

Established in 1991, UCC serves as the representative voice for state legislative advocacy for high-population counties in California. Initially composed of seven counties, the association has grown to 14 today. Over 80 percent of the state's population reside in UCC counties. Consequently, urban counties carry out critical programs and services to the state's most vulnerable populations. For more information, including details on our Board of Directors, please visit [our website](#).

UCC Weekly News: December 11, 2020

Governor Newsom Makes New Appointments to Key Posts

Governor Gavin Newsom has announced two high-profile appointments this week. On Monday, he announced the appointment of Dr. Tomás Aragón as the Director of the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). Dr. Aragón, who faces a considerable statewide challenge given the current surge in COVID cases, has served as Health Officer for the City and County of San Francisco and Director of the Population Health Division for the San Francisco Department of Public Health since 2011. Dr. Aragón, who is a native San Franciscan, returned to his hometown for residency training during the peak of the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s. He observed in an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle* this summer that he started his medical career with one pandemic and likely would end his career with another.

Former Clinton White House Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers will join the Newsom Administration as Senior Adviser to the Governor and Director of the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz). The Governor made the [announcement](#) Friday, noting that Myers had joined the Administration earlier in the year as a volunteer to support the Governor and his team during the COVID-19 crisis. In her new role, Myers will focus on economic recovery and advise on the vaccine roll-out.

Kickoff to 2021-22 Legislative Session Takes Place ... What's Next?

Members of the newly formulated Legislature were sworn on Monday for the 2021-22 session. Like much else in 2020, the ceremony was far different from previous years due to the pandemic-created restrictions. No guests were permitted to attend, and members were socially distanced during the proceedings. To accommodate the 80 Assembly members, the event took place at the Golden One Center where the Sacramento Kings play. Senate President pro Tem Toni Atkins of San Diego and Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon of Los Angeles were reaffirmed as their respective house's leaders. We await confirmation of the houses' committee chairs, which were reportedly going to be announced this week but have yet to be revealed as we go to print. The most sought-after news is who will replace Senator Holly Mitchell (see below) as Senate budget committee chair, a critical post at any time but especially in the context of the current fiscal

uncertainty engendered by the pandemic. Reportedly, committee membership will not be announced until after the first of the year, so stay tuned for more news.

As reported previously, the Democratic caucuses in both houses retains a supermajority following the November election. The Senate makeup includes 30 Democrats, nine Republicans, and one vacancy attributable to the recent resignation of Senator Holly Mitchell, who was elected to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. Assembly Member Sydney Kamlager, who currently represents Assembly District 54 that exists within the seat that Senator Mitchell has vacated, has announced her plans to replace her former boss and mentor. The special primary election to fill Senator Mitchell's 30th Senate District seat is likely to take place in early February. In the Assembly, Democrats maintain 60 seats; Republicans have 19; and Republican-turned-independent Chad Mayes of the Inland Empire occupies one seat.

Other changes among California's statewide elected officials also have been or will be put in motion due to the incoming Biden-Harris Administration. In addition to Governor Newsom's upcoming appointment to fill Vice President-elect Harris' Senate seat, he also will be asked to replace Attorney General Xavier Becerra who is being tapped as Biden's Secretary of Health and Human Services. Should, for example, California Secretary of State Alex Padilla be appointed to the U.S. Senate, another round of musical chairs will ensue. Other Biden Administration appointments in the coming months may result in additional California impacts, including in state agency and/or departmental leadership.

Also this week, it was reported that Governor Newsom's Chief of Staff Ann O'Leary is being lured back to Washington D.C. by the Biden Administration. California political consultant and registered lobbyist Jim DeBoo was appointed this week as "senior staff" in the Newsom Administration, possibly as a new chief to Governor Newsom. (See the *Sacramento Bee* coverage on DeBoo's possible [role](#) and some [red flags](#) the editorial board raised with respect to this announcement.)

On the budget front, the Newsom Administration is now working on 2021-22 proposed state spending plan. Given that the constitutional deadline for the budget release (January 10) falls on a Sunday, we expect Governor Newsom to unveil his budget proposal on or around Friday, January 8. In preparing his budget, the Department of Finance undoubtedly is looking to make recommendations for utilizing a large one-time surplus resulting from erroneous revenue and expenditure projections in the 2020-21 budget. One-time available revenue could be as high as \$26 billion per an assessment by the Legislative Analyst's Office, although the Governor reportedly has cited a much smaller amount of \$15.5 billion. These assumptions will be laid out more clearly in his January spending plan. Despite the one-time surplus, the state does face an ongoing operating deficit.

We also are hearing that the Governor will likely advance a mid-year budget package, perhaps laying out recommended early 2021 expenditures as part of his January plan. Possible elements of a mid-year package could include small business relief, additional assistance for the COVID public health response (i.e., testing, vaccinations), direction on any new federal stimulus dollars, and restorations of 2020-21 budget cuts.

