



● **Communication and Legislation Committee Report**

Summary

This letter provides information on activities in External Affairs, relating to federal and state legislative activities and community outreach.

Purpose

Informational

Attachments

None.

Detailed Report

Background

External Affairs is working with member agencies, organization 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, to advance Metropolitan's priority policy objectives and to maintain effective outreach activities throughout the service area.

Federal Legislative Report

Schedule

The House adjourned October 3 and is scheduled to return on November 16, unless a deal on the next COVID-19 relief package comes together earlier. The Senate will return October 12 for Judiciary Committee hearings.

COVID-19 Relief Package

Negotiations between White House officials and Democratic leaders on the next COVID-19 relief package are ongoing. House Democrats released a \$2.2 trillion COVID-19 relief package on September 28, a smaller version of the HEROES Act, H.R. 6800 which the House passed on May 15.

The revised bill creates a State and Local Government Coronavirus Relief Fund, administered by the Department of Treasury, to provide \$436 billion in assistance to state, local and tribal governments, including \$238 billion directly to states and \$179 billion to local governments. Unlike previous coronavirus relief programs, this new funding program can be used to cover lost revenue due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The revised HEROES Act also includes \$1.5 billion for a program to help low-income residence pay their water bills, and a new \$21 billion Homeowners Assistance Fund for utility bills, mortgage assistance, hazards insurance and other purposes.

This new bill is a marker bill for ongoing COVID-19 relief negotiations and will not be voted on unless a bi-partisan agreement fails to come together.

FY21 Appropriations

A bi-partisan agreement to keep the government funded and avoid a shutdown passed the House on September 22 and the Senate on September 30. The continuing resolution keeps the government funded at current levels until December 11 and extends for one year the national flood insurance program and surface transportation program that were set to expire on September 30.

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Infrastructure Bill

Negotiations on the next infrastructure package are on pause until after the election. House and Senate staff are close to reaching a deal on the traditional Water Resources Development Act provisions funding Army Corps of Engineers projects. It remains to be seen if they can reach agreement on a larger package.

State of California Legislative Report

Summary

California has faced extraordinary challenges this year brought on by COVID-19, an economic recession, catastrophic wildfires, and an energy crisis. These events along with last year's unfinished affordable housing bills will shape legislative priorities in 2021.

The Legislature sent the Governor 428 bills; he signed 372 and vetoed 56.

Metropolitan Priority Bills

The Governor signed three water quality bills on Metropolitan's state matrix of priority bills:

- AB 2560 (Quirk, D-Hayward) will bring greater transparency to the State Water Resources Control Board Division of Drinking Water process to establish or revise notifications or response levels.
- AB 3220 (Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials) extends the operation of the Underground Storage Tank Cleanup Fund loan and grant program to January 1, 2026.
- SB 1044 (Allen, D-Santa Monica) will phase out the use of PFAS chemicals in firefighting equipment and foam.

The only Metropolitan priority bill that the Governor vetoed was SB 559 (Hurtado, D-Sanger) regarding subsidence repairs, noting in his veto message that California needs to evaluate repairs and improvements to water infrastructure statewide, not one project at a time.

COVID-19 Legislative Actions

The Governor also signed a number of bills that build on his executive actions in response to COVID-19. Of note, he signed SB 1159 (Hill, D-San Mateo) which supersedes Executive Order N-62-20 to expand access to workers' compensation by making it possible for employees who test positive due to an outbreak at work to receive medical care and wage replacement benefits. Employers also will be required to report a COVID-19 outbreak to local public health officials and any known cases to employees who may have been exposed to COVID-19 within one business day as enacted by AB 685 (Reyes, D-San Bernardino).

Wildfires and Climate Change

Over the past month, the Governor turned his attention to the significant number of wildfires and a series of record setting heatwaves that triggered an energy crisis and rolling blackouts. The Governor also issued Executive Order N-79-20 that requires the California Air Resources Board to develop rules allowing only zero-emission cars to be sold in the state by 2035 and, wherever feasible, zero emission medium and heavy-duty trucks by 2045. The Governor's press release stated banning gas-powered cars was the most impactful thing the state could do to combat climate change given the transportation sector accounts for more than half of the state's carbon emissions.

External Affairs Management Report

There has been significant interest in the progress of the Regional Recycled Water Program and the board discussions this month and next. This includes virtual tours of the facility for the public, Southern California Leadership Network and environmental organizations. Staff also has accepted invitations to speak with the California Contract Cities Association, Gateway Water Management Association, South Bay COG Water Infrastructure Committee, San Gabriel Valley COG Energy, Environment & Natural Resources Committee, ACWA Region 8 and the Gateway Chambers Alliance, in addition to providing program updates with GreenLA, OurWaterLA, and the Southern California Water Dialogue. Lastly, Metropolitan will receive the Environmental

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Communications Award Grand Prize for 2020 from the American Academy of Environmental Engineers & Scientists later this week for the outreach and communications of the program.

Interest in Metropolitan's new virtual educational programming has been high with more than 150 K-12 grade classrooms and teachers requesting webinars and customized online activities in September.

A social media series honoring Metropolitan employees as part of Water Professionals Week featured four staff, each of whom have more than 40 years of service with the district. The posts performed extremely well across all platforms.