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# Capital lessons

As board president of this great organization, I have been looking forward all year to the annual pilgrimage to the nation's capital to talk to lawmakers on behalf of Oregon's nursery industry, as well as the nation's.



Mark Bigej  
OAN PRESIDENT

In late May, I had the privilege of joining OAN Past President and Chair of the Government Relations Committee Leigh Geschwill and Executive Director Jeff Stone on a trip to Washington, D.C.

It was a whirlwind trip — there and back in four days — but the time was well spent. In that short time, we were able to meet with USDA officials, all of Oregon's senators and representatives, and the majority and minority Agricultural Committee members of both the Senate and House. In each visit, we were able to speak on the topics that are the most important to us, and encourage our lawmakers to either make changes or continue with programs that help keep our industry viable and thriving.

The main topics we spoke on were the following:

**Labor:** We encouraged comprehensive immigration reform and stressed the importance of securing a sustainable work force for our industry.

**The upcoming U.S. Farm Bill:** We asked our members of Congress, and the committee members, to support the Farm Bill. We had specific requests for five titles of the bill. One of the most important is Title 10, which funds such programs as the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and specialty crop block grants.

**Regulations:** We asked officials to repeal the overreaching EPA Waters of the United States Rule, and delay the implementation of the new EPA Worker Protection Standard.

**Transportation, infrastructure and environment:** We encouraged the use of plant material as an environmental offset on road and bridge projects and asked for funding to support collaborative research projects, specifically the third phase of the Smart Sprayer Project.

What an experience! I had never lobbied at this level before or been on a trip quite like this one. The lessons learned in D.C. were invaluable.

**Lesson 1:** It is now clear to me why things take so long to change. Nothing is close to being straightforward and fast moving as it is in the business (real) world. If you are into Lean or the elimination of waste, don't go to D.C. — you will get nauseous!

**Lesson 2:** Every senator and representative has a very different approach to the job they do, as do their staff members. President Trump's budget was released on the first day of our trip. Reactions to the budget ran the gamut. Some frantically said, "I can't believe what I'm reading." Others calmly said, "This budget only shows the administration's priorities. Congress creates and passes the budget. The President's budget is always DOA," and everywhere in between. You could definitely see different experience levels — and attitudes — amongst members of Congress.

**Lesson 3:** As in Las Vegas, the distance from building to building is much greater than it looks in Washington, D.C.! Even though the majority of our time was spent in meetings, we still managed to rack up more than 12,000 steps a day.

**Lesson 4:** A trip to the World War II and Vietnam War memorials reminds you quickly of the sacrifices many have made to allow us to live in this amazing free country. They're also a good reminder that regardless of the feelings you may have for the state of the political system we have, so far, it has yielded freedom and a country unlike any other in the world. Many have died fighting for it. It is a true blessing to be able to live here.

I would like to offer a special thank you to all of the OAN Members who provided me the opportunity to go on this trip and represent you. It is a trip I never will forget. ☺