



Western Municipal Water District Federal Affairs Report – January 2025

119th Congress Organizes – Ratifies 2024 Election Results

Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA) secured his first full term as Speaker of the House in the 119th Congress after overcoming resistance from hardline conservatives, with critical support from President-elect Donald Trump. Johnson won the vote 218-215-1, with Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY) as the sole Republican holdout. Initially, Reps. Keith Self (R-TX) and Ralph Norman (R-SC) voted against Johnson, threatening his victory. However, after lobbying from Trump during a pause in proceedings, both members switched their votes in Johnson's favor.

Following the vote, conservative hardliners issued a letter urging Speaker Johnson to maintain rigorous legislative activity and stay committed to Trump's policy priorities. Johnson acknowledged the challenges ahead, particularly in executing Trump's ambitious legislative goals, including major tax cuts. In his acceptance speech, Johnson emphasized prioritizing America-first policies and unity within the party.

On January 6, 2025, Congress ratified President-elect Donald Trump's November election win in a final step validating the Republican's victory for a second term.

House – Senate Take Different Paths to Pass Trump Agenda Thru Budget Reconciliation

The House and Senate have decided to take divergent approaches to passing President-elect Donald Trump's agenda, opting for separate strategies to see which chamber can achieve legislative success more quickly. The House, led by Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), is pushing for a single comprehensive bill addressing border, tax, and energy policies, reflecting Trump's preference for a "big beautiful bill."

Speaker Johnson has in the past emphasized the goal of passing the reconciliation package by early April, aligning with Trump's initial vision of a single comprehensive bill addressing tax cuts, border security, and energy policy. Meanwhile, the Senate, led by Budget Chair Lindsey Graham (R-SC), is pursuing a two-bill strategy, which they believe could deliver faster results.

The differing approaches stem from skepticism within the Senate about the House's ability to unite its slim majority around a more expansive bill. So, Senate leaders are preparing a backup plan in case the House struggles with internal divisions. Despite ongoing coordination, each chamber is vying to demonstrate which one can show faster progress. Conservative members' concerns over the cost of the House's proposal and its potential to stall due to fiscal constraints further complicate the situation.

GOP members in both chambers remain committed to advancing Trump's agenda but face significant challenges in reconciling their strategies, with some lawmakers promoting collaboration while others warning that the parallel-track approach risks failure.

Senate Confirmation Hearings Set for Some of Trump's Cabinet Picks.

The Senate GOP-led Committees of jurisdiction have scheduled a tranche of confirmation hearings this week for a number of President-elect Trump's cabinet picks, attempting to accelerate Senate approval of his cabinet soon after he takes the oath of office on January 20.

Confirmation hearings schedule is as follows:

- Tuesday:
 - 9 a.m.: Doug Collins (Veterans Affairs Secretary)
 - 9:30 a.m.: Pete Hegseth (Defense Secretary)
 - 10 a.m.: Doug Burgum (Interior Secretary) – Postponed to Thursday
- Wednesday:
 - 9 a.m.: Kristi Noem (Homeland Security Secretary)
 - 9:30 a.m.: Pam Bondi (Attorney General, Day 1)
 - 10 a.m.: Chris Wright (Energy Secretary)
 - 10 a.m.: Marco Rubio (Secretary of State)
 - 10 a.m.: John Ratcliffe (CIA Director)
 - 10 a.m.: Sean Duffy (Transportation Secretary)
 - 1 p.m.: Russ Vought (OMB Director)
- Thursday:
 - 10 a.m.: Eric Scott Turner (HUD Secretary)
 - 10 a.m.: Pam Bondi (Attorney General, Day 2)
 - 10 a.m.: Doug Burgum (Interior Secretary) – Rescheduled

Note: Gov. Doug Burgum's Interior Secretary hearing was postponed from Tuesday to Thursday due to incomplete ethics and financial disclosure paperwork, according to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

New Trump Administration Nominees

Over the weekend, President-elect Donald Trump announced his selections for deputy positions in key federal agencies. He nominated former Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) member James Danly for Deputy Secretary at the Department of Energy (DOE), environmental attorney David Fotouhi for Deputy Administrator at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Katherine MacGregor for Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior. MacGregor has previous experience as Deputy Secretary of the Interior under Trump 45.

