



City of Bellevue

City Manager's Office

DATE: January 14, 2025

SUBJECT: Federal Legislative Update, December 2024

OVERVIEW:

With elections officially certified and the organizational work of the new 119th Congress complete, legislative work is poised to begin.

In the House, Republicans hold a two-seat majority, the slimmest working majority in history. Rep. Mike Johnson (R, LA) was reelected as House Speaker, committee leadership has been established, and new House rules adopted. While many House rules for the 119th Congress are similar to those of the 118th, a notable difference is the higher threshold needed to trigger a vote to remove the House Speaker. The new rules now require nine members of the majority party to bring forward a "motion to vacate" versus a single member to trigger a vote to vacate the House Speaker.

In the Senate, Republicans hold a three-seat majority (53 Republicans to 45 Democrats and two Independents that caucus with the Democrats). Senator John Thune (R, SD) will serve as the new Senate Majority Leader, taking over the leadership of the Senate Republican Caucus. Washington state's senators will remain the top Democrats of their key committees: Senator Murray as the Ranking Member of Senate Appropriations Committee and Senator Cantwell as the Ranking Member of the Senate Commerce Committee.

With congressional leadership and rules set, the next few months are expected to be a flurry of legislative activity as the narrow Republican majority tries to push through President Trump's priorities. House Speaker Johnson has already announced pushing through a reconciliation package by May that would lump several of Trump's priorities together including extension of the 2017 tax cuts, immigration, the debt limit, and regulatory reform. However, members from both sides of the aisle are questioning this approach.

In December, Senator Thune announced his intention of advancing a two-part reconciliation effort: an initial package that would focus on immigration and energy permitting reforms and a later package to cover the expiring 2017 tax cuts. Beyond disagreements on strategy, several Republicans are voicing policy proposal concerns and objectives pushed by leadership and President Trump. With an extremely small majority, Speaker Johnson cannot afford to lose one House Republican vote. The Republican's and President Trump's biggest challenge during this new Congress may be keeping the various factions of the House caucus united.

As the 119th Congress gears up and the presidential transition begins, the following summarizes the work completed by the 118th Congress and actions by the Biden Administration in December 2024 that may be of relevance and interest to the City of Bellevue.

BUDGET & APPROPRIATIONS

Within hours of a federal government shut-down in December 2024, Congress cut a deal to pass a Continuing Resolution (CR) to keep the federal government open and funded until March 14. In addition to keeping the government open at Fiscal Year 2024 (FY 24) funding levels, the bill includes disaster aid funding, supplemental funding for national security and defense needs and extends health care and farm programs. The House passed the measure by a 366-34 vote on December 20, 2024 with 34 Republicans voting against it and one member voted present. The Senate passed it by a vote of 85-11. Highlights include:

- Extensions through March 14 include:
 - [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#) program
 - Federal Emergency Management Agency's [National Flood Insurance Program](#)
 - Department of Homeland Security and Justice Department authority to counter uncrewed aircraft systems that pose a credible threat
 - The Homeland Security Department's [National Cybersecurity Protection System](#)
 - US Agency for International Development's [Food for Peace](#) program
 - Commodity Futures Trading Commission whistleblower program trust fund
 - [Domestic Trafficking Victims Fund](#) authorization
- Extends the Farm Bill provisions for one year and provides an additional \$10 billion in economic assistance to farmers. The renewed funds also help replace food assistance benefits over the next four years for low-income recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) whose dollars for groceries were stolen via card skimming, card cloning, and other similar fraudulent methods. The one-year Farm Bill extension omits conservation dollars from the Inflation Reduction Act that Democrats were hoping to roll into the budget baseline, thereby making them permanent.
- Provides over \$100 billion in disaster aid funding, which includes \$29 billion for FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund (President Biden originally requested \$40 billion to replenish FEMA's Disaster Relief account). The disaster aid measure also includes \$21 billion in disaster aid through the Agriculture Department, \$12 billion through the Housing and Urban Development Department's Community Development Block Grant program, \$8 billion to repair federal highways and road, \$3.25 billion in state and tribal grants for water infrastructure, and \$2.2 billion through the Small Business Administration's disaster loan program.

- Extends healthcare provisions aimed to boost Medicare doctor payments, telehealth services and provides \$1.1 billion for the Community Health Center Fund through March 31, 2025.
- Defense and national security infrastructure supplemental funding would include funds for the Navy’s submarine program and for the Defense Department to carry out activities to reduce risks to critical IT and telecommunications systems used by national security agencies. The bill also includes language to reauthorize a counter-drone program.
- Continue to freeze \$20 billion in Internal Revenue Service (IRS) funds, rejecting a measure proposed by President Biden to allow the use of the funds.
- Includes language to restrict U.S. “outbound” investment in China, provisions that were struck from this year’s National Defense Authorization Act.
- Criminalizes the publication of nonconsensual “deepfake pornography” generated by artificial intelligence. It also requires platforms to remove images from a site upon request from victims.
- Takes aim at hidden fees for various services including hotels and event tickets by requiring sellers to fully disclose their total costs to consumers.
- Directs the Federal Trade Commission to create guidelines for smart devices, such as dishwashers and refrigerators, to disclose any audio and video recording capabilities that may not be obvious to consumers.
- Bans products containing high amounts of sodium nitrite, a meat-curing chemical that has circulated as a method of suicide.
- Increases funding for security at the Presidential Inauguration.
- Continues the restriction on congressional pay raises.

