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The off-year election (Nov. 7) was good for Democrats, road funding, and legalized marijuana – an emerging category for out of home ads.

US House “In Play”

Republicans control both houses of Congress and the White House. Experts say Democrats’ strong showing in the 2017 off-year election means they have a chance to win control of the US House in 2018.

The diverse Democratic base is growing. Democrats are unlikely to flip rural House seats held by Republicans, but could pick up suburban seats.

Typically, the party out of power gains congressional seats in mid-term elections.

The OOH industry is focused on the transportation committees in Congress. If Democrats win control of the US House in 2018, the likely chairman of the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee would be Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR).

DeFazio:

- Has used billboards in his campaigns
- Is an environmentalist, with a 95% rating from the League of Conservation Voters in 2016
- Was helpful to OAAA in defeating adverse OOH industry amendments as Congress approved a long-term Highway Bill in 2015



DeFazio (second from right) with Meadow Outdoor in Oregon, 2016

“The recent election is a reminder that our political outreach should be bipartisan,” said OAAA President and CEO Nancy Fletcher. “At times, it might seem tempting to align exclusively with one party or the other, but we know the political pendulum swings.”

What’s next: Brisk turnover. An average of 22 House members retire every two-year cycle, according to Roll Call. So far in the 2018 cycle, that number has jumped to 30 (21 Republicans and nine Democrats), with [more retirements expected](#).

Voters Supported Transportation

Facing congestion and a backlog of repairs, voters are willing to tax themselves to pay for roads and transit:

- Denver approved a \$431 million bond for surface transportation, 73% to 27%
- DeKalb County, GA, approved a sales and use tax for transportation projects, 70% to 30%. Athens-Clarke County, GA, also approved a sales and use tax, by a wider margin.
- Maine approved a \$105 million bond, 72% to 28%
- Lawrence, KS, Grand Rapids, MI, and Mahoning County, OH, extended expiring taxes for transit. Allen County, OH, rejected a tax extension for transit.

Road construction highlights the importance of regulations that allow relocation of billboards and also require just compensation when government removes billboards.

What's next: Look for a government study on billboard relocation next year.

Marijuana

In multiple jurisdictions, election results were positive for marijuana reformers.

“Murphy’s New Jersey (Phil Murphy is governor-elect) will race Vermont and a handful of other states to become the first to end cannabis prohibition” through legislative action, cannabis news editor Tom Angell posted in [Forbes](#).

What's next: Look for a ballot measure next year in Michigan to legalize marijuana, with medical marijuana on the ballot in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Utah.

A variety of viewpoints are expressed on billboards and other OOH formats, including promotion of cannabis where it is legal.

The 2017 OBIE awards recognized [don't-drive-high creative](#) posted by Colorado’s Department of Transportation.

On election day, a nonprofit called SAM (Smart Approaches to Marijuana) announced in San Diego a media campaign against marijuana-impaired driving. This group, co-founded by former Rep. Patrick Kennedy, intends to post billboards that say “High Means DUI.”



New Jersey elected Democrat Phil Murphy to replace Republican Governor Chris Christie.