



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

eREGIONS

NATIONAL
CONFERENCE OF REGIONS

FEBRUARY 11-14, 2018
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Registration is Open!

NEWS FROM WASHINGTON

The Senate resumes session tomorrow, and the House will return on January 8.

Happy New Year from Washington!

When Congress adjourned for the holidays, they left a lot of unresolved issues on the table. Now that both chambers are set to return within the next week, they will have to swing into action to avoid breaking two important January 19 deadlines, including appropriations and flood insurance reauthorization.

Congress agreed to a stopgap spending bill in late December that would keep the federal government running until January 19. That gives the Senate eleven legislative days and the House eight legislative days to pass all twelve appropriations bills or another continuing resolution to avoid a government shutdown. The following disagreements between Democrats and Republicans are complicating the process: 1) boosting budget caps, 2) maintaining parity between defense and non-defense discretionary spending, and 3) preventing automatic spending cuts, or sequestration, from occurring if the budget caps are exceeded.

Congressional leaders and the White House have been trying to negotiate a budget deal for weeks. **According to The Hill**, a senior White House official believes a budget caps deal will be reached in January. This could open the door for appropriators to finish negotiations on a deal to fund the federal government for two years – the rest of fiscal year 2018 as well as fiscal year 2019.

The National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) is coming up against its January 19 deadline as well. The House adopted a bill to **reauthorize the program for five years** and implement several reforms, but the Senate has yet to take up a vote on the issue. It is unclear whether the Senate will come to an agreement on the *21st Century Flood Reform Act* (H.R. 2874), raising concerns over the potential increase in rates for NFIP homeowners under the proposed bill.

Here are a few other issues that NARC will be following early this year:

- *Disaster aid.* The House passed an **\$81 billion disaster aid package** for Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and California. The Senate is expected to pick this issue up again this month.
- *Children's Health Insurance.* The last continuing resolution included money through March for the expired Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Almost everyone is pushing for a deal to reauthorize this program.
- *Farm Bill.* The first draft of the 2018 Farm Bill reauthorization should be released within the next month or two. Our biggest concern for local governments is that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) will be removed from the Farm Bill and considered separately.

Five Fights Facing Congress in 2018

Congress is already preparing for several tough fights ahead. Here are five issues to watch in the new year:

1. *Government funding and spending gaps.* Congress needs to reach an agreement on the budget caps to stop sequestration. Democrats are demanding parity between the defense and non-defense discretionary spending. Lawmakers must also prevent another government shutdown by January 19 by passing all twelve appropriations bills or passing another continuing resolution. They must also pass a bill to raise the debt ceiling early this year to avoid a default on the federal debt.
2. *Immigration.* Congress has until March to decide how to deal with the population that was eligible under the now rescinded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The Trump administration wants to include border policy measures on any DACA agreement.
3. *Entitlement Reform.* After passing the tax reform bill, GOP lawmakers are now looking at entitlement reform to help tackle the federal debt and deficit. A White House official has also pointed to welfare reform as a major priority in 2018.
4. *Healthcare.* Conservatives are gearing up for another repeal push heading into the 2018 midterms. Others, being led by Susan Collins (R-ME), are seeking to stabilize the *Affordable Care Act's* insurance marketplaces.
5. *Infrastructure.* The Trump administration is expected to release its long-awaited infrastructure plan in early January. This is expected to be a blueprint for legislation on Capitol Hill. While there is bipartisan support on this issue, paying for it is still a huge obstacle.

Senate Compromise Preserves Clean Energy Financing Program

The Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program, a financing initiative that has helped more than 180,000 homeowners pay for solar panels and clean energy appliances through their local tax bills, was feared to be effectively shut down in recent months. This was due to a concern that the program was "scamming" unsuspecting buyers into financial ruin. However, Senate staffers, consumer groups, mortgage lenders, PACE proponents, and GOP lawmakers have reached a compromise to rescue the program instead. The compromise was included in the *Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act (S.2155)*, which overwhelmingly passed through the Senate Banking Committee last month. The agreement would provide the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau the authority to regulate PACE and establish standards for program lending.

OTHER NEWS

Plan Ahead: Infrastructure Week 2018

It's never too early to start preparing for Infrastructure Week! This year it will be held the week of May 14-21. Join hundreds of American businesses, workers, elected officials, and everyday leaders to promote one message: invest in our nation's infrastructure. The week will include national events, media coverage, and education and advocacy efforts to elevate infrastructure as a critical issue for communities. Check out the official **participation page** to learn more about how your organization can become an affiliate, plan an event, and tell your story of why it's #TimeToBuild.

