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To expand communications between Washington and California, the California Institute provides periodic faxed bulletins regarding current activity on Capitol Hill which directly impacts our state. Bulletins are published weekly during sessions of Congress, and occasionally during other periods. The e-mail edition is made possible in part by in-kind contributions from Sun Microsystems and IBM Corp.

MCKEON'S EDUCATION PANEL EXAMINES FIRST HIGHER EDUCATION ACT RENEWAL BILL

On Thursday, September 11, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce's Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness, chaired by Rep. Howard P. "Buck" McKeon (Santa Clarita), held a hearing to examine a newly introduced higher education bill and to receive expert feedback on proposed changes to current policy included in the bill.

The Expanding Opportunities in Higher Education Act of 2003, authored by Committee member Tom Cole (OK), is the first in a series of higher education act reauthorization bills, each intended to address a different aspect of the higher education field. According to supporters, Rep. Cole's bill (HR 3039) focuses on leveling the playing field for proprietary institutions of higher learning; expanding distance learning opportunities; supporting minority serving institutions; and simplifying student financial aid programs.

Proponents of the bill lauded a provision that would create a single definition for higher education institutions as a fair and equitable move enabling all eligible institutions to qualify for competitive grants. Opponents expressed concern that added competition from for-profits would reduce the availability of increasingly scarce federal grants to public colleges and universities and to minority-focused institutions.

Witnesses gave conflicting assessments of the bill's proposal to eliminate the so-called 50 percent telecommunications rule, which sets at 50 percent the maximum number of distance education courses a student may be enrolled in to qualify for financial aid and the maximum number of distance learning courses offered at postsecondary institutions. Elimination of the rule would allow for greater innovation and more flexible options to meet the changing needs of students, according to Mr. David Moore, Chairman and CEO of Corinthian Colleges of Santa Ana, California. Representing private and corporate colleges, Mr. Moore said in support of his position, "most students are not traditional students, 73 percent are now working adults." Dr. Donald Heller of the Center for the Study of Higher Education

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Policy retorted that such sweeping action was premature, and that distance learning, though important, was too new to warrant legislative modifications in its favor. Heller preferred executive action to be undertaken with appropriate oversight.

Moore expressed satisfaction with the bill's plan to eliminate a regulation that requires for-profit institutions to derive a minimum 10 percent of revenue from non-federal sources in order for its students to qualify for financial aid, arguing that the regulation forces many private schools to raise tuition, hurting low income students the most. "The 90/10 rule is not following its intent." said Moore. "The premise is dubious." Dr. Heller urged the retention of the 90/10 rule, arguing that its elimination would potentially "open the door to more fraud and abuse" among colleges that are not as rigorously accredited as public ones.

Testifying on the minority institution provisions of the bill, Dr. Antonio Flores of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities was pleased with the enhancements included in HR 3909. However, Flores still urged greater funding increases for Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), noting that HSIs on average receive 50 cents per student for every higher education federal dollar of support.

To view testimony or other information from this hearing visit the House Committee on Education and the Workforce website at: http://edworkforce.house.gov/ .

SENATE COMMITTEE APPROVES WELFARE BILL, CHILD CARE FUNDING POSTPONED UNTIL FLOOR DEBATE

On September 10, 2003, the Senate Finance Committee approved a multi-year welfare reauthorization bill by a party-line vote of 9 to 8. The final bill, mostly an amended version of the House reauthorization plan, increases work hours and work participation rates above that required by current law. It does not include additional funds for child care, which prompted criticism from Democratic members of the panel.

Committee Chair Charles Grassley (IA) largely evaded the contentious issue of mandatory child care increases in order to prevent a potential fallout between members of his own party over the appropriate level of child care dollars. By putting off child care funding questions until the bill is considered on the Senate floor, Sen. Grassley sidestepped disagreements between GOP conservatives, who favor a $1 billion increase in child care funds, and the Committee's moderate Republicans, such as Sens. Olympia Snowe (ME) and Orrin Hatch (UT), who support a $5.5 billion additional increase. In return for the moderate votes needed to report the bill out of committee, Grassley vowed to grant Sen. Snowe the opportunity to introduce a child care funding increase amendment on the Senate floor. The exact amount proposed in the forthcoming Snowe amendment is reported to be between $5 and $6 billion above the $1 billion increase already attached to the bill.

