

Election could mean bye bye bullet train funds

Dan Walter, Sacramento Bee, 11-9-16

This was supposed to be, in the minds of many, the election that moved the rest of the nation closer to pluralistic, pro-tax, anti-gun, "progressive" California.

Never mind.

California voters reinforced the state's image in a big way, favoring Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump by a nearly 2-to-1 margin and passing ballot measures to tax the rich, regulate ammunition sales, soften criminal punishment, lift the ban on bilingual education and legalize marijuana.

But Trump cracked Democrats' much-vaunted "blue wall" in the rest of the nation to score a stunning upset in the presidential duel, winning even such traditionally Democratic states as Wisconsin and Michigan.

Trump's victory, coupled with continued Republican control of Congress, means California will be, at least for the next four years, the nation's diaspora for liberal politics. And on a practical level, it may mean a running war between Sacramento and Washington.

With the GOP controlling the federal government, for instance, Gov. Jerry Brown can probably kiss goodbye any lingering hopes that Uncle Sam will finance his much-cherished bullet train project.

Once a short stretch of track is constructed in the San Joaquin Valley, the state will be on its own. State officials have toyed with leveraging proceeds of the state's "cap-and-trade" auctions of carbon dioxide emission allowances, but recent auctions have produced almost nothing.

In fact, California's entire anti-carbon crusade could become another point of friction. Brown and other Californians have portrayed it as a model for the nation, and even the world. But a Trump White House is likely to back away from carbon reduction, leaving California as an outlier.

Trump's triumph has another potential impact on California — reinforcing the Supreme Court's conservative wing that could breathe new life into the challenge to California's law requiring non-union members to pay dues.

That law has fueled political power that public employee unions wield, and they were braced for a big hit before the death of Justice Antonin Scalia gave them a reprieve.

An even more direct confrontation may be over Obamacare.

No state was more vigorous in implementing the Affordable Care Act, extending health insurance coverage to millions of Californians, particularly through expansion of Medi-Cal, which covers the poor, to more than a third of its population.

A Republican Congress has pledged to repeal the ACA, and if it does, the state could lose many billions of federal dollars that have paid for expansion, forcing the state to decide whether to continue its coverage for millions of Californians on its own dime. Indeed, it could become the ultimate test of just how "progressive" California's politicians are.

And then there are the state's three million illegal immigrants. How will they fare if Trump's administration tries to implement his oft-expressed sentiments?

With Brown having just two years remaining in his governorship, California-Washington conflicts could dominate the 2018 campaign for governor that's already under way.