CONGRESS: HOUSE REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS PICK NEW COMMITTEE CHAIRS & RANKING MEMBERS, RESPECTIVELY

On November 18, 2014, House Republicans selected the Members who will become chair(wo)men on a number of Committees. Rep. Devin Nunes (Tulare) will serve as Chair of the Intelligence Committee. Rep. Darrell Issa (Vista) has been termed out of the chairmanship of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee. Rep. Jason Chavitz (UT) will takeover the panel. Rep. Mac Thornberry (TX) will replace the retiring Rep. Buck McKeon (Tujunga).

Other new Committee Chairmen are:
- Agriculture: Mike Conaway (TX)
- Budget: Tom Price (GA)
- Ethics: Charlie Dent (PA)
- Natural Resources: Rob Bishop (UT)
- Small Business: Steve Chabot (OH)
- Ways and Means: Paul Ryan (WI)

Rep. Ed Royce (Fullerton) will continue to lead the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Democrats also selected Ranking Members for the 114th Congress. Rep. Anna Eshoo (Atherton) lost her bid to move up to Ranking on the Energy and Commerce Committee. Instead, Rep. Frank Pallone (NJ) will take the slot. Rep. Maxine Waters (Los Angeles) will remain Ranking Member of the House Committee on Financial Services. Most other Committees will have the same Ranking Members. Rep. Bobby Scott will become Ranking Member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, replacing the retiring Rep. George Miller.

To see all Committee Chairs and Ranking Members, go to:
http://www.democraticleader.gov/newsroom/pelosi-announces-12-ranking-members-114th-congress/
and
ELECTIONS: TWO INCUMBENT CALIFORNIANS RETAIN THEIR SEATS

Reps. Jim Costa (Fresno) and Ami Bera (Elk Grove), both Democrats, will be returning for the 114th Congress. Costa won his sixth term over Johnny Tacherra by 1,319 votes. Bera beat out former Rep. Doug Ose by a 1,319-vote margin to return for his second term in Congress.

IMMIGRATION: HOUSE ANALYZES STRATEGY ON THE UNACCOMPANIED MINOR CRISIS AT THE BORDER; OBAMA TO ANNOUNCE EXECUTIVE ACTION

On Tuesday, November 18, the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing titled, "Unaccompanied Alien Children: Pressing the Administration for a Strategy." It was the second hearing convened by the committee on the humanitarian crisis witnessed along the U.S. southern border. The purpose of the hearing was to analyze the effectiveness of programs and policies intended to stabilize the violence and corruption in Central America, thus curbing migration to the United States.

Witnesses included Elizabeth Hogan, Acting Assistant Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean; Roberta S. Jacobson, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs; Robert N. Kaplan, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Inter-American Foundation; and Catherine Wiesner, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

"The answer to the problems plaguing the region is not to further incentivize citizens of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to leave. Rather, we should double down on serious efforts to empower the people of the region to achieve lasting peace and prosperity," declared Chairman Salmon (AZ). Further, he deplored the effort of the Obama Administration to change immigration policy by decree. Of particular concern was the in-country refugee processing program recently announced by Vice President Biden on November 14 at the Inter-American Development Bank Conference to deter potential migrants from making the treacherous journey from their home country to the United States. The program allows for family members in the U.S. to petition for children and spouses in Central America to be interviewed for refugee status, offering humanitarian parole on a case-by-case basis to those ineligible for refugee status.

Refugee status is already administered through the P3 program to individuals located in the United States. To be eligible for refugee status, an individual must be persecuted or fear persecution based on certain criteria, such as race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Ms. Weisner explained that the announcement of in-country refugee processing and the possibility of humanitarian parole for those who do not qualify for refugee status is authorized by the Immigration and Nationality Act and is separate from the P3 program in that applicants may apply from their home country. Not to be conflated, refugee status is a pathway to legal permanent residency and citizenship while parolee status is temporary, subject to renewal after two years.
Assistant Secretary Jacobson testified to the dramatically decreasing number of apprehensions of unaccompanied minors at the U.S. - Mexico border from 10,628 in June to 2,514 in October. Additionally, she outlined the U.S. Strategy for Engagement with Central America, which balances the goals of security, prosperity, and governance in the region, with the stated commitments of the presidents of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in a coordinated plan - The Alliance for Prosperity in the Northern Triangle.

