

Washington Update

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

December 1, 2020

FY21 APPROPRIATIONS

Congress returned from the Thanksgiving break with the need to make rapid progress on legislation to fund the Federal government in fiscal year 2021. Although short-term funding is in place until December 11, progress had been stalled by disagreements over the funding totals and broad parameters that are needed for the Appropriations Committees to do their work. That logjam was broken last week when the bipartisan congressional leadership reached a deal to divide up the \$1.4 trillion discretionary spending total among the twelve annual funding bills.

Work is now proceeding on specific funding decisions for each agency and program. Negotiators must also deal with various “red-lines” that have been drawn over issues such as border wall and veterans’ health funding. Finally, the House and Senate will have to decide whether to include additional emergency spending in the regular appropriations bills for COVID response or whether this need can be dealt with as part of a more comprehensive pandemic relief bill.

COVID-19 RELIEF LEGISLATION

We recently contacted the leadership of the House and Senate and our local delegation to reiterate the importance of enacting legislation to provide direct and flexible fiscal relief to county governments of all sizes. Leaders from both parties have called for enactment of a fifth pandemic relief package during the Lame Duck Session, but an agreement remains elusive.

Negotiations have been stuck between the \$2.2 trillion, fairly comprehensive, plan pushed by House Democrats and the much more limited approach favored by Senate Republicans. In recent days, several rank and file members

from both parties have been urging a more targeted approach that would see at least some aid get enacted this year.

MARIJUANA POLICY

House leaders have scheduled a floor vote this week on Judiciary Committee Chairman Nadler’s (D-NY) H.R. 3884, the *Marijuana Opportunity, Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act*. This legislation would remove marijuana from the federal list of controlled substances and expunge some marijuana-related criminal records. H.R. 3884 had originally been slated for floor time in September, but a decision was made to downplay the bill before the November elections. Senator Harris introduced the Senate version of the legislation as S. 2227, but no action has been scheduled on that bill.

HOUSE LEADERSHIP ELECTIONS

During the week prior to recessing for Thanksgiving, both parties re-elected their top leadership teams in the House as organizing began for the 117th Congress. The re-election of Speaker Pelosi (D-CA) shows the continued support she has in the Democratic Caucus and confidence among members with the legislative direction she has navigated. Many members were surprised that Democrats failed to increase their margin of control in the House and in fact are currently projected to lose a net of between 6-10 seats. The close margin of support that the Democratic House majority will have next year will test their ability to remain cohesive. But, for the time being, the leadership elections indicate that most of the priorities and direction from the 116th Congress will carry over into next year.

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