



● **Communications and Legislation Committee Report**

Summary

This letter provides information on activities in External Affairs, relating to community outreach and state and federal activities relative to the COVID-19 pandemic

Purpose

Informational

Attachments

None

Detailed Report

Background

External Affairs is working with member agencies, organizations and policymakers on the state and federal levels to respond to and support efforts to address the human and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and, in particular, the impacts to water agencies which have been identified as an essential sector by the federal government.

Federal Responses and Actions

The United States Senate returned to work on May 4, 2020 and the House of Representatives is tentatively set to return May 12, 2020.

Latest COVID-19 Stimulus Package

On April 24, President Trump signed into law a fourth COVID-19 legislative package, H.R. 266 the Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act. The \$484 billion relief package includes funding for the following programs:

- \$310 billion for the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program to help businesses keep their workforce employed during the COVID-19 crises
- \$60 billion for other SBA disaster loan programs to provide additional aid to businesses employing 500 or fewer employees including agricultural businesses
- \$75 billion for to reimburse health-care providers for COVID-19-related expenses and lost revenue
- \$25 billion for COVID-19 testing

Work continues on the next round of federal COVID-19 relief bills, with some members recommending a slower approach to incorporate input from committees and an assessment of the impact of previous aid packages, and others recommending quick action to provide aid to state and county governments and extend unemployment assistance. The Administration also wants to ensure assistance for the oil and gas industry.

Additionally, a stimulus bill providing infrastructure funding is anticipated in the coming months as a tool to restart the economy. Metropolitan is working with member agencies to prepare a list of water infrastructure projects which could potentially be eligible for funding.

Other Significant Actions

On April 21, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee released draft language to reauthorize the Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA), which primarily authorizes U.S. Army Corps of Engineers water resource projects. In addition to the draft WRDA bill, the Committee released a bipartisan draft drinking water bill.

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This bill includes assistance for disadvantaged communities and a nationwide needs assessment for rural and urban low-income community water assistance.

Legislation requiring the Environmental Protection Agency to set a drinking water standard for perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) may be attached to the draft drinking water bill. The legislative language is likely to mirror the language approved by the full Senate last year in its National Defense Authorization Act.

State of California Responses and Actions

Governor Newsom is leading the state's response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Conducting daily informational briefings, the administration has launched a series of efforts to provide expanded health services, housing, financial assistance to workers and businesses, and other services. Among the major efforts announced in April to help the California economy recovery are:

- A plan to inform when to lift the stay-at-home orders based on six key factors designed to protect public health:
 - monitoring and protecting communities through testing, contact tracing, isolating
 - preventing infection in higher-risk people
 - handling surges in hospital and health system capacity
 - developing therapeutics to meet demand
 - supporting physical distancing in business, schools and child care facilities
 - determining when to reinstitute protective measures, if needed
- A Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery, co-chaired by Tom Steyer and Chief of Staff Ann O'Leary, and including Governors Wilson, Davis, Schwarzenegger and Brown, the Senate President pro Tempore, the Assembly Speaker, and 80 of the state's leading business and civic leaders.

A bicameral group of 20 California legislators commended the Governor's Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery and called for new bonds, tax incentives, and private investment to advance climate-resilient infrastructure projects, including water recycling, to accelerate job creation.

The California Legislature plans to return on May 4. Members of the Senate and Assembly have pared down their respective bill packages at the urging of legislative leadership due to the compacted legislative calendar. Remaining bills will likely focus on wildfire recovery, affordable housing and homelessness, and COVID-19 response. Both Metropolitan-sponsored bills, AB 2246 (Mayes): Surface Mining and Reclamation Act and SB 996 (Portantino): State Water Resources Control Board: Constituents of Emerging Concern Program, have been postponed so the Legislature can focus on time-sensitive work ahead and will have to be reintroduced next year.

Passage of the FY 2020-21 budget by the June 15 constitutional deadline is a high priority of the Legislature. The Senate and Assembly budget committees have formed COVID-19 subcommittees and held oversight hearings on the expenditure of emergency funds and the economic impacts of the pandemic. The state expects to spend \$7 billion on COVID-19 needs this year, and a revised budget that reflects those expenditures will be presented mid-May. The Department of Finance and the Legislative Analyst's Office have reported the economic downturn and the rapid rise in unemployment have put California into a recession and will result in lower revenues. However, according to Legislative Analyst's Office, due to strong budget reserves, California is in a better fiscal position than the last recession.

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External Affairs Management Report

Metropolitan this month received top honors from the National Association of Government Communicators in five awards categories: social media, grassroots marketing, photography, the calendar art program and the State Water Project virtual reality tour.

In response to COVID-19, External Affairs continues to develop and distribute an extensive collection of informational resources and services focused on water quality, safety and reliability, and to provide communications support to member agencies.

The centerpiece is a new COVID-19 web portal and resource library of more than 100 creative assets including graphics, videos, fact sheets and in-language documents. These materials are available at no cost to agencies and the public and have been downloaded more than 1,000 times in the past month.

A full-page open letter was published in 35 community newspapers, in three languages, reaching an estimated 3 million readers. Social media posts have garnered 4.4 million impressions on Facebook and nearly 500,000 on Instagram and Twitter combined. The next phase of messaging will focus on positive and forward-looking elements.

A newly designed education website was launched this month to better serve the large number of teachers and students at home. Through increased collaboration with member agencies, state agencies and schools, Metropolitan is expanding its reach with new curriculum, webinars and distance learning projects. A reimagined Solar Cup program includes weekly online engineering, art and science challenges, allowing students to complete the 2020 program.

In partnership with the California Native Plant Society, Metropolitan has initiated a series of “Gardening is Wellness” themed social media posts on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter that link to new outdoor gardening resources and is partnering with gardening organizations on weekly Zoom virtual tours of home gardens with an average attendance of about 1,000 viewers.

External Affairs is actively working with hundreds of community based organizations, small businesses and local elected officials and leaders to support activities and information-sharing about Metropolitan as well as financial and other resources.

