



● **Communications 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 Update

New Congress

The 117th Congress was sworn in and on January 3 Alex Padilla officially became the junior Senator from California.

The outcome of the Georgia Senate race on January 5 determined which party controls the Senate. To allow sufficient time for votes to be counted, the Senate is not scheduled to conduct any legislative business until after the inauguration on January 20.

The House is in session the first week of January and then reconvenes after the inauguration.

Federal Legislative Update

Leaders of the 116th Congress passed a legislative package that included funding the federal government for FY 2021, coronavirus relief, and a variety of other miscellaneous pieces of legislation.

Appropriations funding for programs of interest to Metropolitan are largely consistent with FY 2020 funding or slightly increased. Notably, Environmental Protection Agency's Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program received \$65 million in FY 2021, an increase of 8% from FY 2020. Reclamation programs authorized in California Water Title of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act (WIIN Act) received level funding and CALFED was once again funded at \$33 million and its authorization extended for another year.

A low-income water and wastewater ratepayer assistance program was created for the first time in the appropriations portion of this large bill. The Department of Health and Human Services received \$638 million to "reduce arrearages of and rates charged to" households "with the lowest incomes, that pay a high proportion" of their income for water service.

The bill also funds a WIFIA program for Army Corps of Engineers projects for the first time. The new low-interest loan program received \$14.2 million and will focus on projects to reduce flood damage and repair high hazard dams.

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Provisions were included in the Coronavirus relief portion of the package included: \$160 billion to individuals making up to \$75,000 and couples making up to \$150,000; \$25 billion in rental assistance that can be used to pay utility bills, and extension of the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program. Unfortunately, it does not include direct aid to states and local governments or special districts.

Other legislation incorporated into the bill includes the Water Resources Development Act authorizing numerous Army Corps of Engineers projects around the country; and a bill establishing the Snow Water Supply Forecasting Program within the Department of the Interior to improve snowpack measurement.

State Update

Newsom Administration

Governor Newsom selected Secretary of State Alex Padilla to be the next California Senator filling Vice President-elect Kamala Harris' seat. Assembly Member Shirley Weber (D-San Diego) was selected to fill the Secretary of State vacancy. The California Legislature has 90 days to confirm her nomination by simple majority and a special election will then be called for her Assembly seat. The Governor has one more constitutional office to fill, Attorney General, assuming Xavier Becerra is confirmed as President-elect Biden's Health and Human Services Secretary.

Governor Newsom appointed Jim DeBoo to be his Executive Secretary. In his new role, Mr. Deboo will oversee communications, legislative, external affairs and intergovernmental affairs. He will lead the Governor's Office alongside Cabinet Secretary Ana Matosantos, who will continue to oversee state agencies and departments and the Governor's legal affairs, judicial appointments and operations.

California Legislature

The Legislature's return date has been amended from January 4 to January 11, 2021 due to the high number of COVID-19 cases and a desire to keep members and staff safe. At this time, there have been no other changes to the legislative calendar.

- January 22 - Last day to submit bill requests to the Office of Legislative Counsel
- February 19 - Last day for bills to be introduced
- March 25-April 5 - Spring Recess
- May 14 - Last day for policy committees until after the house of origin deadline
- May 21 - Last day for fiscal committees until after the house of origin deadline
- June 4 - Last day for each house to pass bills introduced in that house (house of origin deadline)
- June 15 - Constitutional budget bill deadline

Committee chairs and membership for the 2021-22 legislative session have been named.

Assembly

Water Parks and Wildlife: Assembly Member Eduardo Garcia (D-Coachella) will remain Chair and Assembly Member Meghan Dahle (R-Bieber) is Vice Chair. Newly elected members added were Assembly Members Steve Bennett (D-Santa Barbara), Janet Nguyen (R-Fountain Valley), Thurston "Smitty" Smith (D-Hesperia), Carlos Villapudua (D-Stockton), and Chris Ward (D-San Diego). In addition, Assembly Member Al Muratsuchi (D-Torrance) was added to the committee.

Environmental Safety & Toxic Materials: Assembly Member Bill Quirk (D-Hayward) will remain Chair. Newly elected Assembly Member Thurston "Smitty" Smith (D-Hesperia), who formerly served on the Mojave Water Agency Board of Directors, will be the new Vice Chair.