The bill would reauthorize welfare programs last renewed under the 1996 Personal Responsibility Work and Reconciliation Act (PRWORA, P.L.104-193). PRWORA expired last year after lawmakers could not agree on child care funding levels and work requirement changes. Congress kept welfare programs operating through 2003 by approving a series of stop-gap appropriation measures. The most recent continuing resolution expires on September 30th, 2003.

The Senate bill maintains funding for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant at $16.5 billion through 2008, while increasing work hour requirements among cash aid recipients from 30 to 34 hours per week. It also provides $200 million in state grants to promote healthy family projects and sexual abstinence programs and expanded job credits for beneficiaries engaged in education or training activities. California receives 22.6 percent of TANF block grant funds, though the state only receives 11 percent of child care funds.

Through the course of the markup, the Grassley bill fended off a number of Democratic amendments, including a Jeff Bingaman (NM) proposal that would increase child care funds by $11.2 billion (by a vote of 9 to 11) and an effort by Ranking member Max Baucus (MT) to substitute the chairman's bill with the same Democratically written measure that cleared the Senate Finance Committee last year (failed by a 10-10 vote). Referencing the inadequacy of child care funds, Sen. Snowe said she thought the $1 billion child care increase was deficient, "It's clear we're going to have to do more," she said, "the question is, how much more?"

For a discussion of the funding formulas for federal welfare programs, see "TANF and Welfare Programs," part of the *Federal Formula Grants and California* series -- an ongoing review of California's share of federal formula grants developed at the request of California's congressional delegation and produced by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) in collaboration with the California Institute -- at http://www.ppic.org/content/other/1202TANFandWelfare.pdf .

PPIC Report Finds Need For Greater Post Welfare Benefit Awareness

A new Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) report finds that families leaving cash assistance are mostly earning enough to beat the federal poverty line, but the report's other findings reveal many families leaving welfare rolls remain in poor conditions.

The report -- entitled "What Happens to Families When They Leave Welfare?" -- used extensive telephone surveys of California families leaving welfare rolls to draw its conclusions; identifying at least one working parent among 90 percent of those surveyed who was employed after a year's separation from TANF assistance. The average monthly income of those in employment was $2400 among single parents and $2300 in two-parent families after one year. According to the report, 70 percent of single parent households and 55 percent of two-parent households were making enough money to live above the federal poverty line.

On the other hand, the report stipulates that one-third of those surveyed fell below the poverty line, demonstrating a not altogether sanguine position for hardest hit families. Two-parent family conditions are the harshest, according to the report, where earnings are lowest.

Unused assistance is identified as a significant barrier to the advancement of many families. The study reports that about 30 percent and 40 percent of food stamp-eligible one and two parent families, respectively, are not receiving aid. The report's authors recommend greater information dissemination and publicity of post-welfare benefits to those families leaving welfare as an important consideration for policymakers.

For more information or to view this report, visit the PPIC website at http://www.ppic.org .

Water Agencies Agree on Colorado River Water Transfer and Supply

Four California water agencies and the State have reached an agreement (the "Quantification Settlement Agreement") on implementing water transfers and supply programs to reduce California's over dependence on the Colorado River and reduce California's draw from the River to 4.4 million acre-feet annually. The four water agencies involved in the QSA are: Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD); Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD); Imperial Irrigation District (IID); and San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA).

Under the QSA, urban Southern California will be entitled to receive surplus water when available. In 2004, it will be entitled to receive 200,000 acre-feet of surplus water. The Agreement also calls for the State to implement a restoration plan for the Salton Sea. The State will spend $20 million in 2003 to fund the development of a plan by 2006. Also, the State will purchase up to 1.6 million acre-feet of water from IID for sale to MWD. That will generate up to $300 million to be used for the Salton Sea restoration.

Other major features of the agreement include:

- An initial term of 45 years and a renewal term of 30 years by mutual consent;
- Quantification of IID's Colorado River entitlement at 3.1 million acre-feet;
- Quantification of CVWD's Colorado River entitlement at 330,000 acre-feet; and
- Agreed upon water transfers among the agencies.

To implement the deal, the California Assembly passed a package of four bills on Tuesday, September 9. The State Senate was expected to act on the bills before the legislature adjourns later this week.

The Boards of Directors of the water agencies must ratify the deal by October 12, in order to ensure that they will be able to draw additional water from the Colorado River. The U.S. Department of the Interior cut the state's water allocation last year when the water agencies failed to reach a deal by the deadline.

