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**TO:** Melissa Garza

**FROM:** Len Simon  
Brandon Key  
Jennifer Covino

**SUBJECT:** Fresno COG 2014 Washington Meetings Summary Overview

**DATE:** April 10, 2014

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Thank you again for the opportunity to work with the 2014 Fresno COG “One Voice” delegation. We were pleased to see such robust engagement between the delegates and the panelists on Capitol Hill and in the federal agency meetings. We believe that the meetings were a highly effective way to communicate the delegates’ priorities with both top-level federal officials and the policy experts working every day to craft relevant legislation and executive action around these priorities.

The COG came at a unique and opportune time to advocate their federal priorities in Washington, as was indicated by the meetings, with both water and transportation high on everyone’s list of priorities. The following is a summary of the various including contact information and follow-up activities.

**Monday,**  
**April 7<sup>th</sup>**

9:30 a.m. **One Voice Funding and Policy Priorities**  
**Policy and Project Presentations for Congressional Office Staff**  
**Office of Congressman Jim Costa** (*Office Phone: 202-225-3341*)

- Scott Petersen, Deputy Chief of Staff - [scott.petersen@mail.house.gov](mailto:scott.petersen@mail.house.gov)
- Andy Flick, Legislative Director – [andy.flick@mail.house.gov](mailto:andy.flick@mail.house.gov)

**Office of Congressman Devin Nunes** (*Office Phone: 202-225-2523*)

- Damon Nelson, Legislative Director – [damon.nelson@mail.house.gov](mailto:damon.nelson@mail.house.gov)

**Office of Congressman David Valadao** (*Office Phone: 202-225-4695*)

- Chris Marklund, Legislative Director – [chris.marklund@mail.house.gov](mailto:chris.marklund@mail.house.gov)

**Office of Congressman Tom McClintock** (*Office Phone: 202-225-2511*)

- Brittan Specht, Legislative Director – [brittan.specht@mail.house.gov](mailto:brittan.specht@mail.house.gov)

The meeting began with opening remarks from COG Chairman Mayor **Amarpreet Dhaliwal**, who provided an overview of the trip to the Congressional staff. **Mario Santoyo** then briefed

Congressional staff on the COG's top regional priority: water. He asked Congressional staff what the status was of the *California Emergency Drought Relief Act of 2014* (S. 2016), introduced in mid-February by Sen. **Dianne Feinstein** and cosponsored by Sen. **Barbara Boxer**, as well as the two Senators from Oregon: **Ron Wyden** and **Jeff Merkley**. He stressed the dire situation facing the San Joaquin Valley in this drought, highlighting the "zero surface water" allocation for many farmers in both the west and east sides of the Valley. He explained the importance of increasing storage capacity at **Temperance Flat**, and said that a "Dear Colleague" letter to the Bureau of Reclamation would be helpful in moving this project forward. He also encouraged the Congressional staff to send a "Dear Colleague" to Governor **Jerry Brown**, urging him and the legislature to move forward on approving a state **water bond** in order to show unity from Congressional officials. California's water problems will only be solved using "*all the available tools*," he said.

Fresno County Supervisor **Judy Case-McNairy**, explained the major water issues facing both the Eastern and Western sides of the Valley. There is a strong possibility that thousands of productive fruit and nut trees may perish, and that reestablishing will take at least five years, after sufficient water becomes available again. Orange Cove Mayor **Gabriel Jimenez** explained the situation his community faces, with a "zero" surface water allocation, and no ground water available, forcing the City Council to ban any outdoor water usage by residents, for the time being.

**Scott Peterson** said he has participated in "*boat loads*" of conference calls with federal agencies on water issues, recognizing that their decisions have a major impact on communities. Unfortunately, many of the agencies have so far failed to act on pumping recommendations by Congressional officials. Congressman **Jim Costa** has participated in regular conference calls with the **White House** on the drought, and he supports an all-of-the-above strategy for dealing with it. The Congressman supports the Temperance Flat project, and strongly supports the state water bond and additional water conveyance projects.