Senate GOP Ranks Filling In

Senator-elect Jim Justice (R-WV) will be sworn in on Tuesday at 2:30 p.m. in the Old Senate Chamber, becoming the 52nd Republican senator in the new Congress. Meanwhile, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine ® has not yet announced a replacement for Vice President-elect JD Vance, who resigned from the Senate on Friday. DeWine's appointee will be sworn in as the 53rd GOP senator and will need to run in a special election in two years.

House Natural Resources Committee Announces Subcommittee Chairs

House Natural Resources Committee Chair Bruce Westerman (R-AR) has announced leadership for the panel's subcommittees in the 119th Congress. Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.) will serve as vice chair of the full committee. Key subcommittee appointments include:

- Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ) returning as chair of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.
- Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-WI) continuing to lead the Federal Lands Subcommittee.
- Rep. Pete Stauber (R-MN) remaining chair of the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee.
- Rep. Jeff Hurd (R-CO), a first-term member, leading the Indian and Insular Affairs Subcommittee.
- Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-WY) taking over the Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries (WWF) Subcommittee, focusing on western water issues and wildlife conservation.

Rep. Hageman, who replaced Liz Cheney in Congress, emphasized her commitment to reducing federal regulations and promoting local resource management. She takes over for former Chairman Cliff Bentz (R-OR) who remains on the committee but has also been assigned to the House Energy and Commerce Committee. House Democrats have yet to announce ranking members for these subcommittees.

Reclamation Finalizes Revisions to NEPA Categorical Exclusions

The Bureau of Reclamation has finalized revisions to seven categorical exclusions (CEs) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to help streamline environmental reviews for certain water-related projects. These

[updates](#) aim to enhance efficiency for contracting, use authorizations, financial assistance (including WaterSMART grants), loans, and funding activities.

The revisions, published for public comment in June 2024, incorporated feedback from state governments, Tribal Nations, and various water organizations. According to Reclamation, this modernization effort updates CEs that have been in place for over 40 years, ensuring alignment with current regulations and policies while supporting priority water infrastructure needs across the West. See the [Federal Register](#) announcement for further information.

118th Congress Passes Temporary CR with Disaster, Farm Aid

After several missteps and just prior to adjournment *sine die*, the 118th Congress successfully passed a stopgap continuing resolution (CR) funding bill to avert a government shutdown, extending federal funding through March 14, 2025. The House approved the measure with a vote of 366-34, while the Senate followed with an 85-11 vote.

The legislation included \$100 billion in disaster relief and \$10 billion in disaster aid for farmers, along with a one-year extension of the farm bill. Notably, it excludes provisions related to the debt ceiling, which will need to be addressed separately in future negotiations.

President Joe Biden signed the bill into law shortly after its passage, ensuring continued government operations after the previous CR expired on December 20, and providing critical support to disaster-stricken areas and the agricultural sector.

Biden Admin Releases ESA Plan for California Water Projects

The Biden Administration finalized its water management plan for California's Central Valley Project (CVP) just weeks before President-elect Donald Trump takes office, setting the stage for potential policy reversals. The plan, developed jointly with California's state government, focuses on balancing water deliveries to Central Valley farmers with protections for endangered fish species like Chinook salmon and Delta smelt.

The Biden Administration emphasized operational changes at Shasta Reservoir to support salmon populations and alignment with Governor Gavin Newsom's (D) habitat restoration plans. However, the timing and shortened review period drew criticism from moderate Democratic Representatives Jim Costa (D-CA) and Adam Gray (D-CA), who expressed concerns about the plan's durability and potential impacts on federal funding for California water projects.

Both state and federal plans are already facing legal challenges from water districts and environmental groups. Key CVP water users criticized the rushed process and argued that stakeholders' concerns were inadequately addressed. Meanwhile, environmental groups claimed the plan lacks meaningful improvements for endangered fish populations, with some forecasts showing little difference or worse outcomes compared to Trump-era policies.