SEVERAL WATER BILLS CONSIDERED BY RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE

On Wednesday, September 10, 2003, the Subcommittee on Water and Power of the House Resources Committee held a hearing to examine several California-related water bills.

The Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Ken Calvert (Corona), considered HR 2991, HR 142, HR1156, and HR2960, all of which would allow the Secretary of Interior to provide technical and federal financial resources through the use of the Title 16 Program. The Subcommittee members heard testimony from two panels, including: Reps. David Dreier (San Dimas), Gary Miller (Diamond Bar), and Loretta Sanchez (Anaheim); Mr. William Rinne, Deputy Commissioner of Operations, Bureau of Reclamation; Mr. Richard Atwater, CEO/General Manager, Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA); Mr. Denis Bilodeau, President, Board of Directors, Orange County Water District; and Mr. Robert DeLoach, CEO/General Manager, Cucamonga County Water District.

Both Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member Grace Napolitano (Norwalk) welcomed witnesses in their opening statements and praised communities that meet their water needs through non-traditional sources such as desalination and water recycling. Rep. Dreier testified about his bill, HR 2991, which amends the Reclamation Wastewater and Groundwater Study and Facilities Act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to participated in the Inland Empire regional recycling project and in the Cucamonga County Water District recycling project. Rep. Dreier testified that between the two projects included in the bill, 75,000 acre feet of new water will be produced annually for the region before 2010. Rep. Dreier noted that HR 2991 not only enjoys the support of all member agencies of IEUA, but that it is also consistent with regional watershed plans, the California Department of Water Resources water recycling task force, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's comprehensive water study, and the Department of Interior's "Water 2025" plan. Also testifying in support of HR 2991, Mr. Atwater and Mr. DeLoach said that the bill is consistent with Title 16 feasibility studies and is supported by local agencies, business community, and environmental groups. In particular, Mr. DeLoach said that Cucamonga County Water District supports HR 2991 because it would commit the federal government to provide assistance to agencies who are trying to bring new water supplies online using innovative technologies.

Mr. Atwater also testified in support of HR 142, which is sponsored by Rep. Miller. The bill authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to participate in the Inland Empire regional water recycling project, to carry out a program to assist agencies in projects to construct regional brine lines in California, and to participate in the Lower Chino Dairy Area desalination demonstration and reclamation project. Rep. Miller said that his bill will help significantly enhance the region's water quality and safety.

He also testified that HR 142 will result in several significant developments, such as: 1) it will provide southern California with 70,000 additional acre feet of new water annually after the Inland Empire project is completed, 2) will provide a new drinking water supply for increasing population in San Bernadino County by expanding groundwater desalination in the Chino Basin to 40,000 acre feet per year, and 3) will provide a means to safely and efficiently discard excess brine from desalinization plants.

Rep. Sanchez also spoke about her bill, HR 1156. The bill increases the ceiling on the federal share of the costs of phase I of the Orange County Regional Water Reclamation Project. Noting that the project will deliver improved water supply reliability, enhanced economic activity in the region, and improved protection of natural resources, Rep. Sanchez said that the project provides an effective and efficient response to the region's problem of increasing water demand and diminishing supply. Similarly, Mr. Bilodeau testified in support of HR 1156, and stated that the Groundwater Replenishment System project in question will create 72,000 acre-feet of new water supplies for residents and businesses in Orange County, or 114,000 families each year after its completion in Spring of 2007. He noted that this project enjoys strong support in Orange County from medical, health, community, business, agriculture, media, and environmental organizations.

In contrast, Mr. Rinne testified in opposition to HR 2991, HR 142, and HR 1156. He asserted that the Department of the Interior "does not believe it is prudent to authorize new Title 16 projects while there is a major backlog of projects that already exist." Additional new Title 16 projects, according to Mr. Rinne, would make it even more difficult to meet the Bureau of Reclamation's current and future obligations. In addition to citing an already tight budget, Mr. Rinne also said that some of the projects included in the abovementioned bills deviate from the Title 16 statute capping the federal cost share.

For more information about this hearing, please visit the Subcommittee on Water and Power website at: http://resourcescommittee.house.gov/schedule.htm .

NEW SOURCE REVIEW RULE ANNOUNCED BY EPA

On Wednesday, August 27, 2003, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a new rule concerning the New Source Review (NSR) permitting program, which established an equipment replacement provision as part of the "routine maintenance, repair and replacement" exclusion of the NSR.

