

April 13, 2020

Letter to the Caucus

VIRTUAL CAUCUS RECAP

LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR

Stay
Connected

Dear Fellow Rural Caucus Members, During our Virtual Caucus Zoom Meeting, there was a resounding call for a letter to the Governor from the Caucus thanking him for his leadership. It was an honor and a pleasure to write. I hope I adequately expressed everyone's feelings. Here is what I sent last Friday.

Please [click here](#) to read it.

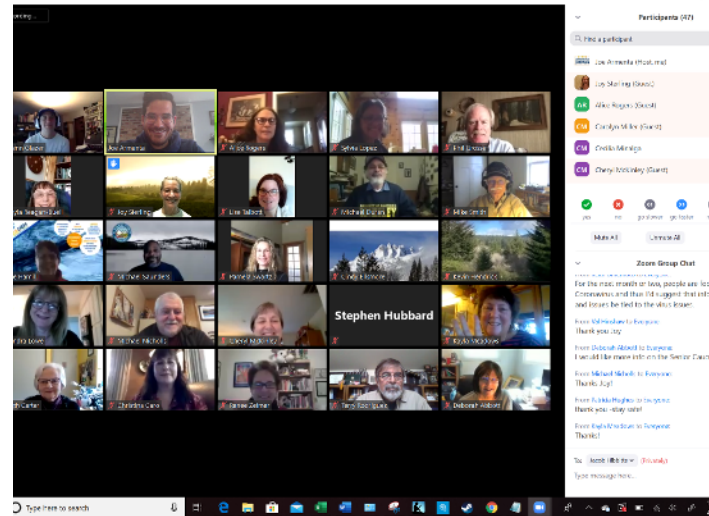
We also came up with three asks for the membership:

1. Please sign up to support our candidates
2. Help with outreach for Census 2020
3. Organize your own Zoom meetings

Here is a link to [get more information](#).

I recommend listening to the [Zoom recording](#), kind of like a podcast, beginning with remarks from CDP Chair Rusty Hicks. One of the highlights is the "Good of the Order", when everyone gets to speak, about 35 minutes in.

Thank you so much for staying engaged. And, please stay safe! With all my very best,



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: WILD FIRE INSURANCE

By Phil Grosse
Legislation Advocate

There are two bills we are following, very carefully, involving the ongoing crisis of homeowners insurance cancellations in high fire risk areas.

- **AB2167** would create a path for smaller insurance companies to expand their geographic reach into rural areas. The idea would be that greater participation by more companies would prevent any insurer, large or small, from having too great a concentration of policies in any one area, and thereby risk catastrophic loss in a single large fire.
- **AB2367** would create standards for fire-hardened homes and fire-resistant communities, that, once met, would guarantee that a homeowner would be issued a policy. Not only that, but receive a discount, similar to the Safe Driver discounts available on auto policies.

The two bills are presently in competition with each other. One is supported by the Insurance Commissioner, the other is supported by the Chair of the Assembly

Committee on Insurance.

On February 25, 15 members of our Rural Caucus met with Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara to get briefed on his bill.



Since then, Joy Sterling and I have engaged in an intensive conference call effort, discussing both bills with staff of six Assembly members on the Insurance Committee and two consultants to the Insurance Committee.

And, we had a conference call with the State Fire Marshall and the CalFire Assistant Deputy Director to discuss in general terms the provisions in these two bills.

We like aspects of both bills. They each take an intelligent approach, and they do not appear to us to be mutually exclusive. Joy and I have written the consultants to the Insurance Committee and urged that the bills be merged into one.

Politics being what it is, this may run afoul of turf battles. But *when* the legislators return to the Capitol, there is going to be severe pressure to reduce the 2400 bills currently pending to a more manageable number, so we might have a chance.

They're both good bills. Through our advocacy, we may have a chance to make a bill that's greater than the sum of its parts.

CAMPAIGNING IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC

By Elizabeth Betancourt
Northern Regional Chair
CDP endorsed candidate
for Assembly District 1.

We're just barely through the first quarter and it's already been quite a year! As usual, though, we have deep opportunities commensurate with our challenges.

I ran against the incumbent and an NPP who entered the primary race late and spent over \$500,000 of his own money. With late ballots coming in pulling largely from the incumbent's share, I'm ending up around 40%. County turnout was between 51% (Modoc) and 65% (Sierra).

I am growing increasingly uncomfortable with the fundraising situation. With COVID-19 (rightly!) keeping people sequestered, and the oncoming recession

putting a squeeze on people's finances, raising money from individuals – 60% of our contributions in 2019! – is much more difficult. More resources are needed – especially as people become reachable solely via mail, phone and text.



Finding new ways to connect: There's a huge increase in backyard gardening, so we are doing some Q&A for seed starting and garden development, since that's my (and my husband's!) background.

