



What to Expect First from the Biden Administration

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The two major issues confronting President Biden after his inauguration are COVID and the economy. Whatever initiatives he proposes will be delayed somewhat by the Senate's impeachment trial of Donald Trump, which will begin either just before or right after Biden's swearing in. The Senate likely will try to conduct other business part of each day during the impeachment trial. Top priorities for Biden will be getting his Cabinet appointees approved by the Senate while issuing a flurry of directives ranging from COVID to the environment. He's announced he will introduce a \$1.9 billion economic rescue package that includes \$350 billion in state and local aid. Last year congressional Democrats pushed for that aid but were rebuffed, particularly by Senate Republicans who felt that some states either did not need or deserve assistance. Look for this and other issues related to the Biden proposal to be resolved soon because unemployment and other assistance passed by Congress late last year will expire in March.

We have argued since last year that local governments need direct funding to combat losses in revenues and increased costs during the pandemic. Direct funding from Washington to Main Street has been done before on a massive scale from 1971-1986 using a formula based on a locality's population and per capita income as well

as another factor relating to its taxing capabilities. Rather than considering it as a long-term effort, the need for this kind of assistance for the next two to three years would enable local governments to pay for both operating and capital expenses, providing a huge boost to local economies at a time when the national economy desperately needs to lower unemployment and increase spending. **Wall Street may be booming but many Americans are teetering on the edge of financial ruin.** That economic disparity has already resulted in political unrest that makes it harder for elected officials at all levels of government to find common ground.

Since Trump took office in 2016, rumors of an infrastructure plan have circulated among legislators and the media. We hope that it occurs during the Biden administration, but let's face it; By the time \$4 trillion dollars has been spent on COVID-related stimulus, support for another trillion will require more political fortitude than politicians of both parties are likely to have in 2021. While the Biden administration clearly will make action on climate change a very high priority, that isn't likely to translate into initiatives that will provide state and local governments with funds to deal with flooding and pre-disaster mitigation. The Biden administration can provide strong leadership for applying scientific knowledge to dealing with the impact we humans have on global warming, but its major accomplishment in this arena will be putting the U.S. back into the international dialogue about what at least **most** nations can be doing to secure the environment for future generations.

Since the mid-1980s, the federal government has failed to be a proactive leader in dealing with issues such as infrastructure, the environment and disaster resilience. Its political dysfunction has made it an unreliable partner with states and local governments. On the coast, that boils down to being at best a miserly source of coastal program funding and more often quite simply unreliable. This has been the case regardless of who has been President or which party controlled Congress. Increasingly, states and regional collaborations of local governments are finding it necessary to deal with a variety of crucial issues, not the least of which is planning for coastal resilience and adaptation to more rain, dangerous storms, and rising seas. Regardless of whether any of us feels the federal government should do more, my point is that President Biden alone cannot fill the federal vacuum and Congress has not shown a desire to do more than react to storms rather than investing in programs that enable local governments to act.