OFFICE OF THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

TO: Legislation Committee
Supervisor Susan A. Bonilla, Chair
Supervisor Gayle B. Uilkema, Vice Chair

FROM: Lara DeLaney, Legislative Coordinator

DATE: January 25, 2010

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item #8: Federal Platform and Federal Issues Update**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. RECOMMEND the Board of Supervisors take action on including a Delta Counties Coalition-sponsored project(s) in the list of FFY 2011 appropriations requests made to our federal congressional delegation, if the DCC requests co-sponsorship.

2. ACCEPT the report on federal legislative matters.

Delta Counties Coalition Project(s) for Federal FY 2011 Appropriations

As you know, on January 19, 2010, the Board of Supervisors adopted the 2010 Federal Platform which contained the County's 13 appropriations request projects for Federal Fiscal Year 2011. These appropriations requests are due to our congressional representatives beginning February 5 (for Senator Feinstein) and February 12, for all others. During the oral report to the Board on the 2010 Federal Platform, staff had reported that the County may be requested to support or co-sponsor an as-yet-undetermined project related to the Delta, in conjunction with our Delta Counties Coalition (DCC) efforts.

During the past several weeks, the Supervisors who are designated as representatives to the Delta Counties Coalition and its Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members, along with the federal lobbyists for the DCC counties, have been in discussions regarding a project or multiple projects to put forward for federal appropriations. During their weekly calls (scheduled for Friday mornings at 8:00 a.m.), the Supervisors have endorsed the idea of submitting a request for federal appropriations, but they delegated the crafting of the request to the TAC. In consultation with the federal lobbyists, the TAC has drafted four projects for consideration (see Attachment A). The DCC Supervisors are scheduled to decide the matter of which project(s) would be submitted on their January 29, 2010 call.

You may also recall that Contra Costa County has, for many years, included projects on its federal appropriations request list that would be of regional benefit to the Delta. There are two specific projects, the Delta Long-Term Management Study (Delta LTMS) (#1 on our list) and the CalFed Levee Stability Improvement Program (#6 on our list) that Contra Costa County is urging that the DCC member counties either include in their individual request lists or support as a DCC-sponsored project. Pending the outcome of the Supervisors' call on Friday, January 29, staff may return to the Board of Supervisors on February 9 for authorization to support or co-sponsor an appropriations request as a member of the DCC.

WASHINGTON, D.C. REPORT

Following a brief break for the holidays, members of the House of Representatives returned to Washington the week of January 11 for the start of the second session of the 111th Congress. On the other side of the Capitol, the Senate reconvened the week of January 18 to begin the new session.

Lawmakers will face a number of hot-button issues early in 2010, with legislation to reform the nation's **health care system** still under consideration. Determining how to proceed on reform and what should be included in the bill became much more complicated when Republican Scott Brown of Massachusetts upset the Democratic candidate for the Senate seat that was held for decades by the late Senator Ted Kennedy. Now, the Democratic majority in the upper chamber has been reduced to 59, one vote short of the 60 needed to break a Republican filibuster.

Still, several options are available to Democratic congressional leaders in order to move the health care reform legislation this session. One of the options being discussed would have Congress move pieces of the massive bill incrementally. Yet another option is for the House to approve the Senate-passed measure and follow it with separate legislation making changes that House and Senate leaders have negotiated since the upper chamber passed its package last month.

The early signal from Capitol Hill, however, seems to be that there is no perfect option available at this time. For example, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said late this week there are not enough votes in the House to send the Senate-passed bill to the president's desk. Additionally, some Democrats question whether the Senate would actually approve the separate legislation that would amend portions of the Senate-passed legislation.

In addition to health care reform, lawmakers are expected to tackle a number of other legislative initiatives in the coming weeks, including a jobs package, immigration reform, and a supplemental appropriations measure for military operations in Afghanistan. Also on the horizon, President Obama's Fiscal Year 2011 budget request is expected to be unveiled on Monday, February 1.

For more information, contact Joe Krahn, Waterman and Associates, 202/898-1444, or e-mail jk@wafed.com.

Poll: Most in state frown upon Congress' job performance

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Published Wednesday, Jan. 27, 2010

WASHINGTON – Nearly seven in 10 Californians are dissatisfied with the way Congress has handled the issue of health care, and two-thirds of the state's voters say they disapprove of Congress' overall job performance, according to the latest Field Poll.