Congress established the New Source Review program as part of the 1977 Clean Air Act to help control emissions from major new stationary sources of pollution. Under the 1977 Act, operators of industrial facilities and power plants were required to add more clean air control systems every time modernization or improvement activities outside of those defined as "routine maintenance" were performed.

The new exemption essentially means that older power plants, refineries and factories are no longer required to install pollution-cutting devices when they modernize with new equipment or do anything more than "routine maintenance" on a plant. According to the new rule, up to 20 percent of the costs of equipment replacement activities would be considered "routine maintenance" by the EPA, thus allowing industries to modernize a fifth at a time each of a facility's essential production systems. Critics of the new rule argue that it will allow for increased emissions within a plant's permitted limits, and most plants currently are not operating near those limits. In addition, those that disagree with the exemption say the new changes will be harmful to people's health, especially those living near or downwind of the facilities affected by the new rule. EPA's Acting Administrator Marianne Horinko asserted that plants and facilities will still be required to comply with overall permit limits and to meet state and federal pollutant requirements, and said that the new rule "will result in safer, more efficient operation of [industrial facilities and power plants], and more reliable operations that are environmentally sound and provide more affordable energy."

For more information about the new NSR rule, please visit EPA's website at: http://www.epa.gov .

HOUSE APPROVES 2004 TRANSPORTATION-TREASURY SPENDING BILL; TEA-21 EXTENSION MAY LAST THREE OR SIX MONTHS

On September 9, 2003, the House approved its annual Transportation, Treasury and Independent Agencies spending bill by a vote of 381 to 39, with Amtrak retaining its original $900 million appropriation, though this is only half of what it says it needs to maintain current operations.

The $86 billion FY 2004 House Transportation-Treasury Appropriations spending plan provides $34.6 billion in Federal Aid Highway funds, $2.3 billion more than current spending levels, while retaining formula language in the TEA-21 authorization law governing highway disbursements to states. For aviation programs, the House bill assigns $14 billion for Federal Aviation Administration programs and activities.

The Senate is expected to vote on its version of the bill next week. It's bill includes a $1.35 billion for Amtrak and $33.8 billion for national highway programs. Rail advocates will support the higher Senate appropriation level when the bill moves to conference, since Amtrak has indicated that it will have to close its operations if its budget is slashed as severely as the House proposal.

In other transportation news, Congress is reported to be gearing up for a temporary stop-gap measure that would maintain highways and transit funding authorizations through the end of this year. Differences between the White House and House transportation leaders over funding levels for a multiyear surface transportation renewal bill remain in effect, pressing the increasing unlikelihood that the comprehensive transportation law known as the Transportation Equity Act of 2001 (TEA-21), will be renewed by Congress before its expiration next month.

A spokesperson for Sen. James Inhofe's (OK) Environment and Public Works Committee revealed plans for a short term, three- to six-month extension of TEA-21 while lawmakers continue to seek a path to a final reauthorization plan.

DAVIS LETTER ON TEA-21

Governor Gray Davis sent a letter to the members of the California Congressional Delegation urging the passage of either a long-term reauthorization or short-term extension of the Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21), which is set to expire at the end of this month. The September 10, 2003 letter, individually addressed to each member of delegation, underscores the importance of federal funding for transit and highway projects that the state receives as part of TEA-21 dollars, and estimates the effect that inaction would have on the state's economy and transportation system. According to the letter, approximately $10 billion worth of highway, transit and rail projects are currently underway throughout California. If no action is taken with respect to TEA-21 prior to October 1st, a shutdown of the federal-aid highway program could occur, causing a $265 million shortfall per month and a loss of 200,000 transportation-related jobs. In his letter, Governor Davis asked Congress to continue the current program funding rations between transit and highways, and to support the existing program structure of TEA-21, including the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and Transportation Enhancements (TE) programs. The Governor also called on the delegation members to pass either al long-term renewal or short-term legislation that would cover a sufficient period of time to allow the state to develop and execute long-range transportation plans and programs.

