

From: kevin bosch <kevin.bosch@davidturch.com>
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To: 'Kodiak Hill-Davis'; 'Amanda Stephenson'; Jamie Jones
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David Turch and Associates

WASHINGTON UPDATE

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HURRICANE DISASTER RELIEF FOR THE EAST COAST

Even before the damage from Hurricane Matthew is fully assessed, the White House and congressional leaders are already planning how to manage the disaster relief to effected communities on the Southeast coast. Preliminary discussions appear focused on attaching emergency relief funding to a catchall omnibus appropriations bill that is likely to move before the end of the year. According to the White House, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approximately \$5 billion in its Disaster Relief Fund. With the level of damage experienced in Florida, Georgia and Carolinas, the cleanup and rebuilding needs of the region are likely to dwarf the funding currently available to FEMA. For instance, in the wake of Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the Obama Administration requested \$60.4 billion in emergency aid following the damage wrought in New Jersey and New York. Superstorm Sandy was a category two when it made landfall while Hurricane Matthew was rated a category three as it closely paralleled the US Southeast coastline.

We can expect Congress to fight over the size of the emergency aid package as well as how to pay for it. House Tea Party members will likely demand offsets for most if not all of the emergency funding allocated to the area. The Obama Administration, along with congressional Democrats, will push for the emergency aid to be exempt from the budget caps for FY 2017. The current federal stopgap funding measure expires on December 9, leaving House and Senate leaders with a relatively short window of opportunity to reach a deal that can garner the support of a majority of their respective rank and file members.

MORE THAN 6.1 MILLION VOTING AGE AMERICANS BARRED FROM VOTING

With the presidential elections four weeks away, and a myriad of congressional, state and local offices up for grabs, a recent report by the Sentencing Project sheds new light on what is referred to as “felony disenfranchisement.” According to the report, an estimated 6.1 million US citizens are prohibited from casting a ballot because of a felony-level criminal record. Out of this population, approximately 4.7 million are no longer incarcerated but are effectively “disenfranchised” by their respective state laws. As a comparison, 1.17 million people were disenfranchised in 1976, 3.34 million in 1996 and 5.85 million in 2010. The state of Florida – a key battleground state in presidential elections -- has the lion share of the disenfranchised, 1.5 million people or 27 percent of the total affected population.

One of the key findings of the report is that 2.5 percent of the total U.S. voting age population – 1 of every 40 adults – may not vote due to a current or previous felony conviction. While rates of disenfranchisement vary by state due to different voting prohibitions, more than 7 percent of the adult population in the following six states cannot vote: Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee and Virginia. The states of Maine and Vermont, interestingly enough, have no restrictions in place, even for individuals that are currently incarcerated. Fourteen states (Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon and Pennsylvania) restrict voting rights for individuals in jail. Four states (California, Colorado, Connecticut and New York) forbid voting for individuals in prison or on parole. Eighteen states (Alaska, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin) proscribe voting rights for people in prison, on parole or probation. Twelve states (Alabama, Arizona, Delaware, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, Tennessee, Virginia and Wyoming) curtail voting rights for individuals in prison, on parole or probation and post-sentence.

Minority populations are disproportionately effected. For instance, over 7.4 percent of the adult African American population is disenfranchised compared to 1.8 percent of the non-African American population. In four states, the level of African American disenfranchisement is significantly higher – Florida (21 percent), Kentucky (26 percent), Tennessee (21 percent), and Virginia (22 percent).

CONGRESSIONAL CALENDAR

Congress is out of session and not scheduled to return to the US Capitol until after the elections on November 14.

Kevin Bosch

Kevin Bosch
David Turch and Associates
517 2nd Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002
202-543-3744
kevin.bosch@davidturch.com