Gun purchase: There are accounts of more brand-new gun owners, driven by fear and scarcity as well as the political rhetoric blaming Asians for COVID-19.

The need to ensure safety is paramount.

The Internet: Of course, Broadband - the great equalizer that unfortunately is not really all that equitable right now. We have a petition going that I hope the Rural Caucus will sign and circulate! [Sign it here.](#)

Finally, we can now all see that the "great economy" touted by our president over the last several years was just not that great. We already knew this, as rural advocates, but now it is plain for all to see.

The solutions that we develop as champions of our small rural communities will be even more important in the weeks and months to come.

I feel incredibly lucky to be part of a group that is on the forefront of advocating for a new, people-centered economy.

Thank you!

**CONTACT
INFO**

(530) 289-8571

betancourt4ad1@gmail.com

www.betancourtforassembly.com

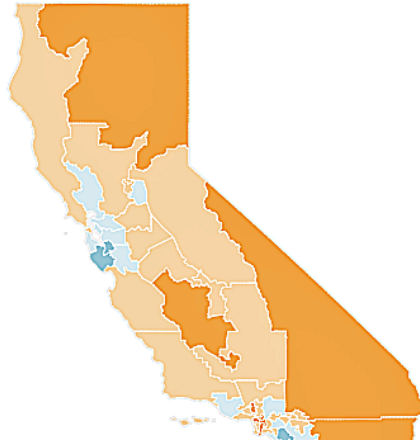
CENSUS 2020

Self-Response by Congressional District

This map features self-response rates from households that responded to the 2020 Census online, by mail, or by phone. Rates can be viewed in [rankings here](#).

California
Self-Response
47.8%

Congressional District 1
Self-Response
38.9%



Press the "Reset" button in the bottom right bar before using filters to view other geographies.



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4/10/2020

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Geographies

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Congressional District

Alarming, the rural counties are far behind in the Census count. The story is summed up the map, which you can [access here](#). Outreach efforts *need and deserve* our full support. For more information, please contact **Rural Caucus Treasurer Lise Talbott** ([by clicking here](#)) as she is active in the effort.

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH PG&E

PG&E pleaded guilty last month to 84 counts of involuntary manslaughter in connection with the 2018 Camp Fire, the state's deadliest. State regulators determined PG&E's equipment caused the fire, which engulfed the town of Paradise and led to the deaths of 85 people. The company was fined \$2.1 B and is required to build Paradise a new water system. No board members or executives were punished.

In another development, the Governor got the utility to agree to more concessions, like suspending dividend payments to investors for three years.

A new cause for concerns is that half of the \$13.5 B payment to wildfire victims would be in PG&E stock, now in steep decline with the rest of the stock market.

Meanwhile, Sen. Scott Weiner's bill (SB 917), authorizing a state takeover, has gone to committee. We recommend support with the caveat that the urban assets don't get spun off leaving rural California literally in the dark. The IBEW has voiced opposition. However, there is a provision that all current contracts be honored and we note that the work force at Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), a public utility, is represented by IBEW.

Central Coast Regional Chair Glenn Glazer is organizing the effort to garner support for the Weiner bill from the CDP Legislation Committee, our County Committees and key legislators. Please contact Glenn ([by clicking here](#)) for more information.

**PFAS...!
BY
MIKE SMITH**

No, I did not sneeze. PFAS is the acronym for a class of chemicals that are contaminating our water supplies. It stands for “Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances”. They are also called “**forever chemicals**” as they do not deteriorate.

It is a large group – at least 3000 synthetic compounds that are used in a wide range of consumer products and industrial processes. They are easily water solvable. They have been around since the 1940s but are now catching the attention of regulators who are concerned about the health risks, including elevated cholesterol levels, liver dysfunction and kidney cancer that have been documented in medical journals. But industry pressure – primarily from 3M and Dupont – have kept them away from regulatory attention. Specifically, the EPA has been convinced to keep the levels for reporting these chemicals high so that very few water systems needed to notify of their presence.

Last year, the landscape changed. Linda Birnbaum, the former Director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (an entity within the Department of Health and Human Services) retired and was able to speak freely. She encouraged a more robust look at the health causes of PFAS chemicals.

Picking up on this increased attention, the California legislature passed AB756 which moved the regulation of PFAS chemicals into the able hands of the State Water Resources Control Board. The Board moved quickly to lower the contamination level that triggers the need to report. Though the levels are still much higher, according to the Environmental Working Group, than they need to be, the new trigger levels are moving in the right direction.

As politically involved individuals we should stay aware of the issue.

- The Water Resource Board newsletter is a good place to start: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/pfas/
- Environmental Working Group (www.ewg.org) is focused on PFAS contamination.
- Support legislation development as it occurs. Right there are none pending in California, but the House has HR353 and HR5279.
- Watch for further announcements in the summer Caucus Newsletter.

