

Washington Update

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

January 29, 2013

113TH CONGRESS

As the 113th Congress has gotten underway, three issues of significance to the County and its local responsibilities have quickly moved to the forefront. These include:

- FY 2013 Federal Funding;
- Immigration Reform; and,
- Gun Violence.

FY 2013 FEDERAL FUNDING

Despite the year-end deal by the 112th Congress to avert the Fiscal Cliff, significant residual budget issues affecting the County still remain and must be addressed in the next few months. These include the new March 1 deadline for the automatic spending cuts under sequestration; the March 31 expiration of the FY 2013 Continuing Resolution (CR); and the increase in the Federal debt limit. The new Congress has already begun action to temporarily neutralize the debt limit issue, with the House approving H.R. 325, which would suspend the debt limit through May 19, 2013. The bill was placed on the Senate Calendar on January 28, and President Obama has indicated he will sign the measure once it is approved by the Senate. Discussions regarding the continuation of FY 2013 funding and the avoidance of a government shutdown center around two options – approval of another CR to fund Federal programs for the remainder of the Fiscal year, or passage of an Omnibus FY 2013 Appropriations bill to cover all Federal programs. We are told that an omnibus bill has been drafted and is ready to go, but Congressional leadership has not yet indicated how they intend to proceed.

How Congress will address sequestration is less clear and more problematic. Republican Leadership and rank-and-file members both have expressed a strategy of using the specter of the broad cuts as a way to leverage action on entitlement reform. However, many entitlement and programs

that benefit low-income and needy families and individuals are exempted from the 8-10% sequestration reductions.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

As was highlighted in our January update, White House Deputy Intergovernmental Affairs Director Jay Williams indicated during our December meeting with him that comprehensive immigration reform would be one of President Obama's highest priorities. The President strongly emphasized this priority during his Inaugural Address on January 21, and is expected to release his proposals for immigration reform shortly. Meanwhile in Congress, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has released his top priorities for the 113th Congress and has assigned comprehensive immigration reform as the highest priority for Senate Democrats. A bipartisan group of 8 senators have also announced that they are working on a broad outline for immigration reform that includes;

- Creating a path to citizenship for unauthorized immigrants already living in the United States (contingent upon securing the borders);
- Creating an effective employment verification system; and
- Establishing an improved process for admitting workers to meet the country's workforce needs.

While not amongst the eight senators issuing this framework, we anticipate that Senator Feinstein will be a very active player in the immigration debate, having sponsored immigration-related measures in recent Congresses that included proposing a guest worker program to address the workforce needs of agricultural industry. Despite optimism stemming from President Obama's leadership and the budding bipartisan effort in the Senate, the response by the House Republican Majority has been lukewarm so far and negotiations of the details of

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comprehensive immigration reform is expected to be an extensive process.

GUN VIOLENCE

The Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting tragedy has mobilized a variety of efforts to address gun violence in the country. In addition to appointing Vice President Biden to head a panel to investigate the issue and develop recommendations, President Obama announced a list of twenty-three executive actions the Administration would take immediately to reduce gun violence. We provided this list to County staff and researched potential resources the County could access for its public safety, mental health and public health needs. While they did not offer immediate opportunities, in the longer term the President's initiatives may be

able to provide resources through the proposed expansion and parity for behavioral health services, the ramping up and expansion of the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, which has faced declining funding in recent years. Finally, Senator Feinstein has introduced S. 150, the Assault Weapons Ban of 2013, which would ban 157 of the most commonly-owned military-style assault weapons, as well as large-capacity magazines that hold more than 10 rounds of ammunition. The Senator has acknowledged that the legislation faces an uphill battle against the gun lobby, but she has assembled a broad coalition of Congressional members, law enforcement, doctors, clergy and gun violence victims in support of her proposal.

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