

Washington Update

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

September 3, 2019

BUDGET

Before adjourning for the August recess, Congress passed H.R. 3877 to suspend the federal debt for two years and increase the FY 2020 defense and non-defense spending caps from a total of \$1.119 trillion to \$1.288 trillion. This bipartisan budget agreement ensures that the United States will not default on its debt obligations and also avoids automatic across-the-board cuts in federal spending that were put into place as budget enforcement mechanisms by the Budget Control Act of 2011.

It is hoped that the budget deal will reduce the likelihood that a budget impasse would shut down the federal government in October. However, myriad spending decisions must still be made, starting when Congress returns next week. The budget agreement deals with the critical question of what the overall discretionary spending limit will be for FY 2020 but leaves the many details about how that funding will be allocated to be decided in the individual appropriations bills. The lack of progress on those funding bills in the Senate has caused the Appropriations Committees to begin working on a short-term Continuing Resolution that will be needed to keep the government open when the new fiscal year starts on October 1.

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES

NACo urged counties to join in a coordinated advocacy effort during August in support of long-term reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. We contacted the House Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees to reiterate the County's support for a multi-year TANF bill that would increase funding for child care, job training, and other aspects of the program and also provide California more flexibility in the administration of the program. This is an issue that carried over into 2019 from the

115th Congress because the previous TANF authorization lapsed on December 21. A short-term extension at current funding levels was enacted in June but Congress must act again by October 1 to continue funding for this safety-net program.

INFRASTRUCTURE

In late July, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works approved S. 2302, the *America's Transportation Infrastructure Act of 2019 (ATIA)*, which would provide a multi-year authorization of the highway portion of federal surface transportation programs. The current authorization for these programs is provided by the FAST Act, which runs through September 30, 2020. The action yesterday by the Committee accelerates the reauthorization process and jump-starts the congressional debate over infrastructure.

The committee-approved version of the ATIA would increase highway spending by about 27 percent. S. 2302 would continue the current set-aside under the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program that makes funding available for county bridges and establish a new discretionary grant Bridge Investment Program, which would be funded by \$3.3 billion over the life of the bill. In addition, the bill would continue and increase the INFRA grant program and make funding available for projects that promote resilience to climate change.

The next steps for the legislation would be consideration of the transit title by the Banking Committee and rail and highway safety titles by the Commerce Committee. Identification of the financing provisions for the bill is under the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee and that is a significant hurdle for the legislation to overcome. If the current baseline spending level for all surface transportation programs was increased by 27 percent, it is estimated that an

additional \$110 billion in revenue would be needed to keep the Highway Trust Fund solvent through 2025.

We are continuing to work with NACo and CSAC to advocate for transportation funding that would come directly to counties and other local governments for maintenance of roads. Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) and other congressional leaders indicated earlier in the year that infrastructure initiatives would receive priority consideration in the House, but those bills stalled when bipartisan negotiations over financing mechanisms ended abruptly.

OLDER AMERICANS ACT

We contacted the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee and the House Committee on Education and Labor in support of reauthorization of the Older Americans Act (OAA). The OAA funds a wide range of aging services across five core areas, with local flexibility built into the Act to reflect the needs of that area's older adults and caregivers. Examples include meals, in-home help, transportation, home modification, legal services and many other supportive services that keep older adults healthy and independent. The current Older Americans Act will expire on September 30, and we are coordinating our advocacy with stakeholder groups such as the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging.

IMMIGRATION

On August 1, the Senate Judiciary Committee approved Chair Graham's (R-SC) S. 1494, *the Secure and Protect Act of 2019*. Chair Graham intends the legislation to address what he describes as abuse of the asylum laws and would require asylum applications from residents of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to be filed at refugee processing centers in Central America and Mexico, rather than the United States. It also would modify U.S. law to allow families to be held together for longer than the 20 days currently allowed by the Flores decision.

All Committee Democrats opposed the bill and Ranking Member Feinstein spoke against the legislation on both policy and procedural grounds. President Trump has also taken several steps administratively to clamp down on immigration and Congressional Democrats may seek to oppose those steps in the FY20 appropriations bills that are currently under development.

GUN CONTROL

The House Judiciary Committee is planning to meet next week to mark up several gun control bills, including Representative Carbajal's H.R.1236, the *Extreme Risk Protection Order Act of 2019*, which would provide incentives through grants for states to adopt laws providing for Extreme Risk Protection Orders. The other bills on the Committee's schedule include H.R.1186, the *Keep Americans Safe Act*, which would ban high capacity ammunition magazines, and H.R.2708, the *Disarm Hate Act*, which would include those convicted of misdemeanor hate crimes in the list of categories of individuals who are prohibited from possessing firearms, and who would be prohibited from doing so through background checks. In February, the full House also passed H.R. 8, the *Bipartisan Background Checks Act of 2019*, and H.R. 1112, the *Enhanced Background Checks Act*. Recent mass shooting events have increased pressure on the Senate to take action, but Majority Leader McConnell (R-KY) has not yet announced if he will schedule any of the bills for consideration.

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