All Fifty States Opt-In to FirstNet

Public safety agencies in all fifty states; Washington, D.C.; Puerto Rico; and the U.S. Virgin Islands

have all opted-in to the FirstNet broadband emergency services network. FirstNet CEO Mike Poth said, “With every state saying ‘yes’ to the FirstNet plan, America’s first responders now have a nationwide interoperable network they can rely on 24/7/365 – like their mission... public safety is assured of an enduring, self-sufficient network to serve them for years to come.” With this recent development, AT&T is expected to get the green light to build out the network this year. AT&T will spend \$40 billion to deploy the network over the next 25 years, with the initial buildout expected to be completed in about five years.

More Americans Want Shorter Commutes and Walkable Communities

According to the **National Association of Realtors’ (NAR) 2017 Community Preference Survey**, millennials are not the only group driving the demand for walkable communities. The silent generation, or those born before 1944, also prefer to live in areas with shorter commutes. The survey found that 62% of millennials and 55% of the silent generation show a strong preference for walkable communities and shorter commutes, even if it means reducing the size of their home. Overall, the majority of Americans (53% of those surveyed) prefer living in a place with a small yard that is within easy walking distance of community amenities. The survey found that women are more likely to prioritize walkability and public transit than men. When it comes to their thoughts on transportation priorities for governments, responders said that maintaining and repairing roads and bridges and expanding roads to alleviate congestion are their highest priorities.

REGION SPOTLIGHT

Metro Atlanta Transportation Plan Calls for Major Bus Expansion

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) has unveiled a six-year plan for investing in the region’s public transit. If the plan is approved by the ARC Board, \$422 million in transportation spending will be used for a dramatic expansion of the local bus service. This would include launching new rapid bus lines, enhancing other routes, and expanding bus service to Cobb and Gwinnett counties. The plan would also dedicate millions of dollars towards road improvements and bike trails. The plan is largely funded through federal dollars – about \$299 million – while the remaining \$123 million comes from state and local matching funds.

MEMBER REQUESTS

DOE Request: Information on Energy Emergencies Planning

Based on our recent conversations with the U.S. Department of Energy, we have learned that they are very interested in local energy assurance and the importance of a regional approach to prepare for energy emergencies. Has your regional council done any planning in preparation for regional power outages, fuel shortages, or national gas service disruptions? Have you made plans to help keep critical infrastructure facilities in operation, or help emergency responders, medical care facilities, and critical care facilities have the energy supplies they need to function? If you have undertaken planning measures for any of these scenarios, please reach out to Cameron Herbolsheimer (cameron@narc.org) or Maci Morin (maci.hurley@narc.org) and tell us your story.

Transportation System Resiliency

NARC has been asked to participate in a roundtable discussion focused on “Resiliency, Reliability, and Energy Infrastructure Planning.” Help NARC share your stories. How are you upgrading and preparing infrastructure (i.e. repairing/building more resilient roads, preparing for transportation fuel shortages, investing in alternative fuels, etc.)? What policies and programs are you implementing to support robust infrastructure investment, planning, and response (i.e. upgrading emergency plans, etc.). Please send all relevant stories to Leslie Wollack (leslie@narc.org) by February 2.

NACo Wants to Hear Your Water Resources Story!

Does your community/region/county own/operate or have a harbor, port, levee, dam, flood control channel, or other water infrastructure? If so, NACo and NARC want to share your story with Congress. NACo has been asked to testify before a Senate committee on authorization of the 2018 *Water Resources Development Act* (WRDA) next week and would like to include community/regional examples in the testimony. Please take a look at the list of questions below and send your responses to jufner@naco.org no later than COB on Thursday, January 4.

1. Have you “partnered” with the Corps on a water resource project, or has the Corps undertaken a WRDA project in your community (i.e. where you are not the Corps’ partner)?
2. If the project had not been authorized through WRDA and/or technical assistance was not offered by the Corps, would the county/community/region have been able to undertake the project alone?
3. Has your community completed an innovative, non-traditional WRDA-related project?
4. What types of challenges has your community faced during Corps and/or WRDA-related projects?
5. Are there specific Corps policy changes that Congress should consider under WRDA 2018?

Please include any other information you feel will be useful for NACo’s testimony.

FEATURED JOBS

[View full list of jobs!](#)

Planner

East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission, Anniston, AL

Senior Planner, Transit

Stanislaus Council of Governments, Modesto, CA

Senior Transportation Planner

Stanislaus Council of Governments, Modesto, CA

REGIONS LEAD

Visit www.regionslead.org to read up on the latest NARC blogs. We invite members to submit blogs to the site too. Please send contributions to anna@narc.org.

