

TO: Members, Legislative Committee
County of Santa Barbara

FROM: Monica Miller, Legislative Advocate
Cliff Berg, Legislative Advocate

RE: April Update

DATE: April 16, 2010

So, it is mid-Spring in Sacramento and everything is in full swing. The legislature is running up against their policy deadline which is April 23, 2010. This has made many of the policy committees meet for very long hours dealing with complex issues. There are also many new committee chairs in the Assembly due to the speaker change, which has made for interesting times. Having said this, the new committee chairs have managed to continue to move their committee meetings forward while having productive public policy discussions as they get adjusted to their new roles.

This is also the time for the budget discussions to begin under normal circumstances, with the Special Session having come to a close and the Administration having yet to call another Special Session, they are moving forward as business as usual. There was some encouragement with sales taxes having increased this last month and as you are aware, state income taxes were due on April 15. The hope is that this April 15 will provide a much needed surprise to the economy allowing for increased numbers for the state's General Fund which will allow for better discussions on our critical programs.

The budget sub-committees have begun doing their work to digest the Governor's proposed budget in anticipation of the May revise which is expected to be released the middle of next month. Once the legislature, administration and department of finance have an idea of what the states finance's look like they can better judge how to fund programs. We will update you once the May Revise is released.

On another note, there are some critical bills to the county which we would like to update the committee on. The first one is AB 50 by Assembly Member Pedro Nava, which is supported by the county. The bill is currently sitting on the Senate Floor waiting to be heard. This measure is a two year bill; it will allow various counties, Santa Barbara being one, to get some property tax relief as a result of the devastating fires the county has experienced in the last few years. If you recall, this bill was set to be heard at the end of last year, unfortunately there were some political discussions that did not go well that held our bill up on the Senate floor. Additionally, the department of finance had asked us to take some amendments that were taken, however the administration did not approve of the language and threatened to veto the bill. We decided to hold the bill until this year since the deadlines for additional amendments had already passed and we did not want a veto from the Governor.

Another bill of interest to the county is AB 1640 by Assembly Member Noreen Evans and Assembly Member Pedro Nava. This measure seeks to overturn a decision made by the California Department of Public Health in late December 2009 that disenrolled low-income, medical women ages 40-49 from the breast and cervical cancer screening program under the Every Woman Counts program. The Department cited fiscal constraints as the reason for this new mandate. You may recall that the Governor signed our County sponsored bill, AB 359, last year allowing providers, on a voluntary basis, to provide a digital screening but be reimbursed at the analogue rate. The idea was to allow more women to get their screenings, not less. The measure has received bi-partisan support and is awaiting the Assembly Suspense file hearing later this spring due to the fiscal impact. We will continue to keep you updated on this bill as it continues to move forward.

When we last reported the Governor and the legislature were fighting over the Lt. Governor appointment. As you know, one of our Senators, Able Maldonado, was appointed Lt. Governor, however the legislature denied his appointment. Once this happened, the Governor reappointed him, they have until April 22 to confirm or reject this appointment. We understand that he is working very closely with Speaker John Perez in the Assembly in an effort to get this appointment confirmed by the Assembly.

In an effort to update the Committee on Santa Barbara specific issues, wanted to advise you that we are continuing to work with the Alcohol Beverage Control Board (ABC) on issues related to permits and wineries. Supervisor Farr's office along with the CEO's staff and our office participated in a conference call in late March to talk about the issues that the County is dealing with. The call was very productive; we anticipate that there will be further discussions in the future in an effort to address the issues the County is having as it relates to ABC.

Another issue of concern to the County is the Special Distribution Fund (SDF). You may recall that the Governor is holding this money and will not release it to the locals. We had heard that during the special session the legislature considered raiding those funds to offset the states general fund, this did not happen. While our current understanding is that there will be another bill introduced this year in an attempt to release these funds to the locals; this has yet to happen, we will continue to monitor this issue and report back on it should a bill be amended to address this issue for us.

Finally, as the budget discussions continue to unfold, we will keep you updated on the May Revise and funding for our programs. We anticipate that they will begin to get much more engaged in the coming weeks as we get through spring and into the summer. We will keep you updated as these issues and other areas of interest to the County continue to move forward. As always, if you or your staff have any questions or would like additional details, please don't hesitate to let us know.