

Summary of Federal Legislative Report – March 11

NACo Legislative Conference – Trip Recap

Solano County officials were in Washington, D.C. the week of March 4th for the National Association of Counties' (NACo) Legislative Conference. The event is held on an annual basis and brings together over 2,000 elected and appointed officials from across the country to focus on key federal policy issues facing county government.

Led by Supervisor Erin Hannigan, the Solano County contingent participated in a number of committee meetings and conference workshops and also met with several congressional offices. Supervisor Hannigan was joined in Washington, D.C. by Birgitta Corsello, County Administrator, Michelle Heppner, Legislative, Intergovernmental and Public Affairs Officer, Jerry Huber, the Director of Health and Social Services, and Paragon Government Relations, Solano County's federal advocate.

In addition to meetings on both the House and Senate side of Capitol Hill, Solano County met with Lynn Johnson, the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The group discussed reorganizing service delivery systems to better serve clients. Prior to her current position, Assistant Secretary Johnson directed the Jefferson County (CO) Department of Human Services and initiated a number of reforms Solano County is contemplating. Solano County officials will be contacting Jefferson County to explore the possibility of a site visit to exchange best practices.

Trump Administration Releases Fiscal Year 2020 Budget

On March 11th, the Trump administration released an outline of its fiscal year 2020 budget proposal. As expected, Democratic leaders in both the House and Senate have declared the budget plan "dead on arrival." Given the divided Congress and the political climate ahead of next year's presidential election, the document will serve as more of a symbolic representation of the president's policy priorities than the actual starting place for spending decisions within the context of the FY 2020 appropriations process.

It should be noted that the budget outline lacks specific details on most individual spending programs, though it does specify certain programmatic areas that the administration would like to see increased, or, in some cases, completely eliminated. Line-by-line program numbers are expected to be released by the White House on March 18th.

To follow are several key aspects of the administration's budget outline.

- While defense spending would increase by roughly four percent, the proposal calls for reducing non-defense discretionary spending from \$597 billion in the current fiscal year to \$543 billion – a nine percent cut. Note: when disaster-relief funding

is factored in, the total domestic spending reduction would amount to a roughly five percent decrease.

- The Environmental Protection Agency – along with the Departments of Transportation, HUD, and HHS, among others – would see double-digit percentage cuts (EPA – 30%; DOT – 21%; HUD – 16%; HHS – 12%).
- Along with Defense, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs, would receive increases in FY 2020. As part of the DHS budget, the president is requesting \$8.6 billion for southwest border wall construction activities, setting up another likely showdown with Congress over this particular issue.
- The budget proposes a total of \$2.1 trillion in long-term cuts to mandatory safety net programs, including cuts to Medicaid (via the creation of a Medicaid block grant), as well as proposed cuts to SNAP and other entitlements.

Infrastructure

A number of congressional committees in both the House and Senate have held hearings in recent weeks to examine the state of the nation's infrastructure. The purpose of the hearings is to set the stage for the development of a potential wide-ranging public works package.

For one, the House Ways and Means Committee held a hearing entitled *Our Nation's Crumbling Infrastructure and the Need for Immediate Action*. Among others, the committee heard testimony from Transportation & Infrastructure (T&I) Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Ranking Member Sam Graves (R-MO). It should be noted that the T&I Committee has jurisdiction over many of the programmatic aspects of any would-be infrastructure legislation, while the Ways and Means Committee would be charged with writing the revenue raising portion of the bill.

In terms of how to pay for an infrastructure proposal, Congressman DeFazio has endorsed a fuel tax increase as the most efficient way to put the Highway Trust Fund on a long-term path to solvency. He also announced his intentions to reintroduce legislation that would invest in the nation's infrastructure, including his *A Penny for Progress* bill that would index the gas and diesel tax, with increases capped at 1.5 cents per year. For his part, Congressman Sam Graves (R-MO) advocated for a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) user fee as the most promising long-term funding solution, though he indicated that all financing options are currently on the table.

On a related matter, the Senate Environment & Public Works (EPW) Committee is soliciting legislative proposals for its forthcoming "FY 2020 Surface Transportation Reauthorization" bill. For her part, Senator Feinstein is asking stakeholders to provide her office with their requests no later than Monday, March 25th.

Gun Background Check Legislation

Last month, the House of Representatives passed two separate pieces of legislation designed to expand background checks for firearm purchases. The first bill, sponsored by Representative Mike Thompson (D-CA) and entitled the *Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019* (HR 8), was approved on a 240 to 190 vote.

Among other things, HR 8 mandates background checks be performed on nearly all gun sales and transfers, including firearm purchases made privately, online, or at gun shows. Under current law, only licensed gun dealers are required to conduct a background check for someone seeking to obtain a gun. The background check mandate would not apply to certain firearm transfers, such as a gift between spouses in good faith. The bill also would require federal immigration officials to be contacted in the event someone in the U.S. illegally tries to buy a gun.

The second piece of legislation, sponsored by House Majority Whip James Clyburn (D-SC) and entitled the *Enhanced Background Checks Act of 2019* (HR 1112), was approved by the House on a 228 to 198 vote. The bill would extend the period federal authorities have to complete a background check before a gun sale can go through. Under current law, if a check isn't finalized in three business days, the transaction can automatically proceed.

Looking ahead, neither HR 8 nor HR 1112 is expected to be considered in the Senate. According to an official Statement of Administration Policy, President Trump's advisors would recommend that he veto both bills if they were presented to him.