



January 18, 2022

2021 Year End Report

**TO:** Marissa Montenegro

**FROM:** Paul Schlesinger

Despite a horribly partisan Congress immobilized by internal and external factors and marked by an unprecedented second round of impeachment proceedings following the historic events of January 6 the generational and all-pervasive pandemic, and the complete polarization created by perhaps the ugliest election cycle in our history (have I missed anything?), we are pleased to report significant progress on several fronts important to Sonoma County.

Of course, the progress made in 2021 with regard to funding through the federal appropriations bills is only preliminary, as none have yet been enacted. While the House has passed its appropriations measures most pertinent to the County and our requests, the Senate has not passed any. As this is being written, the federal government is operating pursuant to a Continuing Resolution enacted in early December and in effect through February 18, 2022. It is not until these bills are signed into law that we will be able to close the book on our FY '21 earmark requests.

### **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)**

The November 15<sup>th</sup> enactment of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was the culmination of an effort that began 2 ½ years prior when we developed a strategy to utilize the next transportation reauthorization bill to enhance funding that might be made available to the County for wildfire resiliency. Working collaboratively with the City of Santa Rosa, we drafted legislative provisions that might help accomplish this objective. While our language changed over the intervening period, as did provisions which passed the Senate and House in 2019, 2020, and finally in 2021, the County and the City may have been the earliest entities calling for such a provision.

The IIJA includes \$1.4 billion over five years for a new PROTECT Program – Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient and Cost-saving Transportation, which has formula apportionment and discretionary allocation components. Also significantly, it requires metropolitan planning organizations to develop resilience improvement plans and encourages components of the plan to be funded with federal assistance.

Other provisions of the legislation amend existing programs, or create new programs, that make eligible, funding for wildfire prevention and control and vegetation management that can be critical for wildfire prevention and control, and response. Funding for evacuation routes are made eligible for federal funding.

In most summaries of the legislation, Resiliency is cited as one of the hallmarks of this major legislation. It can be truly said that this is a result of the early and persistent efforts of the County.

### **Appropriations**

2021 saw the return of the solicitation of earmarks in the transportation reauthorization/infrastructure legislation and the various appropriations measures. We were pleased to assist the efforts of staff of the CAO's office with their efforts to help develop a plan for maximizing our return on earmark requests, determining their prioritization, and working with the departments in developing their requests. At this point, the one earmark still pending is the \$1.6 million that has passed the House for Department of Health and Human Services funding for the ACCESS Program, Accessing Coordinated Care and Empowering Self Sufficiency, to provide mental health and substance use screening, treatment, and other services, equipment and technology.

It also appears likely that the County has once again successfully saved funding for counties nationally that are the home of geothermal developments. We are told that this fund brings the County about \$1.1 million each year which we can use flexibly to meet various needs that might otherwise go unfunded. We know of no other counties that work to preserve this set-aside for county governments.

With the departure of the previous Administration, and an incoming Administration that was deemed to be more accommodating to many of the County's budgetary needs, we did turn away this year from our practices of the past several years where we focused considerable attention on preserving funding for programs of importance to us that were jeopardized by the priorities of that Administration. With the current Administration's priorities more aligned with our own, those energies were rechanneled elsewhere.

### **Miscellaneous Advocacy Efforts**

In addition to managing many of the issues on the County's legislative program, and given the dynamic nature of events in Washington, we have also brought various matters of interest to the County's attention and assisted the County when new matters surfaced that required communication with, or the input of, our delegation.

Some of the diverse issues we have called to the County's attention, worked on at the County's behalf, or simply informed our Congressional delegation about, include:

- Relaunching America's Workforce Act – HR 602
- Community Transportation Investment Grant Program – House bill Feb 17
- Drafted a congratulatory letter to Senator Padilla, urging his support on local recovery – direct aid
- When ARPA became public law in March, we provided various summaries and updates, including guidance on the delivery and use of funding.

- A County immigration resolution
- Federal aid for agricultural producers related to the drought
- Worked to advise the County on FEMA assistance for road damage related to 2017 wildfires May 20
- Provided input related to federal funding for our new Sonoma County Government Center and reached out to a County in the region with a new government center so that they might offer information from their experience in developing and constructing that facility.
- Drafted an invitation for Senator Padilla to visit the County as part of his tour of the State relative to wildfire resiliency and assisted with the drafting of talking points when he, indeed, made such a visit.
- Worked on trying to secure additional flexibility for the County in use of ARPA funds Including formal comments that were submitted in July.
- Tried to assist with securing opportunity for presentation at COP 26
- Ongoing efforts encouraging Senators to assist with two Immigration bills that have passed the House. Senators Padilla and Feinstein have both supported, and Senator Padilla has been widely recognized as a leader on the effort.
- Letter to Delegation urging Congressional adoption of a Continuing Resolution to avoid a federal government shutdown.
- Support letters to our House delegation on S. 3011 – allowing ARPA funds to be used for infrastructure purposes.
- Provided substantial recap and summary information on IIJA, along with a compendium of grants that would become available through the legislation, including those from the EPA for water and wastewater, and the Department of Energy.
- Have kept County continuously updated on the status of the Build Back Better Act.
- Given the County ongoing interest in matters pertaining to FEMA, we provided the FEMA Strategic Plan for 2022-2026
- In December, provided County with Policy Outlook for year ahead.
- Provided the County with Information on possible sources of Broadband funding.

Activities such as these certainly contribute to the long-held perception around Capitol Hill and elsewhere in Washington that we serve as the County's office here in town; a place these offices can trust, knowing they are communicating, if through an agent, with appropriate County officials.

As always, it has been a privilege to represent the County with many of its efforts as they relate to the federal government. We would be pleased to elaborate on any aspect of this work and look forward to continuing our efforts on your behalf in the year ahead.