

Brown brushes off GOP opposition to bullet train

Michael Finnegan, Los Angeles Times, 11-7-14

Gov. Jerry Brown played down concerns Thursday about Republicans killing the state's \$68-billion bullet train, saying that "they're going to join the chorus" in support of high-speed rail once construction around Fresno and Bakersfield gains momentum.

"Look, we have the ingredients to get this thing launched," Brown told reporters on his way into an Anti-Defamation League lunch at a Beverly Hills hotel.

Republicans in Congress, most notably House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, who is from Bakersfield, have vowed to block any further federal spending on the rail network to link Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The Republicans' capture of a U.S. Senate majority in Tuesday's election could make it more difficult for Brown to win further support from Washington for a project that would be a major legacy for the Democratic governor. So far, the federal government has provided \$3.2 billion in grants to get the project started.

"We have the amount of federal money we're going to get, at least over the next few years," said Brown, who won a historic fourth term Tuesday. "And we have funds from the state."

A state bond measure and the Legislature's recent allocation of some pollution fees to the project will still leave it many billions of dollars short of its \$68-billion budget.

"The governor's math just doesn't add up," said Rep. Jeff Denham (R-Turlock), a bullet train opponent who is a member of the House Transportation Committee. "To just spend money laying track on a project that voters no longer support I think is shortsighted."

Brown said Chinese and Japanese investors were "very bullish" on investing in the project. The Japanese ambassador to the United States recently flew to California just to urge him to consider a Japanese rail company, Brown said.

While some in Washington "may be small-minded," he added, they will come around when heavy construction starts.

"Maybe even some of the Republican congressmen will have to see the wisdom of high-speed rail," Brown said.

Brown also said Thursday that revamping the state's criminal laws would be a major focus of his final four-year in the wake of voters' passage this week of Proposition 47, which reduces penalties for drug possession and other nonviolent crimes.

"This is a good period to consolidate, to harmonize and to make more sense out of the fragmented, multifarious criminal statutes that we now have," he said.

Brown took no public position on the ballot measure. But he suggested that the reduced penalties would still be an effective deterrent against crime.

"People who get put in a jail cell in downtown L.A. – that's no picnic," he said.

With his reelection now behind him, Brown, 76, was in a lighthearted mood as he addressed the ADL luncheon.

“When I was younger,” he said, “I was always talking about reform and throw the bums out, and it’s time for fresh face and young blood. I don’t say that any more. I say there’s no substitute for experience as I enter my fourth term as governor.”