Natural Resources: Assembly Member Luz Rivas (D-Arleta) will chair the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources replacing Assembly Member Laura Friedman (D-Glendale), who was appointed chair of the Assembly Transportation Committee. Assembly Member Rivas, an engineer, was first elected in 2018.

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Utilities and Energy: Assembly Member Chris Holden (D-Pasadena) remains the Chair and Assembly Member Jim Patterson (R-Fresno) is Vice Chair.

Appropriations: Assembly Member Lorena Gonzalez (D-San Diego) remains the Chair and Assembly Member Frank Bigelow (R-O'Neals) is Vice Chair.

Budget: Assembly Member Phil Ting (D-San Francisco) remains Chair and Assembly Member Vince Fong (R-Bakersfield) is Vice Chair.

Budget Subcommittee No. 3 Climate Crisis, Resources, Energy, and Transportation added "climate crisis" and "energy" to its title suggesting a new priority focused on climate change issues. Assembly Member Richard Bloom (D-Santa Monica) will remain Chair.

Senate

Natural Resources and Water: Senator Henry Stern (D-Canoga Park) remains Chair and Senator Brian Jones (R-Santee) remains Vice Chair. New committee members include Senators John Laird (D-Santa Cruz), Susan Talamantes Eggman (D-Stockton) and Senator S. Monique Limón (D-Santa Barbara).

Environmental Quality: Senator Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica) remains Chair and Senator Patricia Bates (R-Laguna Nigel) is the Vice Chair. Senator Lena A. Gonzalez (D-Long Beach) was added to the committee.

Energy, Utilities and Communications: Senator Ben Hueso (D-San Diego) remains Chair and Senator Brian Dahle (R-Bieber) is Vice Chair. Several newly elected members added to this committee include Senators Josh Becker (D-Menlo Park), Susan Talamantes Eggman (D-Stockton), Dave Min (D-Irvine). Senator Eggman has been a supporter of long-duration energy storage projects and Senator Beckman is a long-time advocate for clean energy.

Budget and Fiscal Review: Senator Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley) will Chair the committee replacing former Senator Holly Mitchell and Senator Jim Nielsen (R-Tehama) will remain Vice Chair.

Budget Subcommittee #2 on Resources, Environmental Protection and Energy: Senator Bob Wicowski (D-Fremont) remains the Chair and Senator Brian Dahle (D-Bieber) is Vice Chair.

The special election to fill a vacancy in SD 30 created by the election of Senator Holly Mitchell to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, will have its primary on March 2 and general election on May 4.

State Legislative Update

As of December 22, 252 bills have been introduced with a focus on COVID-19, climate and wildfire, housing and education. As was reported last month, the Senate introduced a climate bond, SB 45 (Portantino, D-La Cañada Flintridge), a reintroduction of a \$5.51 billion bond bill from the last session to finance projects for wildfire prevention, safe drinking water, drought preparation, and flood protection. Staff will provide an update on the proposed bond and any proposals that may be in the Governor's proposed 2021-22 budget scheduled for release on or around January 8, 2021.

External Affairs Management Report

Metropolitan's new "We're California Friendly Plants" campaign launched on social media platforms and digital marketing with video promotions and animated gifs introducing the plant characters. In December, the campaign racked up nearly one million impressions on social media platforms, more than 300,000 views on YouTube, and drove 20,000 visitors to the native plant page bewaterwise.com.

The first-ever virtual "Water is Life" Student Art Calendar reception honored 37 young artists from 19 member and retail water agencies whose art supported conservation, water efficiency and stewardship themes. The online event recognized the students and their families, teachers and the sponsoring agencies.

Virtual tours for the public and customized offerings continue for the Regional Recycled Water Program including the addition of a Spanish language tour program and materials.

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Expanding its virtual education programming for Boy Scouts, Metropolitan is partnering with the Municipal Water District of Orange County to offer a Merit Badge clinic on January 23. Scouts will learn about soil types, erosion, soil conservation, aquifers, water cycle, water pollution and conservation in a half-day online session. Interest also remains high for Metropolitan's online "Water Protector" patch program that educates Girl Scouts about Southern California's water resources, infrastructure and water quality initiatives.