President Barack Obama will address the nation in primetime on Thursday, November 20th. At press time for the Bulletin, early indications were that the President would take Executive Action to defer the deportation of as many as 4-5 million illegal workers in the country. It is expected to be modeled on the deferred action program put in place in 2012 for young undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children, and perhaps include an element that would allow those children to apply for work status for their parent(s). The Institute will prepare a detailed analysis of the action, and its effect on California, when more detailed information is available.

For more information, go to:

**SOCIAL SERVICES: CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT ACT PASSES SENATE WITH OVERWHELMING SUPPORT**

The Senate passed S. 1086, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014, with overwhelming bipartisan support on Monday, November 17th by a vote of 88-1. The approved measure authorizes $5.5 billion annually to states to help low-income families pay for child care. The grant was last reauthorized in 1996 although it has continued to be funded since then without consideration for changes in practices and cost of child care.

The CCDBG increases the proportion of money that states must spend in child care improvements. Additionally, states receiving funds must support training and professional development of the child care workforce, improve development or use of early learning and development guidelines, develop or enhance a tiered quality rating system for child care providers and services, and improve the supply and quality of child care programs and services for infants and toddlers. Lastly, criminal background checks with a 10-year look-back period are required for staff members of child care providers.

The bill now goes to the President who is expected to sign it.

For more information, go to:
http://www.help.senate.gov/newsroom/press/release/?id=1d8d567b-386e-439c-a952-bf9c6b04e9f8&groups=Ranking

**REPORT: RAND ASSESSES COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION**

In August of 2014, RAND Corporation released a report entitled, "Competency-Based Education in Three Pilot Programs: What It Is, How It's Implemented, and How It's Working." In 2011, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation extended grants to three educational organizations working to develop competency-based approaches in large, urban settings. Each organization practiced different aspects of competency-based education, yet still focused on curriculum development and upgrades to online learning management systems. RAND evaluated the data collected during academic years 2011-2013 and released its analysis in 2014.
RAND defines competency-based education as a personalized approach to schooling that emphasizes proficiency while allowing flexible pacing and student choice. Technological tools have made the option of personalized instruction tailored to student needs possible. Frustrations amongst participating organizations included technological challenges and associated financial stresses. Additionally, teachers demonstrated disagreement on the definition of proficiency and its role in determining student success, particularly as it related to issues of equity. When students are graded solely based on proficiency, the amount of time or effort that a student put toward learning does not translate into a grade or credit. Some teachers reported that students who struggled academically advanced at a slower rate than their peers.

Policy recommendations include the assessment of competency-based education programs on a variety of nearer-term outcomes (accountability test scores and high school attendance rates) and longer-term outcomes (high school completion rates and postsecondary enrollment and persistence rates). Additionally, the report emphasizes alertness for widening achievement gaps and anticipation of technological challenges.

To view the full report, please visit: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR700/RR732/RAND_RR732.pdf

REPORT: CALIFORNIA’S LAO REPORTS ON 2015-2016 FISCAL OUTLOOK

The California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) symbolically signaled the kick-off of the 2015-2016 state budget negotiations with release of California's Fiscal Outlook report on Wednesday, November 19. The main scenario explored in the report assumes continued moderate economic growth through 2020. Assuming that spending remains near the 2014-2015 level without new budget commitments, the LAO projects that the 2015-2016 will end with $4.2 billion in reserves. Additionally, resources available to Proposition 98 are nearly $2 billion higher than predicted, and projections for 2015-2016 are significantly higher than the current ongoing spending level.

Due to the unpredictability of future economic circumstances, the LAO entertains other less favorable scenarios for future budget outcomes. As explained by Legislative Analyst Mac Taylor at the press conference for the release of the fiscal outlook report, if an economic slowdown is to occur starting in 2016, the result could be a budget deficit in 2016-2017 of $3.8 billion. Theoretically, the $4.2 billion in reserves could cover that deficit in the next budget year, but would fail to cover future shortfalls in subsequent years. Therefore, the LAO supports building up the reserves to the target of 10% set by Proposition 2, which passed on November 4, 2014.

Under Proposition 2, mandatory pay downs of state debt are required over the next fifteen fiscal years. This could result in nearly $15 billion to $20 billion in today's dollars for debt repayments. The report suggests that the Legislature carefully develop a plan for the use of Proposition 2 debt payment funds, including consideration of the unfunded liabilities for health benefits of state government, CSU, and the University of California retirees or the underfunded Judges Retirement System I. If persistent debts are tackled appropriately, state legislators will ensure future budget flexibility.

For more information, go to: http://www.lao.ca.gov/Publications/Detail/3152