If there’s one constant in the country today, it is that there are political issues to discuss and high stakes on the table for all parties involved. In this case, it was potato growers and industry leaders from across the country who converged on Capitol Hill for the D.C. Fly-In, February 13-16, 2017.

The annual Potato D.C. Fly-In is open to all potato growers and industry partners who want to advocate for their industry in the heart of our nation’s capital.

Attending the D.C. Fly-In provides a unique perspective on how federal policies develop in Washington, D.C. and how they affect business, but more importantly, it gives growers the chance to help shape the process.

A week unlike any other, growers speak with one unified voice to lawmakers, administration officials and regulators.

In addition to experiencing the history of Washington, D.C., attendees are given the opportunity to:

- Master advocacy techniques to use during meetings with federal decision makers
- Develop relationships with influential Congressional lawmakers and staff
- Hear analysis and perspective from some of the nation’s top political experts
- Gain invaluable experience as advocates for the potato industry

Congressional representatives and staff were available and out in full force. During scheduled events and speaker presentations, Rep. Suzan DelBene (D-WA) gave a Congressional perspective on potato trade and agricultural policies.

Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WA) provided his Congressional take on not only the potato industry, but also specialty crop priorities. Fitzhugh Elder of the Senate Appropriations Committee explained Congressional priorities for potato research.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture

Above: 2017 National Potato Council President Dwayne Weyers gave opening remarks and welcomed growers and industry partners to the Palm Court Ballroom of the Mayflower Hotel for the D.C. Fly-In.
Above: Patricia Wolff of the American Farm Bureau Federation addressed the gathered crowd and the issue of opportunities for tax reform in the 115th Congress at the Potato D.C. Fly-In, Monday, February 13.

Right: The U.S. Capitol building served as a backdrop for the Potato D.C. Fly-In and an impressive reminder of why growers and industry professionals converged on the nation’s capital—to discuss issues that affect the agricultural community.

(USDA) transition team was represented by Brian Klippenstein, who talked about agricultural priorities of the new administration.

The American Seed Trade Association was represented—Ph.D. Bernice Slutsky tackled “Regulatory Structure for Advanced Breeding Techniques.” The American Farm Bureau had representation at the D.C. Fly-In—Patricia Wolff, who talked about “Opportunities for Tax Reform in the 115th Congress.”

HITTING KEY NOTES

Keynote speakers included Charlie Cook, a renowned political analyst and publisher of The Cook Report, who covered the current political and legislative environment. Charlie has been a trusted voice on all things political for decades and a featured guest on myriad news outlets.

A second keynote speaker, Larry Sabato, whose book A More Perfect Constitution is a call for a new American Constitutional Convention, touched on 23 specific major changes he would make.

John Keeling and Kam Quarles of the National Potato Council provided a key issues overview, and then, in a breakfast session before the Capitol Hill visits, went through pre-lobbying preparation.

Representatives of the Grocery Manufacturers Association, CropLife America and the United Fresh Produce Association presented analysis and gave informative speeches on a variety of topics affecting the potato industry.

Industry experts on tax, Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) disclosure and the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) also addressed the general sessions. Senior Senate Agriculture and Appropriations Committee staff focused on the 2018 Farm Bill and key spending issues that may affect the potato industry in 2017.

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What attendees looked most forward to, and the main purpose of the D.C. Fly-In, was to meet with Congressional leaders and make their voices heard. Key issues were pinpointed and issue papers summarizing those topics circulated to small groups who met with lawmakers throughout the day on Wednesday, February 15.

Those key issues were Immigration Reform, Potato Research Special Grants, Regulatory Reform and Potato Trade Policy and Agreements.

**VIABLE GUEST WORKER PROGRAM**

During Capitol Hill visits with Congressional lawmakers and staff, growers and agricultural professionals explained how the industry depends on a stable workforce, which must include a viable guest worker program and the opportunity to obtain legal work status for current improperly documented workers. They discussed working with the appropriations committees in the House and Senate to secure funding.
for Potato Research Special Grants that support competitive potato breeding projects across the country.

Growers and associates described the regulatory burden on farms and other businesses and how it’s a growing concern for owners and operators of those businesses and a real threat to the creation of jobs and the growth of the economy.

Regulatory reform issues covered the Waters of the United States, or WOTUS, rule (which has since been continued on pg. 18

Left: Rep. Suzan DelBene (D-WA) spoke at a breakfast session in the Grand Ballroom of the Mayflower Hotel during the D.C. Fly-In, giving her Congressional perspective on potato trade and agriculture policies.

Right: Congressman Mike Gallagher (R-WI) holds a potato given to him by WPVGA Executive Director Tamas Houlihan (right) while visiting Capitol Hill to advocate for growers. At left are Larry Alsum of Alsum Farms Inc. and Lynn Dickman, research agronomist for Heartland Farms, Inc.
D.C. Fly-In...
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rolled back by President Donald J. Trump); the Worker Protection Standard; Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Pesticide regulation; agriculture guest worker reform and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits.

Trade policy topics covered the current global competitive landscape, future challenges, the North American Trade Agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (also rolled back by President Trump), port improvement legislation and access to Mexico’s fresh potato market.

The D.C. Fly-In concluded with offsite agency visits to the EPA and USDA to hear from officials.

At the 2017 D.C. Fly-In, issues were discussed. A contingent of intelligent, driven and reasonable potato growers and industry professionals stated their cases, lobbied for their causes and advocated for their fellow growers, and that’s exactly what they were there to do.

Left: During a Wednesday, February 15 breakfast session, Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WA) provided his Congressional take on not only the potato industry, but also specialty crop priorities.

Right: At third from the left with the solid red tie, Congressman Glenn Grothman (R-WI) was kind enough to pose with, from left to right, Wisconsinites Lynn Dickman, Luke Wysocki, Nathan Bula, Larry Alsum and Tamas Houlihan.

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