

Two Bits



Julie Ellingson, Executive Vice President St. Anthony



With Christmas behind us and the new year moving full speed ahead, my January rituals have begun. Closets are being purged, junk drawers are being sorted and boxes of forgotten clutter are being pitched into the trash. There's something uniquely satisfying about a full garbage can and some renewed order after a busy holiday season.

Decluttering isn't just about throwing things away; it's about keeping what's useful and letting go of what no longer serves a purpose.

In many ways, that's exactly what we have been working on in the policy arena over the years — guarding against government overreach, like our standing policy explains, and taking a hard look at the layers of onerous and unnecessary regulations that have piled up over the decades and taken a toll on our businesses.

For livestock producers, these regulations can feel like a house that's never been cleaned. Rules may (or may not) have been added with good intentions, but, over time, they have overlapped, conflicted and outlived the problems they were meant to solve. The result has often been confusion, delay and cost without any clear benefits.

There's been some important housekeeping that is beneficial to our industry that has been taking place over the past year.

Take the efforts to delist the gray wolf in certain regions as one example. As of this writing, the U.S. House of Representatives has passed H.R. 845, the Pet and Livestock Protection Act, which aims to permanently re-

move the wolf from the Endangered Species Act and return management to the states, which the NDSA strongly supports. (The bill still faces an uncertain future in the Senate, however.) Continuing to manage recovered wolf populations under emergency-level rules is like keeping winter coats piled in the entryway in July — it is unnecessary and, of course, dangerous to livestock populations. Returning management authority to the states would allow for more flexible, locally informed decisions and better protect the economic interests of our industry, and we are grateful for the first step being taken in this process.

Similar housekeeping efforts are underway to modernize the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA remains an important tool for environmental review, but decades of expanded interpretation have turned

routine projects into costly, years-long paperwork exercises that do little, if anything, for the environment. The NDSA is supportive of efforts in Congress to speed up and streamline the NEPA process so that common-sense projects, like repairing fences, improving water infrastructure and carrying out critical conservation work, aren't buried under endless analysis. That'd mean less time shuffling papers, more time actually improving the land and less chances of NEPA being weaponized by opportunists through frivolous lawsuits.

Reforming the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA) would be another

"Just like a freshly organized home, a streamlined regulatory system makes daily work more efficient — and will always be a work in progress."

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