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CARPD NEWSLETTER ARTICLE
Legislative Update by Russell W. Noack
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The California Legislature is finally in full swing and predictably, activity focusing on COVID-19 continues to top the priority list. The infusion of federal funds from the passage of the American Rescue Plan, coupled with state contributions under the Budget Early Action Item list derived from a modification of the 2020-21 State Budget has created increased funding for families, workers, businesses, and program needs at both the state and local level. The Legislature has also passed an early action item to improve and extend wildfire preparedness and resilience that includes various grant opportunities for local governments to initiate defensible space, structure hardening and fire prevention projects. All of these items will be revisited as the 2021-22 State Budget goes through the annual “May Revise” process.

Recent days have seen an increase in the charged political atmosphere surrounding the Capitol. The supporters for the campaign to recall Governor Newsom submitted over 2 million signatures prior to the deadline. Recall signatures must be verified and equal 12% of the votes cast in the most recent gubernatorial election, which equals 1,495,709 voters. Counties have until April 29 to verify with current verification rates equaling 84%. Once completed, signatories have 30 days to remove their names and then the counties have 10 more days to report to the Secretary of State. There is another check point with the Department of Finance, for the election cost estimate, and finally the Lt. Governor has between 60 and 80 days to call for the special recall election. The best guess is, assuming sufficient signatures are verified, the recall election will occur in November or December of this year.

The significance of the recall movement cannot be underestimated. We only need to look back to 2003 to revisit what happened when Gray Davis was recalled and replaced by Arnold Schwarzenegger. All aspects of government and public policy in the Capitol was materially affected from the moment the recall effort began and there is no reason to expect it to be any different in 2021. Additionally, it is anticipated the campaign will be the most expensive in the history of California. It will be interesting to see how the breadth and scope of legislative efforts are disrupted by recall politics this year.

Legislative committee hearings have commenced since the Legislature returned from its Spring Recess on April 5. The following measures receiving a support position from CARPD have begun their journey through the legislative process:

Assembly Bill 30 by Ash Kalra would improve access to nature and recreational opportunities with funding for all Californians, with a specific emphasis on economically disadvantaged citizens.

Assembly Bill 118 by Sydney Kamlager would establish a Community Response Initiative to Strengthen Emergency Systems (CRISES) to provide grant opportunities for community organizations who are involved in supporting emergency response activities.

Assembly Bill 418 by Suzette Valladares would establish a Community Power Resiliency Program to provide financial support to local governments concerning emergency planning and preparedness.

Assembly Bill 585 by Luz Rivas is one of a bundle of bills she is authoring seeking to improve conditions for the homeless population. This bill creates grant opportunities to fund an Extreme Heat and Community Resilience Program.

Assembly Bill 981 by Jim Frazier would establish the California Fire Safe Council to identify and promote local programs to improve community fire prevention and mitigation activities to minimize the risk of wildfires.

Assembly Concurrent Resolution #17 by Randy Voepel recognizes the contributions of special districts by proclaiming the week of May 16 to be Special District Week.

Senate Bill 604 by Ben Hueso and Maria Durazo would institute the Nature and Parks Career Pathway and Community Resilience Act to promote funding for resources associated with climate adaptation and natural disaster projects.

Senate Bill 624, also by Ben Hueso would create an Environmental Equity and Outdoor Access Act to ensure all Californians have meaningful access to the state's natural resources.

Two natural resource bond measures continue to be discussed in Sacramento. Assembly Bill 1500 by Eduardo Garcia would place before the voters in 2022, a \$6.95 billion general obligation bond to fund safe drinking water, wildfire prevention, drought preparation, flood protection, heat mitigation and workforce development. Senate Bill 45 by Anthony Portantino is similar, but narrower and would place a \$5.59 billion bond measure on the ballot. The bond bills will be reconciled prior to being sent to Governor Newsom if they get that far.

Assembly Constitutional Amendment #1 by Cecilia Aguiar-Curry is also back in the legislative process. ACA 1 would place on the 2022 Ballot a provision to reduce the vote threshold from 2/3 to 55% for passage of local government tax ordinances to support affordable housing and infrastructure improvements. The measure was denied passage on the Assembly Floor in the last Session, but the Assembly Member is working hard to garner the additional votes required for passage from the group of legislators newly elected in November.