SENATE APPROVES FY 2004 LABOR-HHS-EDUCATION APPROPRIATIONS SPENDING BILL; AMENDMENT RAISES IDEA SPENDING BY $2.2 BILLION FROM PRIOR YEAR

By a 94-0 vote on September 10, 2003, the Senate approved its version of H.R. 2660, a $472 billion fiscal year 2004 appropriations bill to fund the Departments of Labor, Health & Human Services, and Education. The bill had been under floor consideration since September 2, and the Senate considered more than 100 amendments. The bill passed with language, supported by Democratic Senators, prohibiting administration action on its plan to change overtime pay standards.

Another amendment, adopted 51-44, prohibits the administration from implementing its planned change in the methodology for counting state and other taxes in determining eligibility for student financial assistance -- a provision that opponents feared would result in 84,000 students becoming ineligible for Pell Grants. The bill holds back $200 million in NIH spending until the end of FY 2004 in order to offset the change.

By voice vote, the Senate also adopted an amendment by Sen. Christopher Dodd (CT) to increase funding for the Special Education - Grants to States program by an additional $1.2 billion. Before the Dodd amendment, the bill already included a $1 billion increase, so the amendment raises total 2004 spending for grants under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to $11.1 billion, a $2.2 billion total increase from 2003.

During floor consideration, the Senate rejected a number of spending increase amendments for the Workforce Investment Act, rural schools, impact aid, and Latino and Native American education programs, as well as an amendment by Senator Barbara Boxer to add $250 million for after school programs. A later amendment by Sen. James Inhofe (OK) did add $5 million for impact aid programs, and a successful amendment by Sen. Harry Reid (NV) provided increases in a number of Latino-oriented education programs, including an additional $85 million for language instruction, $6.5 million for Hispanic-serving institutions, $4.6 million for migrant education, $11 million for high school equivalency, $1 million for college assistance migrant program (CAMP), $12.8 million for parental assistance and local family information centers, and $69 million for migrant and seasonal Head Start programs. The Reid amendment increases were to be offset by postponing $146 million in NIH spending.

In a one-sentence amendment offered by Sen. John Ensign (NV) and approved by voice vote, the Senate bill changes one word in language that currently requires $3.5 million be transferred annually from the Department of Education to the Census Bureau -- which is used to obtain updated school district-level census poverty data for Title I formula allocations; the Senate bill now would require updates every year instead of every two years.

The Senate measure now moves to conference with the House, which completed work on its version of the bill on July 10.

The California Institute prepared a California-oriented analysis of the Senate Appropriations Committee's version of the bill as it stood prior to these floor amendments. That report is available on the Institute's website, at http://www.calinst.org/pubs/lhe04s.htm .

PPIC RELEASES REPORT ON EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

The Public Policy of California (PPIC) recently released its report, entitled *Determinants of Student Achievement: New Evidence From San Diego*." The report, authored by Julian R. Betts, Andrew C. Zau, and Lorien A. Rice, was conducted in collaboration with the San Diego Unified School District. The authors compiled and analyzed a highly detailed, student-level database that enabled them to link factors influencing student achievement in ways that have not been possible with the state-level data generally used in such studies.

The study defines school resources not as funding per student but rather in terms of class size and teacher training. The authors found that in most cases, the lowest socioeconomic status schools received fewer resources, with the largest inequalities across San Diego schools relating to teacher qualifications in elementary schools.

To examine student achievement, the authors focused on individual students' test scores on California's standardized state test. The research showed that from very early in their educational experiences, students appear to exhibit large variations in achievement that are systematically linked to poverty: Students in less affluent schools lag seriously behind. When examining gains in individual student achievement, the researchers found that the percentage of days a student was absent from school was a strong negative predictor of each student's gain in achievement in math and reading.

The researchers also found that class size does influence reading achievement in elementary school, but that by middle and high school no positive influence was found.

In examining the policy implications of the study, the researchers cite a consistent finding of the study that an individual student's rate of learning appears to be strongly and positively influenced by the initial achievement of students in his or her grade and, with somewhat lesser consistency, that of students in his or her classroom. Thus, ability grouping within a school could affect a student's achievement. Also, the study shows that the achievement gaps between students do not appear to be created primarily by the schools. Rather, these gaps -- related to income and socioeconomic status generally -- emerge by the time young children reach school age. Thus, Head Start and other preschool programs should be considered as ways to reduce the achievement gap of disadvantaged students before they begin formal schooling.

The full report can be obtained from PPIC's website at: http://www.ppic.org .

