ELECTIONS: HOUSE & SENATE CONVENE 112th CONGRESS; HOUSE ELECTS BOEHNER AS SPEAKER

The 112th Congress convened on January 5, 2011, as the Republicans resumed majority control of the House for the first time since 2006. The Republicans will hold 242 seats in the House, to the Democrats’ 193. The Senate remains in Democrat control, but the majority’s margin has slipped to 53 members, with the Republicans holding 47 seats.


In the Senate, Sen. Harry Reid (NV) remains Majority Leader and Sen. Richard Durbin (IL) stays Majority Whip. Sen. Mitch McConnell (KY) was re-elected Minority Leader for the Republicans, and Sen. Jon Kyl (AZ) will be Minority Whip.

DELEGATION: REP. DENHAM COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS ANNOUNCED

Rep. Jeff Denham, the newly sworn in representative of California’s 19th District, will serve on the following three Committees in the 112th Congress: the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, the Natural Resources Committee, and the Veterans’ Affairs Committee.

Rep. Denham’s district covers parts of Fresno, Madera, Mariposa, Tuolumne and Stanislaus counties. The Committee assignments for California’s other new member, Rep. Karen Bass of Los Angeles, have not been officially determined yet.

The California Institute will provide a roster of the California delegation’s Committee assignments, as soon as all assignments have been finalized.

CONGRESSIONAL RULES: HOUSE APPROVES PACKAGE OF RULES CHANGES

In their first act as the Majority, House Republicans brought up a package of changes to the Rules of the House. The measure, H. Res. 5, passed along party lines by a vote of 240-191. H.Res. 5 changes budgetary procedures and provisions, committee and legislative procedures, and various other House rules.
Under the new rules, Budget Chairman Paul Ryan will be able to set a discretionary spending cap for the final seven months of FY 2011, when the current CR runs out on March 4. The cap is expected to reduce spending levels for the remainder of FY11 to those of FY 2008. The total reduction in spending from FY10 funding is expected to be in the $65 billion range.

The rules also replace the current “pay-as-you-go” (PayGo) requirement with a “cut-as-you-go” requirement. Under PayGo, any increase in spending had to be balanced by a decrease in spending in another program, or by an increase in tax revenues. The new rule requires that any new mandatory spending program be accompanied by an equal reduction in spending in another program, and prohibits the use of tax revenue increases to offset the new costs. In addition, savings from amendments to appropriations bills that reduce spending must be applied to deficit reduction and may not be allocated to other programs. New tax cuts are exempt from the cut-go rule. Any loss of revenue because of new tax cuts will not have to be made up for by other revenue increases.

The rules also eliminate the “Gephardt rule,” which allowed the House to include a debt ceiling increase in its budget resolution. Now, an increase in the debt ceiling will require a separate vote by the House.

The rules also eliminate an existing point of order that could be brought on the floor regarding funding for highway and transit programs. Under current law, surface transportation authorizations are guaranteed appropriations funding from the Appropriations Committee. The new rule will allow appropriations bills to provide less than the funding authorized, but will still guarantee that money in the Highway Trust Fund will only be spent on transportation programs.

Three Committees will also be changing their names. The Committee on Education and Labor will revert to the Committee on Education and the Workforce, the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct becomes the Committee on Ethics, and the Committee on Science and Technology is renamed the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. The Select Oversight Panel of the Committee on Appropriations is eliminated.

Other changes include:

- a Member may not introduce a bill or joint resolution unless the sponsor also submits a statement citing as specifically as practicable the power or powers under the Constitution authorizing the enactment of that bill or joint resolution.
- establishing a point of order against consideration of a bill or joint resolution that has not been available for three calendar days.
- provide for a minimum notice period of 3 days for a committee meeting. This joins the current requirement for 7 days notice for a committee hearing. The provision maintains the current ability of the Chair, with the concurrence of the ranking minority member, to waive both notice periods if they find good cause to start the hearing or meeting sooner. The provision can also be waived by a majority vote of the committee.
- requires that the chair of the committee make the text of the measure or matter being marked up publicly available in electronic form at least 24 hours prior to commencement of the meeting.
REPORT: PEW REPORTS ON IMPACT OF LATINOS ON CONGRESSIONAL REAPPORTIONMENT

The Pew Hispanic Center released a report on January 5, 2011 entitled, “The 2010 Congressional Reapportionment and Latino.” The report was authored by Mark Hugo Lopez, Associate Director, Pew Hispanic Center; and Paul Taylor, Director, Pew Hispanic Center.

Based on its analysis of Census data, the authors determined that Latino voters are nearly three times more prevalent in states that gained congressional seats and Electoral College votes in the 2010 reapportionment than they are in states that lost seats. Based on averages reflecting congressional gains and losses, 15.2% of the eligible voter (U.S. citizens ages 18 or older) population in states that gained seats is Hispanic, compared with just 5.4% of eligible voters in those states that lost seats.

With these reapportionment changes, Latinos likely will play a larger role in national politics in the coming decade, the report concludes. Two states that gained seats, Florida and Nevada, have been key swing battlegrounds in recent presidential elections (having voted for the Republican nominee in 2004 and the Democrat in 2008). In both states, Latinos are a growing share of eligible voters.

According to the Census Bureau, there were 308 million people residing in the U.S. in 2010, up 9% from 2000. Overall, based on 2009 population estimates, Hispanics accounted for more than half (51%) of that growth. However, because many Latinos are either too young to vote or are not U.S. citizens, not all of their population growth translates into immediate electoral strength. Among the nation's 48.4 million Hispanics in 2009, a record 20.1 million are eligible to vote. Yet an even greater number are not eligible to vote. Some 15.5 million Hispanics are U.S. citizens 17 years of age or younger and 12.8 million of all ages are not U.S. citizens.

