

## Q & A WITH NCBA'S ETHAN LANE

*Perspectives from Washington, D.C.*

Since COVID-19 continues to disrupt plans across the country, USPB's annual meeting will be held virtually this year. Tracy Thomas caught up with Ethan Lane, who would have been the event's keynote speaker.

Lane is the vice president of governmental affairs for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). He's also a fifth-generation Arizonan with more than 20 years of experience in natural resources, land use issues and advocacy on behalf of the beef industry.

Here's a look into what NCBA is reporting from the nation's Capitol.

**Q: Describe NCBA's relationship with President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris.**

**A:** President Biden, he's always been fine to work with. He is a deal maker. At his core, he is looking for middle ground. It is a very different picture than that of the Vice President. She's taken public positions in the past that are not complementary to the beef industry.

We're going to have very different challenges with the two of them. Although with history as our guide, I would expect the Vice President to defer to the President's agenda and his vision, which he's continued to articulate is to try to bridge the divide and heal the country.

So, I would hope that means they are going to heed more towards his propensity for deal making than hers for more dramatic social change. And that's certainly

where we're going to try to lean over the next few years and make as much headway as we can with this administration.

**Q: What priorities has NCBA seen from the new administration?**

**A:** This administration is going to have a heavy focus on climate change. They have made it clear that is going to be one of their signature issues. Climate is going to be one of those things that we're going to see creep into areas we never expected it to before.

Worker safety is something that they were really clear about during the campaign and even more so during the transition that they wanted to prioritize. In some of the transition team that was put together, particularly in places like USDA, that signals to us

where priorities are going to lie.

**Q: How about U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and the team he's assembled?**

**A:** We certainly view it as a value add with Secretary Vilsack returning to that role. That's going to give us the ability to pick right up where we left off and figure out where we go from here, rather than hopefully re-litigating some past issues. Whether it's GIPSA, mandatory country-of-origin labeling, or any of those issues that tend to hamstring this industry.

We've already had a robust dialogue with Vilsack's team

*continued on page 6*



continued from page 5

at USDA and with the White House since Inauguration Day. They're very open, responsive and interested in what we have to say. That is a tremendous difference between 2021 and 2009.

**Q: What key issues do you expect to come up over the next year?**

**A:** Secretary Vilsack has a big agenda that's been handed to him by the President. He's made it clear that he has marching orders to get into the weeds on climate and worker safety. He's going to have to deal with packing capacity issues.

The cattle market issues that we've been dealing with for the better part of two years now, I would expect are going to continue to be pressing. It's something they are hearing about out in the country and are interested in finding a resolution.

Labeling is another one we're going to see and hear quite a bit about. That is something we've been working on for the last couple of years through policy changes having to do with product of the USA labeling. That's the latest version of the MCOOL conversation.

On GIPSA, Vilsack didn't say he was going to throw it out. He didn't say he was going to start over. So we'll see how they get through that process, and whether they feel like the criteria that was laid out in that new structure is sufficient for him to feel like that's one he can just leave alone and move on to other issues.

**Q: What are NCBA's priority issues and areas of interest?**

**A:** Sustainability and climate is a big one for us. That issue is not going away anytime soon. Before this administration made it a priority, our retail sector was

already telling us that it was a priority. And at U.S. Premium Beef, nobody understands that as well as your members and producers do.

That's a conversation we're going to have to be involved in and it is one where we have the benefit of a really great story to tell.

When we have conversations with the EU or the UK, they're using international cattle production numbers of 14-15% emissions. We're around 2% here in the U.S. That didn't happen by accident. It's the industry evolution and optimizing the supply chain in a way that benefits not just the end product and a higher-quality product every year, but a lower environmental footprint, as well.

Continuing to really hit on that in an organized way is going to be a top priority in our strategic plan, and so is looking at issues like traceability and where we go from here as an industry. We now have a path to mandatory RFID that has been laid out by USDA and the previous administration, which is now under review.

But all of our issue focus is really centered on increasing opportunities for producer profitability. And at the end of the day, that's something we always look at internally, but in this year's strategic plan, we've got it right at the top so that it's clear that that's what we're thinking about in all of these issue areas.

**Q: What's your lasting message to ranchers?**

**A:** For us to be successful, it is going to take all of our producers reminding their elected members of Congress and senators what they need. You can't assume your neighbor's doing it for you. They need to hear those grassroots voices. They need to hear these folks out in the country saying, "I'm an employer in your district and here's what I need to be successful. Here's what I need you to do for me in Congress." ♦