

CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE



RURAL CAUCUS

Assemblymember Dave Cogdill, Chair

Senator Denise Moreno-Ducheny, Vice-Chair

Rural California Scores Victory in the 2004-05 Budget

When Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and legislative leaders agreed on a \$105.4 billion budget last Monday, Californians living in rural areas benefited from several key victories related to health and social services, transportation, resources, and local government.

Members of the Rural Caucus worked diligently to advocate for items that will continue to enhance and protect the quality of life in rural California.

It is important to acknowledge Governor Schwarzenegger's leadership in supporting adequate funding in this year's budget for the programs identified in this newsletter. Special recognition goes to Rural Caucus members, Senator Wes Chesbro and Assemblyman Rick Keene, in advocating for rural areas in the budget conference committee, and to Assembly Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy for his leadership in budget negotiation meetings (the 'Big 5').

"I am extremely pleased that the Governor acknowledges the special needs of rural communities by eliminating unnecessary and burdensome fees and by protecting many services critical to rural areas." Assemblyman Dave Cogdill, Chair, Rural Caucus

The programs highlighted here represent just some of the positive budget achievements that specifically address challenges facing rural California.

SAFER RURAL COMMUNITIES

This year's budget package reinstates the rural and small county law enforcement grant program. The funding is intended to supplement existing resources to ensure public safety.

The 37 counties receiving grants are those with the lowest population.

"This budget holds the line on public safety and clearly demonstrates that protections of the public and proactive approaches to law enforcement are a high priority in California." Robert T. Doyle, President, California State Sheriffs' Association (letter to the Legislature, July 27, 2004)

TAX RELIEF

Last year's budget created "State Responsibility Area" (SRA) fees, a duplicative property tax that unfairly burdens the rural parts of the State. This year, the Rural Caucus was a driving force behind SB 1112, which repealed the unnecessarily cumbersome SRA fees.

“Property owners in SRAs should not be required to subsidize CDF’s fire protection efforts which benefit the entire state”
Regional Council of Rural Counties (position paper on Fire Protection Fees)

PROVIDING QUALITY HEALTH CARE

The budget includes approximately \$70 million to help fund Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs).

“This is a significant accomplishment. These funds will help ensure the continued viability of the rural healthcare delivery system. FQHCs and RHCs are the backbone of the State’s health care safety net, and these funds increase their ability to provide needed primary care services to the state’s most medically underserved populations.”
Lauri Medeiros, Executive Director, California State Rural Health Association

The budget also continues the Rural Health Care Equity Program, which provides reimbursement for out-of-pocket health care costs incurred by State employees and retirees living in rural areas that are not served by HMOs. One of the health care problems faced in rural areas is the lack of coverage by health maintenance organizations. Without HMOs, the only option available is the more expensive fee-for-service plans. This program helps offset those increased costs to State employees and retirees.

CLEANING THE AIR

The Carl Moyer Program provides funds for replacing or rebuilding heavy-duty diesel engines with new clean-technology engines. According to the Governor’s Office, the Carl Moyer Program reduces emissions of smog forming pollutants by 6 tons per day, reducing health care costs for Californians by over \$1.0 billion annually.

“By appropriating this revenue into the Carl Moyer program, we are demonstrating our commitment to fighting air pollution and improving the quality of life for all Californians.”
Senator Denise Moreno-Ducheny, Vice Chair, Rural Caucus

PRESERVING RURAL JOBS

A proposed new fee on timber owners would have created an onerous burden and could have severely impact the timber industry at a time when California’s timber industry is facing strong price pressures from global importers.

The timber harvest fee would have impacted not only individual landowners and others in the timber industry, but most likely, homebuyers, people purchasing lumber, and homeowners doing work on their homes.

“We are very proud to have succeeded in eliminating this unfair fee, especially on an industry that needs our support and is a major employer in rural areas.”
Assemblyman Doug LaMalfa

PROTECTING RURAL AIRPORTS

This year's budget includes \$5.1 million for construction, maintenance, security upgrades of rural municipal airports. This money is matched by the Federal Government at a 20:1 rate. In this post-September 11th world, we need to guarantee that our airports are secure.

“California’s rural airports are critical for the transportation and agricultural needs of those in the most remote parts of our state. We must do all that we can to ensure the safety and security of our rural airports. The grants that I worked to defend several years ago are protected in this year’s budget.”

Senator Charles Poochigian, Republican Caucus Chair and Assistant Minority Leader

CONTROLLING WEST NILE VIRUS

This budget protects funding for mosquito/vector control purposes in the Local Government agreement while providing additional funds to help combat West Nile Virus. West Nile has found its way to California and it is imperative that we be prepared.

“This budget funding will go a long way in developing a long-term strategic plan and program for West Nile Virus surveillance, prevention, and control, protecting all California residents.”

Assemblyman Tim Leslie