**Chris Marklund** said that Congressman **David Valadao** is highly disappointed with the lack of water being allocated to Valley communities and farmers. He referred to the bill sponsored by Congressmen Valadao and **Devin Nunes** which was passed by the House on February 5, the *Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley Emergency Water Delivery Act* (H.R. 3964). **Britton Specht** said that Congressman **Tom McClintock** supports long-term solutions like additional storage capacity, and is ready to work with Senator Feinstein on this issue.

**Damon Nelson** said that he, along with other staff members, recently participated in a two-hour long meeting with Senator Feinstein to discuss water issues. One concern is that, historically, California water bills have passed as an attachment to bigger legislative packages. Without many big "must-pass" bills moving through Congress this year, it's difficult to find the appropriate "legislative vehicle" in this political environment. Congressman **Nunes** is working with other offices to agree on a specific number: How much water could the Valley get if regional leaders and farmers got everything they wanted? House members will have to agree with Senate members on that number, as part of the negotiating process. He said that if Senator Feinstein brings a bill to conference, about 90% of the bill's provisions could be agreed to at the staff level. He said that House members are pleased to finally see Senator Feinstein moving somewhat in their direction.

**Mario** then brought up the idea of releasing additional water from **Shasta Dam** to meet some of the Valley's needs, and asked what was preventing these releases. **Scott Petersen** said that the Bureau of Reclamation was still waiting on final "forecast data" before determining how much water to release from the dam and Rep. **Costa's** office will closely monitor how the Bureau supports its decision. **Damon** added that, in some cases, the Bureau is simply ignoring calls from Congressional offices about this.

On the issue of **air quality** in the Valley, Supervisor **Case** asked Congress to support an Air Quality Empowerment Zone designation, preferably by passage of the *Air and Health Quality Empowerment Zone Designation Act* (H.R. 6378). Several of the Congressional staff members said their members were supportive of the issue, and, for instance, Rep. **Costa** is working with Rep. **Jerry McNerney** to reintroduce the Air Quality Empowerment Zone.

Fresno COG members urged Congressional staff members to restore the **CSBG** and **CDBG** programs to their full funding levels, calling them a "*life raft*" for smaller communities in particular, when developing their budgets. On infrastructure, **Jeff Roberts** highlighted the importance of the **Veterans Boulevard** project, and COG members asked Congressional staff to move forward with a **transportation reauthorization** and support California **High-Speed Rail**.

The COG requested additional funding and guidance on **workforce training programs** for economically displaced workers in particular. Fresno County Sheriff **Margaret Mims** requested that Congress restore full funding to the **SCAAP** program, and COG members also requested full funding for **PILT** allocations. Congressional staff were generally supportive of these initiatives, and happy to stay in contact on these issues.

#### Follow-Up Activities

- **Request a "Dear Colleague" letter from Congressional delegation in support of Temperance Flat**
- **Request a "Dear Colleague" letter to Governor Brown from Congressional delegation in support of the California State Water Bond**
- **Request "Dear Colleague Letters" in support of CDBG and CSBG**
- **Help Congressional Staff agree on a number for the total possible amount of water requested by farmers and San Joaquin Valley officials**
- **Continue to update Congressional Staff on "One Voice" Regional Priorities**

11:00 a.m.

#### US Department of Agriculture

*Discussion of Rural Development and Food Programs*

USDA Natural Resources and Environment

- Callie Eideberg, Senior Advisor to the Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) (presenter)
- Rebecca Shively, Special Assistant, Office of the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment

## USDA Food and Nutrition Service

- Jessica Shahin, Associate Administrator, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (presenter)
- Laura Castro, Director, Food Distribution Division (presenter)
- Scott Carter, Chief, Office of Governmental Affairs

## USDA Rural Development

- Jacki Ponti-Lazaruk, Assistant Administrator, Rural Utilities Service, Water and Environmental Program (presenter)

## USDA Office of External and Intergovernmental Affairs

- Sarah Scanlon, Deputy Director, Office of External and Intergovernmental Affairs

**Jessica Shahin** highlighted to COG members the importance of programs such as **SNAP** to promote food security in communities. While local communities are unable to bypass the state office to receive SNAP funding directly, they are encouraged to reach out to the USDA Western Regional Office in San Francisco with questions about how the program can benefit residents in the San Joaquin Valley.

