



TO: Legislative Committee
FROM: Brent R. Heberlee
DATE: November 14, 2018
RE: Federal Legislative Update

This memo provides a Federal Legislative Update on the items appearing on the agenda for the November 16, 2018, Legislative Committee meeting.

A. 2018 Federal Election Results

For the first time since 2010, Democrats won a majority of seats in the House of Representatives, a result that promises to upend the relationship between Congress and the Trump Administration for at least the next two years. Democrats will soon gain the power to control the House calendar, conduct investigations, subpoena executive branch officials and schedule hearings. As of this writing, Democrats have gained 33 seats, giving them a 228-198 seat advantage in the House with 9 races yet to be called. Democrats are likely to win at least 6 of the remaining 9 races. A record 105 women are projected to be sworn in come January, ninety of whom are Democrats, including 35 of the 61 members of the Democrats' projected freshman class.

Senate Republicans, on the other hand, are likely to gain 1-2 seats, due largely to the favorable electoral map that saw 26 Democratic seats up for grabs, and many of those in deep red states that backed President Trump in 2016. Democrats also gained 7 additional governorships and nearly 250 state legislative seats across the country.

In California, Senator Dianne Feinstein won her race against fellow Democrat Kevin De Leon by a relatively comfortable 9% margin. Rep. Jimmy Panetta, in his first re-election contest, cruised to victory with nearly 80% of the vote total. Statewide, Democrats are expected to see a net gain of 4-5 House seats once all the votes are counted, leaving Republicans with only 8-9 seats out of the 53 member delegation.

B. Pajaro River Flood Control Project – Meetings in Washington, D.C. on October 9-10

Supervisor Phillips and I joined Santa Cruz County Supervisor Zach Friend and other staff and representatives from Santa Cruz County and the City of Watsonville for two days of meetings in D.C. last month to advocate in support of the Pajaro River Flood Control Project. We made significant progress educating key federal officials about the need for the project and learning about the challenges that lie ahead. We participated in meetings with the following individuals/organizations:

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- Senator Dianne Feinstein
- Office of Senator Kamala Harris – chief of staff and senior policy staff
- Senate Appropriations Committee – Republican and Democratic staff
- House Appropriations Committee – Republican staff
- White House Office of Management and Budget – senior staff
- Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – senior staff
- Associate Director, White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs
- Office of Rep. Garret Graves (R-LA) – senior staff
- Office of Rep. Zoe Lofgren – senior staff

Our immediate goal is to secure funding for the project in the Army Corps of Engineers' FY2019 Work Plan. Rep. Panetta has sent a letter to the Corps in support of this funding, and Senators Feinstein and Harris have agreed to send similar letters.

C. Proposed Change to “Public Charge” Definition for Immigration Purposes

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published a proposed regulation on October 10th that would redefine how the government determines whether an individual applying for immigration status meets the definition of a “public charge,” which refers to an individual who relies on public assistance. The proposed rule would allow federal immigration authorities to reject an application for admission to the United States if the officer determines the individual is unlikely to earn enough to support their family. It would also allow authorities to deny immigrants already in the country permanent legal residency or visa extensions if they or their dependents have used a wide range of public benefits. Comments on the proposed rule are due December 10th.

County IGLA staff and I are working with other departments, including Health and Social Services, to develop a formal comment letter that highlights the potential impacts of the proposed rule on immigrant families in the County.

Attachments:

- Federal Bill/Issues Track