to "Google's CS products, educational programs, and employee volunteers who have dedicated more than 1,000 hours to support 4-H youth," when navigating the new technology. This partnership will reach more than one million youth over the span of three years, providing opportunities within various industries, including agriculture. "We are excited to build on our work with 4-H with an additional \$6 million grant to support computer science education in 4-H chapters across the country," Pichai said. "With this grant, we aim to help more young people develop their coding and leadership skills that will put them on a path for future success."

Farm Hands West...Cronquist moves to Blueberry Councils

California Secretary of Agriculture **Karen Ross** met with the California Cut Flower Commission board of directors to thank **Kasey Cronquist**. Cronquist served as the CEO of the California Cut Flower Commission for the past 12 years. He has been named the president of the North American Blueberry Council and U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council, effective July 29.



Kasey Cronquist (left) and Secretary Karen Ross (right)

World Agricultural Outlook Board Chair **Seth Meyer** announced his departure from the organization effective July 13. He is headed to the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI) as the new Associate Director. **Mark Jekanowski** will serve as the acting board chair. Meyer was named chairman of the board in May of 2014 after joining the USDA Office of the Chief Economist as chief economist for domestic agricultural policy in 2013. Before joining the World Board, Jekanowski worked with USDA's Economic Research Service, first as chief of the crops branch, and more recently as deputy director for the ERS commodity outlook program.

Terri Moore is set to join the American Farm Bureau Federation as the new vice president of communications. She comes from Look East, a communications consulting firm focused on food and agriculture, where she served as vice president. She is also part of the Center for Food Integrity management team. Before these roles, she serves as the deputy director of communications at the White House and director of communications at USDA.

Russell Stokes joins Mars Inc. in the newly created chief strategy officer position. He will be responsible for seeking out new business opportunities and creating products and services. Stokes comes from Whirlpool Corp. where he served as head of strategy and mergers and acquisitions.

Rishi Sahgal has left the office of Rep. **Jerry McNerney**, D-Calif. He covered the portfolio for energy, water, and agricultural issues. McNerney's office has not yet hired a replacement, but **Mike Stoeber** has taken over covering those issues. Sahgal has moved to Sen. **Dianne Feinstein**'s, D-Calif., office, working as an aide.

Larkin Parker was promoted to communications director from scheduler for Rep. **Kurt Schrader**, D-Ore. She replaces **Carlee Griffeth** ... **Phoebe Miner** joins the staff as Schrader's new scheduler. Her first day was Monday.

Molly Jenkins is the new communications director for Rep. **Greg Walden**, R-Ore. She previously served as Rep. **Phil Roe**'s, R-Tenn., press secretary on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Meg Badame has left the office of Rep. **Duncan Hunter**, R-Calif., where she served as the deputy press secretary. Hunter's office has not yet found a replacement.

Gabrielle Roesch-McNally joins the American Farmland Trust as the new director of the Women for the Land initiative. Roesch-McNally most recently worked as a fellow with the USDA Northwest Climate Hub. In this new position she will collaborate and help engage women who own and manage farmland and rangeland to help them protect and promote sound farming practices.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant

Editor

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