The disapproval is widely bipartisan. Eighty-five percent of Republicans and 61 percent of Democrats say they disapprove of the way Congress has handled health care. Fifty-four percent of Democrats disapprove of Congress' overall job performance, compared to 83 percent of Republicans.

The ratings are among the most negative assessments of Washington lawmakers since the Field Poll began tracking congressional job approval 18 years ago.

State voters also have a more negative than positive view of Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco. Forty-six percent of Californians disapprove of her job performance, while only 39 percent approve.

"Voters are very dispirited," said Mark DiCamillo, director of the poll.

Despite the low marks, the poll shows that California voters still lean Democratic, by a wide margin. Fifty percent of the poll respondents said they're inclined to support the Democrat in their own congressional district this fall, compared with 32 percent who said they're likely to favor the Republican candidate.

Jeremiah Sasser, 31, of Modesto, one of the poll respondents, said he disapproved of both Congress and its handling of health care.

"They're trying to bring in a new health care program vs. just fixing the problems that we have with the current system," Sasser said. "I think the majority of the people are actually happy with their health care. It's just that there are some problems that need to be fixed."

Sasser, who is registered "decline to state," said he tried to pass along his concerns to members of Congress, only to receive form letters in response.

"Overall, I don't think they really listen to us as people. … They just blow you off," he said.

After watching health care top the agenda in Washington for the past six months, DiCamillo said the public is tired of the process.

"It's like the viewing of the making of sausage," he said. "It's really not a pretty process because deals are being cut, interest groups are being catered to, and the public really recoils from that process when it takes a close look at it.

"Usually, it doesn't have that close a look at legislation," DiCamillo added, "but this particular piece of legislation is probably drawing more attention than just about any piece of legislation in recent memory."

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ECONOMY: BOXER PITCHES MULTIPLE BILL STRATEGY
By Darren Goode and Peter Cohn
CongressDaily, Jan. 27, 2009

Senate Democrats are considering a plan to move an initial package of unemployment assistance and health benefits for laid-off workers, coupled with several infrastructure-related measures and small-business tax incentives, before moving to a broader job-creation bill, a key senator said today.

"People understand it better than if you put 10 things in one bill," said Senate Environment and Public Works Chairwoman Barbara Boxer. "And I think it should help us get passage from our colleagues on the other side."

Senate Majority Whip Durbin and Democratic Policy Committee Chairman Byron Dorgan of North Dakota are putting the finishing touches on an $80 billion-plus package of new spending on infrastructure, energy-efficiency and aid to states, as well as tax credits for companies that hire unemployed workers.

That measure could be unveiled as early as Thursday (Jan. 28) after President Obama lays out his job-creation priorities in tonight's State of the Union address, but it might not see floor action until mid-February. At that point, the President's Day recess and GOP opposition to tapping unspent bank bailout funds to finance new spending could delay final approval.

Meanwhile, unemployment insurance and COBRA health subsidies will be exhausted Feb. 28 if lawmakers do not act, which is partly driving discussion of an initial bill.

Boxer said the measure may also include a short-term extension of Surface transportation programs, also expiring Feb. 28, and an expansion of Build America Bonds, which are taxable bonds to finance state and local infrastructure projects, with the interest payments partially subsidized by the federal government.

The surface transportation fund spending would be paid for through interest it is owed from the Treasury's general fund, she said, and extended through the end of the year. Tax incentives for businesses could be included as well, Boxer said, and the package would not require dipping into Troubled Asset Relief Program funds.

"Let's see how our Republican friends react," Boxer said. "I don't know what in that package they can find a problem with."

Some pieces could also be broken out into smaller bills, Boxer said, although she emphasized that strategies are still being discussed and the timing is unclear.

"We're hoping to move very quickly," she said.

Senate aides said final decisions have yet to be made and that various options are under consideration.

The initial proposals described by Boxer are largely under the jurisdiction of Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus, although her panel is working together with the Finance Committee to reauthorize highway and transit program financing.

The surface transportation spending would be designed to tide state highway authorities over through the spring construction season, while Boxer's panel begins to look at a five-year reauthorization bill in March.

Other initiatives under consideration by Baucus include an extension of the higher federal matching share for Medicaid payments authorized by last year's stimulus bill. The House's $154 billion jobs bill passed in December wrapped together that provision as well as unemployment insurance and COBRA extensions and various spending on infrastructure programs and aid to states.

But there appears to be little appetite in the Senate for tackling one massive bill. When asked whether this is a lesson learned from the difficulty in passing healthcare reform, Boxer said, "I just think it's the pragmatics of getting it done."