On water issues, and how they relate to the **Endangered Species Act**, **Callie Eideberg** said that her agency has devoted considerable attention to the problems facing California during the drought. She said that USDA usually provides grants to dig wells for livestock. One grant program that may be helpful is the USDA **Emergency Community Water Assistance** grant program, which has \$3 million available for California's rural communities that are experiencing water shortages. She highlighted **Working Lands for Wildlife**, a relatively new partnership between NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to use agency technical expertise combined with \$33 million in financial assistance from the **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program** to combat the decline of seven specific wildlife species whose decline can be reversed and will benefit other species with similar habitat needs. There is no streamlining of the NEPA/CEQA process as part of this partnership.

COG members suggested that with crippling poverty and unemployment facing some communities in Fresno County, federal agencies could respond by becoming more flexible than they are on environmental issues. Panelists recommended that COG members reach out to the USDA Western Regional Office with help to resolve specific problems. **Laura Castro** recommended that delegates review the information that was handed out listing USDA Water and Environmental Programs. **Jacki Ponti-Lazaruk** said that her agency would send additional follow-up information to the COG.

*Follow-Up Activities*

- **Contact USDA Western Regional Office with questions related to nutrition assistance and water assistance**
- **Review materials on USDA assistance programs**

1:00 p.m.

**US Department of Transportation***Discussion of Transportation and Infrastructure Priorities*

Office of Government Affairs

- Kevin Monroe, Director of Governmental Affairs – [kevin.monroe@dot.gov](mailto:kevin.monroe@dot.gov)  
*Direct Line: 202-366-8900*
- Michael Daley, Associate Director
- John Drake, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy

**Kevin Monroe** began by welcoming the COG to Washington, DC, and noted his experience working for Transportation Secretary **Anthony Foxx** in Charlotte, NC, when he was Mayor. He said that the **Highway Trust Fund** (HTF) was in danger of running short on money in August, without Congressional action to replenish the fund. U.S. DOT is currently writing the legislation of its own 4-year transportation reauthorization to send to Congress. President Obama recently outlined the provisions in his budget. The Administration’s reauthorization would continue to focus on “**Ladders of Opportunity**,” connecting economically disadvantages communities to sources of employment. The legislative text will be released in the coming weeks. U.S. DOT seeks to reward communities that consolidate transportation planning regionally. The agency is also seeking a 70% increase in transit programs, responding to local demands.

**John Drake**, who used to work for Congressman **Jim Costa**, talked extensively about the politics of a transportation reauthorization. As funding starts to run out for the HTF, U.S. DOT’s first response will be to slow down reimbursements to the states for construction activity. There has been talk that Senator **Barbara Boxer**, Chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee, is proposing a clean one-year extension of MAP-21, while leaving the question of funding the HTF to the Senate Finance Committee. U.S. DOT believes this would be a dangerous precedent, since reauthorizations lasting at least four years are the best way to help regions make long-term planning decisions. A big multi-year transportation bill passing before the election faces many hurdles. But it is still prudent to continue to develop good policy ideas and legislative language in case a window of opportunity opens to push for bold ideas. John could not speak to a **Vehicle Miles Traveled** (VMT) funding component to U.S. DOT’s bill. The bill will have language introducing a **competitive freight rail** program.

COG members said it would be helpful for U.S. DOT to quantify the lost opportunity cost for local communities of a one-year bill versus a four-year bill. They suggested that it might be more efficient to combine many of the responsibilities of the FTA and the FRA. They requested that U.S. DOT make transportation funding more flexible for **workforce training** programs, such as those related to the construction of a High-Speed Rail station in Fresno.

