

While You Were Working

A PUBLICATION OF THE ARIZONA FARM BUREAU GOVERNMENT RELATIONS TEAM

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CrossOVER

Chelsea McGuire, Government Relations Director

Crossover week is over, and four days of marathon floor sessions have seen their fair share of drama, political and otherwise. When the legislators come back on Monday, they'll have plenty of work to do sorting through bills from their opposite chambers, and we'll have plenty of work shepherding our priority bills through the committee process once again.

Here's how Arizona Farm Bureau's priority bills are faring so far:

H244I: Substitute Acreage

Passed House 34-24

This bill has already been assigned to the Senate Natural Resources, Energy, and Water committee, chaired by Sen. Sine Kerr. We will explain why it represents good water policy by allowing landowners to substitute water rights on unirrigable land to irrigable land, conserving water and increasing efficiency in the process.

H2525: Cage Free Eggs

Retained in House Rules Committee

After narrowly passing the House Land and Agriculture committee, our least-favorite bill of the session is currently stuck in the Rules committee. This is good news, and we have continued to express concerns about the potentially unconstitutional nature of the bill to

legislative leadership. A ballot initiative that would impose cage-free restrictions was also filed in December, and has already been used as a threat to try and pass this bill as a "compromise" to avoid the ballot initiative.

H2672/S1224: Agricultural Nuisance

Retained on House Committee of the Whole

As stakeholders continue to work on language that alleviates concerns from a sector of the Yuma produce industry, we are waiting to bring this bill to the floor until we have finalized amendment language. In the meantime, we are continuing to work with our legislators to help them understand the importance of protecting agricultural operations from lawsuits over smell, dust, or noise created from normal agricultural practices.

H2691: Surface Waters Protection Program

Retained on House Committee of the Whole

After a couple of days with contentious votes and a series of unfortunate health events leading to the absence of several Republican members, House leadership decided to retain the Surface Waters Protection Program legislation until a later date. Committee votes on the bill split down party lines, and we think that's what we can expect on the Floor as well.

CrossOVER (cont'd)

SI222/H2079: Conservation Districts, Water, Invasive Vegetation, Soil Health

Passed Senate 19-11; Passed House 48-11

This bill expands the statutory duties of Natural Resource Conservation Districts to include water education and invasive vegetation removal – things that we know the Districts are already doing, and doing very well. By amending the statute to include these measures specifically, we're ensuring that the Districts can continue to receive funding for these key programs. But, despite having passed both chambers with bipartisan support, we're not done yet. After the bills had passed, we learned that there is an opportunity for soil health initiatives to receive funding from federal sources, if legislation moves through Washington the way we anticipate. So we need to go back and amend one of these bills to make sure that soil health is also expressly included in the Districts' charter language (even though we know that the Districts are already implementing soil health improvement programs across the state...). So look for H2079 to come back to a Senate committee in the next few weeks.

SI330: TPT Exemption, Livestock Watering Equipment

Failed Senate, 14-16

This bill would have expanded the sales tax exemption on farm equipment and inputs by applying it to equipment used to water livestock. It failed when two Republican members voted against it, without explanation.

SI337: Civil Liability in COVID Pandemic

Passed Senate 18-14

This bill would protect places of business from being sued by patrons who allege they contracted COVID-19 at the business. The bill would require that someone alleging injury from COVID-19 prove by clear and convincing evidence that the place of business acted with gross or willful negligence in failing to protect the patron from the virus. The bill would also be retroactive to all claims filed on or before March 10, 2020.

SI734: Agricultural Tax Classification Notice

Do-Pass from House Committee of the Whole

Another common-sense bill from Senator Kerr, this measure would require that changes in agricultural property's tax classification be outlined and mailed by certified mail to the landowner. The notice would also need to outline all the ways to appeal the change in status, making sure that the landowner has plenty of time to pursue all options for maintaining favorable tax classification. With bipartisan support, we expect this bill to pass when it is brought to the Senate floor, perhaps as early as next week.