Congressional leaders will now have until March 14 to complete negotiations and work on the FY 25 appropriations bills.

OTHER LEGISLATIVE MATTERS

In addition to passing out the Continuing Resolution, the following bills were enacted before the end of 2024:

Water Resources Development Act (WRDA)

WRDA is typically a bi-annual bill that provides funding and policy authorization to the US Army Corp of Engineers Civil Division. The House and Senate passed their respective measures last summer with strong bi-partisan support in both chambers. A

bipartisan, bicameral agreement was reached by the House and Senate during December and the agreement was enacted by a vote of 97-1 in the Senate and 399-18 in the House before the end of 2024. The measure would authorize several water conservation, development, and navigation projects managed by the Army Corps of Engineers. For the Puget Sound region, the bill provides important funding and support for dredging projects at the Port of Seattle and supports flood control and water infrastructure projects.

The Explore Act - Outdoor Recreation

Congress passed the Explore Act (HR 6492) in December 2024, expanding access to public lands and streamlining permitting for outdoor outfitters and guides. The bipartisan recreation package also provides housing and infrastructure support to “gateway communities” whose resources have been strained by the huge influx of visitors to national parks and federal lands in the years following the pandemic. Three Washington state members were co-sponsors of the bill: Rep. Dan Newhouse, Rep. Kim Schrier and Rep. Cathy McMorris-Rodgers.

ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCEMENTS & ACTION

Student Loan Debt

In a final push to eliminate the burden of student loans, President Biden canceled federal student loan debt for 55,000 public sector workers in late-December. The move represents the cancelation of nearly \$4.3 billion owed on federal loans and is part of a program that forgives the outstanding balance on loans of borrowers who have made 120 qualifying monthly payments and that work in education, public health, law enforcement, emergency response and other public sector jobs.

According to the White House, the Biden Administration has provided student loan relief to nearly 5 million people, totaling nearly \$180 billion in loan forgiveness since taking office. Easing the burden of student debt was a key promise of President Biden’s 2020 campaign.

Climate Action

In an effort to encourage continued efforts to combat climate change, President Biden announced a new US climate goal to slash emissions 61-66 percent by 2035. While the incoming administration has indicated a shift from current pollution reduction goals, President Biden sent a signal that the US economy can still work towards climate change. The Biden White House said that the new goal can be achieved through a combination of existing Biden-era policies, stronger state and local action, and technology advancements such as cheaper solar and wind power, nuclear energy and electric grid updates.

There are already indications that state and local governments are planning to continue or even step-up their efforts on climate change in preparation for the change in administration in Washington, D.C.

Advance Clean Energy & Manufacturing Innovation

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced that 19 teams participating in the Community Energy Innovation Prize have successfully completed the challenge to support innovation, entrepreneurship, capacity building, and economic development in communities historically underrepresented in clean energy funding. One team from the Pacific Northwest was awarded a Manufacturing Ecosystem Award. PDX Clean Industry Network based out of Portland, OR won a \$110,000 award.

Heavy-Duty Vehicles Grant Program

The Environmental Protection Agency announced \$735 million in awards for 2,400 zero-emissions heavy-duty vehicles. Funding was awarded to 70 applicants in 27 states, three tribal nations, and one territory. Three awards were granted to Washington State recipients: The Colville Tribe received funding for refuse haulers, while Washington State Department of Ecology and Woodland Public Schools won funding to replace school buses.

Under this program, grant funding is available to replace any of the following types of heavy-duty vehicles:

- Cargo trucks
- Emergency vehicles – Includes fire trucks/engines, hazmat vehicles, and rescue vehicles
- Refuse haulers – Includes garbage and recycle trucks
- Other vocational vehicles
- School buses
- Shuttle buses
- Step vans
- Straight/box trucks – Includes delivery trucks, laundry trucks, and TRU trucks
- Transit buses – Includes battery electric and hydrogen fuel cell buses
- Utility vehicles – Includes boom trucks, bucket trucks, dump trucks, forestry trucks, street sweepers, and vacuum trucks

BELLEVUE FEDERAL AFFAIRS

Several City of Bellevue leaders joined the Bellevue Chamber for its annual trip to Washington, DC., in December. Mayor Lynne Robinson, Councilmember Jared Nieuwenhuis, City Manager Diane Carlson and Deputy City Manager Genesee Adkins joined the chamber group for meetings with the congressional delegation, the Canadian Embassy and the Nuclear Energy Institute. City of Bellevue leaders were able to provide updates about the city and advocate for the City's federal priorities.