*Follow-Up Activities*

- **Send information to U.S. DOT and Congressional delegation on specific provisions that the COG would like to see in upcoming transportation legislation**

2:30 p.m.

**US Department of Education***Discussion of Workforce Development*

ED Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education

- Dr. Johan Uvin, Deputy Assistant Secretary

**Dr. Johan Uvin** spoke extensively about the Obama Administration’s push to link students in community colleges to career opportunities. One of the ways they are doing this is through the Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration’s (ETA) **Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT)** Grant Program. The Education Department is working with agencies like the Labor Department and U.S. DOT on job training using the resources they already have available. He referred to his office’s report, released in April 2012, titled, **Investing in America’s Future: A Blueprint for Transforming Career and Technical Education**, which recommended \$1.14 billion in funding to reauthorize the *Perkins Act*. He suggested that COG members look into DOL’s **Workforce Innovation Fund** and see the **Pay-For-Success** initiatives promoted by the Administration.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Review information from the Education Department’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education related to workforce training**

4:30 p.m. **US Department of Labor**

*Discussion of Workforce Development*

Employment and Training Administration

- Ben Seigel, Deputy Director of the Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships – [seigel.benjamin@dol.gov](mailto:seigel.benjamin@dol.gov)

*Direct Line: 202-693-6032*

**Ben Seigel** outlined several grant programs in his department, including **TAACCCT** grants. The big-picture focus for the Administration is the federal-wide review of job training programs, being led by **Vice President Joseph Biden**. DOL is working to strengthen and expand relationships with employers. As part of the recently-passed Farm Bill, USDA has \$200 million in funding available for up to ten states to test innovative **Employment and Training (E&T)** strategies to help SNAP participants who are not working or are underemployed. The **Workforce Investment Act** is flexible, and has significant waiver authority. Ben encouraged local WIBs to test its flexibility. While the Vice President continues his review of training programs, Ben called **Registered Apprenticeships** the “*gold standard*” of job training programs, which DOL is working to modernize. He discussed **National Emergency Grants**, which states typically apply to, which temporarily expand the service capacity of WIA Dislocated Worker training and employment programs at the state and local levels. Farmworkers may qualify as “dislocated.” He encouraged interested COG members to contact **Virginia Hamilton**, Regional Administrator in DOL/ETA’s Region 6 office in San Francisco. He also said to look out for an expanded **Promise Zones** initiative, modeled off of Promise Neighborhoods and Choice Neighborhoods.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Contact DOL/ETA Region 6 Administrator Virginia Hamilton about training programs and initiatives that could assist Fresno County**

Region 6 Phone Number: 415-625-7900

Website: [http://www.doleta.gov/regions/Reg06/Pages/eta\\_default.cfm](http://www.doleta.gov/regions/Reg06/Pages/eta_default.cfm)

5:30 p.m. **Valley Leadership 2014** – Congressman Jim Costa

Congressman **Jim Costa** and his staff joined the Fresno COG delegates in the evening to hear their concerns, particularly related to the issue of water in the Valley. The Congressman outlined the work that he and his staff have been doing over the last several months, in response to the drought. He discussed his recent trip with **President Obama** to the Valley and talked about the ongoing communication of his office with federal agencies that control water allocations. He suggested that it is important to continue to communicate the negative effects of the drought to voters who do not live in the Valley, particularly within the State of California itself.