FUNDING

[View full list of grants!](#)

FEMA NOFO: Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program

Applications Due: February 2

The primary goal of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) is to meet the firefighting and emergency response needs of fire departments and non-affiliated emergency medical service organizations. Since 2001, AFG has helped firefighters and other first responders obtain equipment, protective gear, emergency vehicles, training, and other resources necessary for protecting the public and emergency personnel from fire and related hazards. If interested in applying for this grant, see the [application assistance tools](#).

Fannie Mae Sustainable Communities Innovation Challenge

Applications Due: February 23

Fannie Mae has launched the Sustainable Communities Innovation Challenge to generate innovative ideas to addressing America's affordable housing crisis and further support their mission to create housing opportunities that are safe, sustainable, and affordable. They plan to invest \$10 million over two years to support innovative ideas through partnerships and funding for research, planning, idea development, and marketing. Now through February 23rd, they are seeking proposals that focus on the intersection of affordable housing and economic opportunity.

Pioneering Ideas Brief Proposals Funding Opportunity

Applications Accepted on a Rolling Basis

The goal of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Pioneering Ideas Brief Proposals funding opportunity is to put health first as we design for changes in how we live, learn, work and play. They are looking for innovative projects from nonprofit organizations and public agencies that will understand new trends, opportunities, and breakthrough ideas that will enable everyone in American to live the healthiest life possible. The foundation supports work that will help them learn about what a culture of health looks like and how our communities can get there. While the

foundation awards most grants through Calls for Proposals associated with their **focus areas**, they also welcome “unsolicited” Pioneering Ideas Brief Proposals throughout the year.

EVENTS

View full list of events!

Impact of the 2017 Tax Act on Renewable Energy Projects

January 9, 12:00-1:00 PM ET

On December 22, President Donald Trump signed into law the 2017 Tax Act. Most notably, this sweeping legislation reduces the maximum corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 21 percent — but that’s not the only way the new tax law will impact renewable energy projects. Join lawyers from McGuireWoods’ renewable energy and tax policy practices for an overview of the tax law ramifications for these projects and a look at how the renewable energy market is shaping up for 2018.

NACCHO Government Affairs Update: What to Watch For in 2018

January 10, 1:00-2:00 PM ET

What’s in store for 2018? Find out as National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) hosts “NACCHO Government Affairs Update: What to Watch For in 2018.” The webinar will discuss pressing legislative and policy issues that could have critical implications for public health in 2018.

Broadband Under the Community Reinvestment Act

January 11, 3:00 PM ET

Access to broadband has become critically essential in community development—education and workforce development, health, housing, small business development, and access to financial services. Under the *Community Reinvestment Act* (CRA), infrastructure investment includes facilitating the construction, expansion, improvement, maintenance, or operation of essential infrastructure or facilities for health services, education, public safety, public services, industrial parks, or affordable housing. Broadband is included as a form of infrastructure investment—an essential community service. This Connecting Communities webinar will highlight possible opportunities for financial institutions to receive CRA consideration and take advantage of new opportunities to help close the digital divide across communities and improve economic stability.

Commitment to Digital Accessibility: Best Practices for Inclusive Technology

January 17, 2:00-3:30 PM ET

Digital accessibility is a civil right: the right to participate in all that is offered on websites, mobile applications, and through other technologies. Join TransCen, Inc., the Mid-Atlantic ADA Center, and one of the country’s leading disability rights lawyers for a lively presentation on digital accessibility basics. How do persons with disabilities use technology? What barriers stand in their way? What best practices have emerged from legal developments and from organizational champions? Learn the tools you need to help make 2018 a year of great digital inclusion for people with disabilities.

Strategies to Combat Opioid Use in Rural Communities

January 18, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

The opioid epidemic is an ongoing problem in rural areas. Rural youth, young adults, women experiencing domestic violence, and people living in states with large rural populations suffer from higher rates of opioid use than their urban counterparts. Opioid overdose deaths are growing faster in rural counties than urban counties. This presentation by John Gale, MS, of the University of Southern Maine focuses on a wide range of strategies that communities can use to combat the opioid problem. It will discuss cost-effective, evidence-based prevention, treatment, and recovery programs that have been successfully implemented in rural communities. It will conclude by describing community organizing strategies to engage a wide range of local stakeholders to reduce the burden of opioid use.

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