Even so, the report states, the number of the Latinos eligible to vote continues to grow. Since 2000, nearly 6 million more Latinos have become eligible to vote. The bulk of this growth was attributable to the 5 million U.S. born Latino youths nationwide who turned 18 during this past decade. That translates into an additional half-million U.S. born Latinos coming of age each year – a pattern that is certain to persist, and grow, in the coming decades, the authors conclude.

According to California’s Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO), between 2000 and 2008, the share of Californians who are Hispanic has climbed from 33 percent to 37 percent of the state population. By comparison, the LAO reports non-Hispanic white Californians have declined from 47 percent of the population to 41 percent and African Americans have declined from 6 percent to 5 percent of the state population during this same period.


REPORT: LAO ISSUES REPORT ON CALIFORNIA FACTS 2011

The California Legislative Analyst’s Office released a report on January 5, 2011 entitled, “CAL Facts 2011.” The report lists various "snapshot" pieces of information, providing a broad overview of California’s economy and state-local finances. The report also highlights program trends in resources, criminal justice, social services, K-12 education, higher education, and transportation sectors.

California ranks among the world’s top ten economies in gross product in 2009, according to the report. California’s gross state product, the total value of final goods and services produced in state, was about $1.9 trillion in 2009. California accounts for 13 percent of the nation’s total output. The next largest state economy, Texas, is about 60 percent the size of California’s. International exports of goods from
California totaled $120 billion in 2009, down from $145 billion in 2008, according to the LAO. Asia accounts for the largest share of California sales abroad, followed by Europe, Mexico, and Canada.

California counties receive roughly half of their revenues from the state and federal government and must spend these funds on specific health and social services programs. About one-quarter of county revenues come from local taxes, according to CAL Facts. Counties use tax revenues to pay for public protection and other local programs, as well as paying the required “match” for state and federal programs. According to the LAO, California cities receive over 40 percent of their revenues from various user charges. Cities use these funds to pay for electric, water, and other municipal services. Over one-third of city revenues come from local taxes, the largest of which is the sales tax.

California’s public schools enroll more than 6 million K-12 students. Of those students, 1 in 2 is from a low income family (at or below $40,793 for a family of four) and 1 in 10 receives special education services. The state is the primary source of funding for public K-12 schools. According to the LAO, in 2009-10, the state provided 56 percent of all K-12 school revenue, including approximately 1 percent from the state lottery. Local sources (through property taxes and other local incomes) provided about 30 percent of all K-12 school revenue. The federal government provided 14 percent of all K-12 revenue. This amount is higher than in previous years, primarily due to additional funds provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. According to the LAO, California has the highest average teacher salary of any state in the country but also has among the highest numbers of students per teacher. California ranks 31st in per pupil spending and ranks almost last in student achievement according to this report.

Higher education costs are shared by students and the public. In 2009-10, resident undergraduate fees at UC, CSU, and CCC represented about 45 percent, 35 percent, and 15 percent of each system’s average education costs per full-time equivalent undergraduate student. More than one-third of students do not pay education fees due to grants or waivers. Currently, the annual fee for resident undergraduates at UC ($10,302) is lower than at three of its four public university comparison institutions. The CSU fee ($4,230) is lower than at 15 of its 16 peers. The CCC per-unit fee ($26) is by far the lowest of all public community college systems in the nation, LAO found.

According to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, about 50 percent of non-elderly Californians, or 17 million persons, had job-based health insurance coverage in 2009. Approximately 25 percent, or 8 million, lacked any form of health insurance at some point during 2009 and about 16 percent, or about 6 million individuals, received care through the Medi-Cal and Healthy Families programs in 2009. The remaining 9 percent had “Other” forms of coverage, such as private health insurance and veteran’s benefits according to UCLA.

California’s crime rate has declined each year since 2003, reaching its lowest level in the past 50 years. This trend is similar to declines in crime patterns in the rest of the United States. In 2009, about 3,200 crimes were committed in California per 100,000 residents (a total of roughly 1.2 million incidents), according to the LAO. Most were property crimes such as burglary and theft. The state’s property crime rate is lower than the nationwide rate. However, the rate of violent crime (such as murder, rape, and assault) in California remains consistently higher than the United States as a whole.

California has about 460 inmates in prison per 100,000 population, which is very close to the national average. Of the ten largest states in the nation, California has the fifth highest incarceration rate. However, due to the size of its population, California has one of the largest prison populations in the country. Currently, there are about 165,000 inmates in California’s prisons. The state is currently the subject of a federal court order related to prison overcrowding. In 2009-10, the average cost to incarcerate an inmate in state prison was about $46,700. About three-quarters of this total cost was related to security and inmate health care. Over the past ten years, the average cost to incarcerate an inmate has more than doubled. The primary reasons are significant increases in employee compensation as well as federal court orders and settlements that have required specific program improvements (such as inmate medical care).
Transportation funding comes from multiple sources in the state. According to the LAO, roughly $7 billion annually comes from the state for transportation funding. These funds come primarily from the state excise tax on gasoline. About $11 billion per year from local fund sources is used for transportation purposes. These sources include optional local sales taxes, a statewide .25 percent sales tax on all goods and services, and transit fares. Federal funds provide around $5 billion annually to the state for transportation and consist primarily of federal excise taxes on motor fuels and other monies. While the passage of recent propositions will not significantly change the amount of state transportation funding, they will create uncertainty in the division of future state revenues, LAO states.

For more information: http://www.lao.ca.gov/.