*Follow-Up Activities*

- *We will continue to update you on the efforts of the Congressional delegation related to the ongoing drought*

**Tuesday,**  
**April 8<sup>th</sup>**

9:00 a.m. **Senator Dianne Feinstein**

*Meeting with Staff for presentation of “One Voice” projects and priorities*

- James Peterson, Natural Resources Counsel
- Trevor Higgins, Legislative Assistant

**SH-331 Hart Senate Office Building**

**James Peterson**, the Senator’s main counsel on water issues, opened the meeting. The Senator’s office is working with federal agencies to increase water pumping as much as possible without incurring lawsuits. The current strategy for Senator **Dianne Feinstein**’s water bill is to get it to the floor as soon as five Republican votes are secured, to avoid a filibuster. The Senator’s legislation would also defend against future lawsuits. **Mario** responded by emphasizing how important it is to move expeditiously on the legislation. If Congress and the Administration take too long, certain crops in the Valley would die, and it would take at least five years to replace them. As in previous meetings, other delegates discussed issue areas such as an **Air Quality Empowerment Zone**, **CSBG**, **CDBG**, **Veterans Boulevard**, **workforce training**, **SCAAP**, and **PILT**.

**Trevor Higgins** added that the Senator supports additional funding for nearly all federal areas subject to Budget decisions this year.

*Follow-Up Activities*

- *We will continue to update you on the efforts of the Senator Feinstein and her staff delegation*

10:30 a.m. **Valley Leadership 2014** – Congressman Tom McClintock

Congressman **Tom McClintock** began by discussing water legislation and how federal and regional water policy helped to create the current situation by sending too much water to the ocean. He indicated that more water from the Sacramento River would need to be stored and he

discussed legislation that he has sponsored on this issue. He said, “*We are at a turning point.*” Noting that it is his belief that for more than a generation, our water policy has focused on managing scarcity, not seeking abundance. He called Senator Feinstein’s legislation woefully inadequate.

Follow-Up Activities

- *We will continue to update you on the efforts of the Congressional delegation*

1:00 p.m.     **US Department of Justice**  
*Discussion of SCAAP Funding*  
 Bureau of Justice Assistance

- Joseph Husted, Program Manager/Policy Analyst
- Esmeralda Womack, State Policy Advisor

COG members explained how **SCAAP** is an important program for Fresno County in particular because of the relatively large number of alien incarcerations there. Funding for SCAAP has been on the decline in recent years. Department of Justice (DOJ) staff described the calculation used to determine Fresno County’s allocation, which involves dividing salary costs by inmate days. Further complicating this program is the absence of Administration support for it over the last several years. Since the Administration continues to propose no funding to the program in its budget proposals, Congress must restore its allocation while subjecting it to competition with other Congressionally-funded programs.

The DOJ representatives also briefed delegates on other important DOJ programs, such as the **Bulletproof Vest Partnership** and **Byrne JAG** grants, which Fresno County receives on an annual basis.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Review Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Program website for additional state and local assistance opportunities**

1:30 p.m.     **Valley Leadership 2014** – Congressman Devin Nunes

Congressman **Devin Nunes** discussed a wide range of subject matters during his meeting with the COG delegates, including the budget process, FY15 appropriations, transportation legislation, and, of course, water. He indicated that the condition in which the region finds itself is one that he has warned would occur for quite some time. The legislation he sponsored with Congressman **David Valadao** has already passed the House. Any legislation from the Senate would be sufficient to start a conference process, and he has urged Senators Feinstein and Boxer to do so as soon as possible. Congressman Nunes urges cities, counties, farm bureaus, and industry groups to join him in urging for swift agreement between the House and Senate on their respective water bills.

Follow-Up Activities

- *We will continue to update you on the efforts of Rep Nunes and staff.*

- 3:30 p.m.      **US Department of Interior**  
*Meeting with Leadership for presentation of “One Voice” water policy priorities*
- Anne Castle, Assistant Secretary for Water and Science - Bureau of Reclamation
  - Jennifer Gimbel, Deputy Commissioner for External and Intergovernmental Affairs
- 1849 C St., NW  
 Room 6641

**Anne Castle** oversees water policy for the Department of the Interior (DOI), and she indicated enormous sympathy for the plight of the Valley. She understands the misery in people’s lives caused by the drought, and that DOI continues to monitor activity constantly. The agency is operating as maximum flexibility, without endangering other Department goals or initiating a lawsuit. She announced that, later in the day, a new “**Drought Management Plan**” would be released by her agency. For more, click on [Interior Department – Drought Management Plan](#).