Biden Signs Bipartisan WRDA 2024 Into Law

The "Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024" passed the Senate by a 97-1 vote and the House by 399-18, and President Biden signed the bill into law. Named after retiring Senator Tom Carper (D-DE), the bill authorizes over a dozen Army Corps of Engineers projects, primarily aimed at flood risk reduction, extreme weather resilience, navigation improvements, and wetlands restoration.

Key highlights include:

- \$2.1 billion for Everglades restoration
- Authorization of four major navigation projects in Florida, Alaska, California, and Maryland
- Studies on over 200 potential future water infrastructure projects
- National Dam Safety Program reauthorization
- Economic aid for coal-dependent communities
- Promotion of nature-based flood solutions and water conservation at dams in arid regions

Environmental groups, including American Rivers and The Nature Conservancy, praised the bill for advancing natural infrastructure solutions and prioritizing ecological sustainability alongside traditional projects.

The legislation also supports ongoing studies, such as the multibillion-dollar flood protection project for New York City and aims to streamline the approval process for future Army Corps initiatives.

President Joe Biden has also signed several other Congress-passed bills into law, including the following bills:

- [S. 3791](#), the “America’s Conservation Enhancement Reauthorization Act,” from Senate Environment and Public Works leadership, to reauthorize several conservation programs. The House earlier this month passed an amended version after initial Senate passage.
- [H.R. 4385](#), the “Drought Preparedness Act,” from Reps. Joe Neguse (D-Colo.) and Juan Ciscomani (R-Ariz.). The bill would reauthorize the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act through 2028. It also reaffirms the Bureau of Reclamation’s authority to address drought damage.
- [H.R. 5770](#), the “WATER Data Improvement Act,” from Neguse, to reauthorize the U.S. Geological Survey’s groundwater monitoring network.
- [H.R. 5443](#), the “Accelerating Appraisals and Conservation Efforts Act,” by Rep. Susie Lee (D-Nev.). It aims to address a shortage in land appraisers, which is delaying public land transactions.
- [H.R. 7938](#), the “Klamath Basin Water Agreement Support Act of 2024” by Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-OR). Among other provisions, the bill would protect Klamath Project irrigators from future costs associated with dam removal on the Klamath River in Oregon and California. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) carried a Senate companion bill (S. 482) and was instrumental in the Senate passage of the House-passed bill.

White House Science and Tech Advisors Release Groundwater Recommendations

On December 14, 2024, President Biden’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) released their long-anticipated [groundwater report](#) urging the EPA to lead an Interagency Working Group on Groundwater Security and Sustainability to address the depletion, contamination, and mismanagement of groundwater resources across the United States.

Key Findings:

- **Unsustainable Depletion:** Aquifers, especially in the Western U.S., are being rapidly drained, leading to land subsidence and fissures.
- **Contamination Threats:** Agricultural runoff, nitrates, PFAS chemicals, and industrial waste threaten groundwater quality.
- **Limited Natural Recharge:** Much of the groundwater consists of “fossil water”, which cannot naturally replenish on human timescales.
- **Decentralized Management:** Groundwater management varies widely across local, state, and federal levels, complicating national coordination.

PCAST Recommendations:

1. **Interagency Working Group:** Coordinate federal efforts, improve data collection, and create a unified groundwater accounting system led by USGS.
2. **Research Initiatives:** Study groundwater recharge safety, pollution impacts, and sustainable use for food security and biodiversity.
3. **Data Modernization:** Improve and digitize groundwater data collection, including private well data, and ensure hydrological models across agencies are interoperable.
4. **Grant Programs:** Incentivize sustainable aquifer management under the Biden Administration’s *America the Beautiful Initiative*, funded by EPA, USDA, DOI, DOE, and Army Corps of Engineers.
5. **Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR):** Explore technologies for safe aquifer recharge while removing harmful pollutants.
6. **Public Engagement Hubs:** Establish networks to educate stakeholders and provide technical assistance on groundwater management.
7. **Workforce Development:** Create campaigns to recruit professionals for groundwater resource management.

As always, it is a pleasure serving the Western Municipal Water District. If this report brings rise to any questions, please contact Mark Limbaugh at (202) 286-8887 or Christopher Kearney at (202) 549-1583.