NEW STUDY SAYS DECENT HOUSING IN CALIFORNIA IS OUT OF REACH FOR MINIMUM-WAGE EARNERS

For the fifth year in a row, according to a September 8, 2003 national study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, nowhere in the United States is the minimum wage generous enough to cover the fair market rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment. Titled "Out of Reach, 2003 - America's Housing Wage Climbs", the study discusses the crisis in rental housing across the nation by comparing housing costs with minimum wages.

The study contains data for every jurisdiction in the nation based on housing wage, defined as the hourly rate needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the FMR value. The FMR, which is also used to determine the dollar amount of Section 8 vouchers, represents the cost of adequate "low-end" rental housing.

The study places the national median housing wage (HW) at $15.21, an amount that is 3.74 percent higher than the year before and 37 percent higher than it was in 1999. However, the housing wage for California is $21.18, making it the second least affordable state in the nation after Massachusetts ($22.40). The study also found that California is home to five out of ten least affordable metropolitan areas, including San Jose (which is also the least affordable metropolitan area in the U.S. with a housing wage of $35.02), followed by San Francisco ($34.13), Oakland ($27.31), Santa Cruz-Watsonville ($25.79), and Orange County ($23.46). California also leads the nation in the number of least affordable counties; among the ten listed, Santa Clara (HW of $35.02), San Mateo ($34.13), San Francisco ($34.13), and Marin ($34.13) counties are the least affordable counties in that order, followed by Contra Costa (6th least affordable, with HW of $27.31), Alameda (7th, $27.31), and Santa Cruz (8th, $25.79). On the other hand, California ranks 10th (HW of $12.20) on the list of states with least affordable combined nonmetro areas.

The study also offers statistical information and a state-by-state-analysis of the percentage change in housing wage in 2002-2003. California, with an annual change of 7.59 percent, placed third as a state with the largest changes in housing wage, preceded only by Maryland (12.09 percent) and Virginia (9.07 percent), while Oklahoma was the only state with a negative percentage change of minus 1.25. The study reveals yet another interesting statistic about California; Sacramento leads the nation as the metropolitan area with the largest changes in housing wages, with a 27.18 percent change in 2002-2003, while San Francisco leads as the metropolitan area with the nation's largest decrease (-8.51 percent) in the HW. Of course, everything is relative -- the HW in San Francisco had been astronomically high, and it now has declined to just extremely high. The study estimates that in order to afford the FMR for a decent two-bedroom apartment in California, the minimum-wage worker would have to work 126 hours per week.

For more information about this study, please visit the National Low Income Housing Coalition website at : http://www.nlihc.org .

SENATOR BOXER ADDRESSES CALIFORNIANS AT ROUNDTABLE LUNCHEON

On Tuesday, September 9, 2003, Senator Barbara Boxer was the featured speaker at a Golden State Roundtable luncheon in a Capitol Hill banquet room. Senator Boxer's remarks discussed a wide range of subjects. She noted that the nation's land, rivers, forests, and parklands constitute a great resource and stated that Congress must assume a stewardship role to protect them.

Boxer noted that the bipartisan California Congressional Delegation has acted in concert regarding environmental issues -- lauding California's bipartisan support for preventing offshore oil drilling and the delegation's unanimity regarding opposition to mandating the use of ethanol as a fuel additive -- and she also discussed a federal proposal to override state policy on air quality standards for small gasoline and diesel powered engines.

She called the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act "a good bill," but she expressed disappointment in the level of funding budgeted and appropriated for the programs. In particular, she focused attention on after school programs, a major area of personal interest and legislative activity for her.

Regarding Social Security and Medicare, Boxer expressed concern that funding in the trust funds have been declining, which may jeopardize the programs in the future, and she commented that "tax cuts are not doing what they were supposed to do."

Regarding Iraq, and the $75 billion that President Bush has requested for rebuilding, Boxer commented that the country needs "a plan" that addresses troop protection, sharing of responsibility and cost, and an exit strategy. She drew contrasts between the $75 billion figure and various funding totals for federal activities, such as $23.4 billion for higher education, $1 billion for after school, $6.7 billion for Head Start, $31.8 billion for highways, $5.2 billion for the Transportation Security Administration, $6.1 billion for the Coast Guard, $8.1 billion for all environmental programs, $27.1 billion for the National Institutes of Health, and $1.3 billion for superfund.

During the question and answer session that followed her remarks, Senator Boxer called transportation an important priority, and she said she has been visiting various sites, with a focus on ensuring the security of the nation's and the state's ports.