The COG delegates emphasized to the Interior Department officials that absent an immediate increase in water allocations, many farmers would go out of business, and many productive fruit and nut trees would die. Replanting and growing many of those trees would take at least five years. In places like the City of **Orange Cove**, the unemployment rate would reach about 50% with food kitchens providing meals to as many as 600 families every night.

*Follow-Up Activities*

- **Examine the “Drought Management Plan” and respond to the Interior Department with recommendations**

**Wednesday,**  
**April 9<sup>th</sup>**

- 9:00 a.m.      **Valley Leadership 2014** – Congressman David Valadao

Congressman **David Valadao** said he understands the impact that a “zero” allocation for surface water has on farmers in the region. He said that he is continuing to put pressure on the Senate to move forward with its water bill, introduced by Senator **Dianne Feinstein**. The Congressman said that he is encouraged by Senator Feinstein’s willingness to negotiate with House Republicans on a water bill, even if it’s not the same as the water bill that he sponsored, along with Congressman **Devin Nunes**.

Outside of the issue of water, COG members urged the Congressman to support a new **transportation reauthorization** and funding for **Veterans Boulevard**. They requested support for an **Air Quality Empowerment Zone** designation, as well as support for **CDBG** and **CSBG**. The COG members understood well the Congressman’s opposition to **High Speed Rail**, but asked that if a station is built in Fresno, that the Congressman would consider it as a potential economic development opportunity for the region. The Congressman expressed support for continuing the **PILT** program.

Follow-Up Activities

- *We will continue to update you on the efforts of Rep. Valadao and staff.*

10:00 a.m.     **Transportation for America**  
*Discussion of Regional Transportation Priorities*

- James Corless, Director
- Erika Young, Director of Strategic Partnerships

Transportation for America (T4A) is a non-profit organization that seeks to modernize transportation policy through the reauthorization of state and federal transportation programs, with local support. Director **James Corless** briefly described his personal history with California, having worked in the past for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in the Bay Area. T4A believes that Congress must increase investment in the **Highway Trust Fund**, either through raising the federal gas tax or through other policy changes. The organization also advocates a shift in the thinking around how transportation money is spent by the federal government. The federal government should act more as an investor than a regulator, rewarding local communities for developing innovative solutions to infrastructure challenges. James believes that Senator **Boxer** is currently looking to simply extend MAP-21 spending policy into next year, past the November elections. But he thinks that out of crisis comes opportunity, which is why T4A's main focus now is building a national network of communities to share transportation solutions with each other.

James said that while he personally is very supportive of **High Speed Rail**, it has unfortunately become a very contentious issue on Capitol Hill. He urged COG members, to continue to emphasize the importance of traditional passenger rail services, such as Amtrak, to Congressional leaders, in tandem with pushing for HSR. **Erika Young** said that in her interaction with large intergovernmental groups in DC, such as NACo and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, they are still deciding amongst themselves which organization will take the "lead" on signature issues related to transportation policy.

Follow-Up Activities

- **Reach out to T4 if the Fresno-area MPO wants to become part of a national network on best practices in transportation**

11:30 a.m.     **Senator Barbara Boxer**  
*Meeting with Senator and her staff for presentation of "One Voice" priorities*  
Office of Senator Barbara Boxer

- Joaquin Esquivel, Legislative Aide  
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
- David Napoliello, Director of Infrastructure  
**SH-112 Hart Senate Office Building**

COG members outlined several regional priorities for Senator **Barbara Boxer** and her staff, but spent the majority of the meeting focusing on two key issues: water and transportation. COG members described the devastating impact of the drought on their region, and hopes that the

Bureau of Reclamation may consider releasing additional water from **Lake Shasta**. They requested the Senator's support for the state **water bond** being proposed.