Capitol observers expect ongoing tension between the Legislature and Administration. Members have been increasingly critical about what they view as insufficient partnership and transparency in decision making. It will be interesting to observe the extent to which the Legislature pushes back on the Governor in the critical months ahead.

As for policy development and advocacy, we expect the Capitol to remain closed to the public and for there to be continued limitations on face-to-face access to members and staff in the near-term (at least through March 2021). While the houses' leadership have not imposed any specific reductions on existing bill introduction caps, members have been advised that they should continue to expect a smaller volume of measures advancing given limitations on committee hearings and a continued desire to focus on the most critical priorities occasioned by the virus.

During Monday's swearing in, legislative leaders identified their priorities for next year highlighting in particular the need to move on housing production, broadband access, further policing reforms, and continued response to the pandemic's economic toll. The Legislature reportedly will also consider a fracking ban in the year ahead, although Assembly Speaker Rendon cautioned that environmental policies must contain labor protections so as to not leave workers behind as the state moves away from fossil fuels.

Finally, a few observations on bills already introduced since this week's official kick-off of the 2021 legislative year. Not surprisingly, the issues proposed to be addressed are weighty and varied – ranging from housing and homelessness, employee protections in the context of the pandemic, wildfires, and policing reform to enhanced unemployment benefits determination in response to recent revelations about fraudulent activity. Additionally, members have already floated bond measures to address an array of needs: broadband ([AB 34](#), Muratsuchi), school facilities ([AB 75](#), O'Donnell and [SB 22](#), Glazer), resiliency ([SB 45](#), Portantino), and housing for low-income and homeless populations ([SB 5](#), Atkins). [SB 56](#) and [AB 4](#), by Senator Maria Elena Durazo and Assembly Member Joaquin Arambula, respectively, would – subject to an appropriation -- expand of Medi-Cal to cover all otherwise eligible persons regardless of immigration status. Also of note is Assembly Member Aguiar-Curry's renewed effort on telehealth in [AB 32](#). Obviously, we are in the very early phases of what promises to be another rather turbulent year. Please reach out with questions on any specific measures of interest.

Assembly Budget Chair Releases 2021-22 Budget Blueprint

This week, Assembly Budget Committee Chair Phil Ting announced his annual “[Assembly Budget Blueprint](#)” for the 2021-22 budget, reflecting the Assembly’s budget priorities as we head into the new year. Much like the priorities previously outlined by Senate leadership, the Assembly has prioritized preserving state services and preparing for future economic downturns, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and assisting those most impacted, and providing stimulus to help rebuild the California economy.

Specifically, the Assembly has identified the following items to assist in preserving state services:

- Repaying K-14 deferrals
- Restoring one-time funding reductions from 2020-21, including UC, CSU, courts, housing, and child support
- Undoing program suspension reductions to critical health and human services programs, like IHSS
- Retaining reserve funds for a future downturn

As it relates to pandemic response, the Assembly has prioritized:

- Investing in public health infrastructure, including vaccine distribution, workforce development, telehealth flexibilities, testing, and behavioral health response
- Safely reopening K-12 schools and targeting funding to assist with learning loss
- Protecting seniors in skilled nursing facilities
- Ensuring greater transparency and oversight of federal and state disaster-related funding
- Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 in state prisons and investing in an infrastructure and closure plan
- Increasing workplace safety enforcement

The Assembly also seeks to prioritize:

- Increasing financial aid and basic needs for California college students
- Overseeing effective implementation of juvenile justice realignment
- Increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) amount for all filers and allowing families with no income to earn the Young Child Tax Credit
- Creating a Climate Crisis investment plan for expenditure of Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds, including clean transportation, air pollution mitigation, and adaptation
- Developing an infrastructure strategy to provide economic stimulus and address needs of communities that have been left behind, including addressing polluted water systems, cleaning up abandoned toxic sites, expanding affordable broadband, and building farmworker housing.

Roomkey Next Steps

Anticipating that local agencies that have utilized Project Roomkey or other non-congregate shelter options may find it necessary to rehouse current households, the California Department of Social Services, Department of Housing and Community Development, along with the California Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) have released a [memo](#) outlining other relevant funding sources for local agencies to consider to ensure that these households continue to have access to safe housing. The Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council is offering consultations to interested jurisdictions by contacting Amber Ostrander via [email](#).

Incidentally, the final [HCFC Council meeting](#) for this year will be held on Friday, December 18, from 9 a.m. to noon. All HCFC Council Members, partners, stakeholders and interested members of the public are welcome and encouraged to attend. To attend this meeting by videoconference: [register here](#) at any time. Call-in details are as follows: +1 (669) 900-9128, Webinar ID: 982 1098 6951.

Final November 2020 Election Numbers

Our friends at Lang, Hansen, Giroux and Associates have shared the [attached](#) slide deck with us for your information and reference. The slides provide a final, California-focused summary of the November 2020 election results, including some interesting observations about the outcomes on statewide ballot measures. Please enjoy!