On the water bill in the Senate, **Joaquin Esquivel**, the Senator's top aide on water issues, said that they are seeking 5 Republican co-sponsors for the bill. The two Senators from Arizona have expressed interest in signing on, but are not sure quite when the bill will be introduced on the Senate floor for a vote. Senator Boxer and her aides are working in particular to get the support of Alaska Senator **Lisa Murkowski** for the bill. Joaquin said that he and his office recognize the seriousness of the problem.

Senator **Barbara Boxer** who said she joined the meeting while taking a break from discussions on transportation policy, said that her primary goal on transportation is to support a 5-6 year bill, based on MAP-21. In terms on funding a bill, she considers an infusion of capital from **tax reform** to be the only "live" possibility, but is open to consider other solutions such as a wholesale gas tax and VMT, though others are clearly not so open. She said that **David Napoliello** is responsible for writing the EPW Committee's portion of the bill.

On water, the Senator said she is working hard to get Senator Murkowski's support. She also announced a broader water storage bill she is working on behind the scenes called, for now, "**W-21**." She said that they are examining desalinization, conservation, and storage solutions. She said details of the "W-21" bill will be released within about 3-4 weeks, and encouraged COG members to work directly with Joaquin on the bill.

#### Follow-Up Activities

- *We will continue to update you on the efforts of Chairman Boxer and staff.*

3:00 p.m.      **White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs**  
*Discussion of Regional Priorities, Administration Efforts, and the Vice President's Immediate Stakeholder Consultation on Workforce Training*  
**Office of Intergovernmental Affairs**

- Elias Alcantara, Staff Assistant

**Council on Environmental Quality**

- Jay Jensen, Associate Director for Land and Water
- Alexis Segal, Ecosystems Policy Advisor

**Office of the Vice President**

- Lilly Shoup, Policy Specialist

We met with White House staff members in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building to discuss the "One Voice" Regional Priorities. **Elias Alcantara** led the discussion. He said that the White House is well aware of the drought crisis facing California and continues to work with federal agencies to provide additional support to the state. COG members explained that the San Joaquin/Sacramento Delta is not transferring water in an optimal fashion to the lower San Joaquin Valley. COG members updated the White House on the current status of Senator Feinstein's water bill in the Senate.

**Jay Jensen** described the efforts of the **National Drought Resilience Partnership**, which was announced by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) in November 2013. The purpose of

the interagency partnership is to think long-term and help communities better prepare for droughts and reduce the impact of drought events on families and businesses. He said that the Administration is fully aware that additional water storage must be part of the solution. He highlighted the work of the **Western Governors' Association**, which is working to develop a “*runway to the future*” on water storage and efficiency. Lastly, he mentioned the White House **Climate Change Taskforce**, which is also working to address water-related issues.

COG members requested that the CEQ consider streamlining the NEPA/CEQA environmental review process, particularly as it relates to increasing storage capacity at **Temperance Flat**, saying that this was the biggest impediment to its development. They described the impact that the drought is anticipated to have on both the east and west sides of the Valley, with thousands of acres of productive fruit and nut trees at risk of death. This would have an enormous impact on an already economically-distressed area. COG members requested that the Administration consider an **Air Quality Empowerment Zone** designation, along with other policy requests. Elias said, “*I'd like to get these ideas in writing,*” since the President is moving forward on executive policy actions that do not require Congressional approval.

**Lilly Shoup** described the efforts that Vice President **Joe Biden** is undertaking on job training and workforce development. Currently, in the U.S., the vast majority of job training dollars are spent by employers to train employees. The White House is working with industry associations to promote uniform “**credentialing**” so that skills in an industry in one geographic location can easily be transferred to another location. Many CEOs of small business are unaware of federal job training programs, so the Administration is working to promote education about these programs. COG members invited the Vice President, as well as White House staff, to visit Fresno County to learn more about the economic conditions there.

#### Follow-Up Activities

- **Prepare a memo for the White House detailing executive actions that the Administration can take to benefit Fresno County.**

#### Conclusion

We hope this summary is helpful – please let us know if you have any questions and thanks again for the opportunity to help “One Voice” in 2014.