



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

eREGIONS



NEWS FROM WASHINGTON

Congress is in session.

Overview

Lawmakers are working on their replacement for Obamacare and debating U.S. Department of Defense funding. The Senate continues to focus on nominations and hearings on FY2018 appropriations. The budget and the president's proposed infrastructure plan continue to dominate the news, along with state and local government concerns that a primary source of local infrastructure funding – municipal bonds – remains at risk in congressional discussions of tax reform.

In his address to Congress last week, President Trump reaffirmed his intention to call on Congress for a significant increase in federal infrastructure spending. Details of the plan still remain scarce, but the speech marked the first acknowledgement from Trump that the \$1 trillion investment he favors will be a mix of public and private capital, with federal dollars used to leverage private investment: "To launch our national rebuilding, I will be asking Congress to approve legislation that produces a \$1 trillion investment in infrastructure of the United States," and the program would be financed "through both public and private capital, creating millions of new jobs."

Last week Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao raised the prospect that needed infrastructure improvements may be funded to some extent by imposing tolls on more of the nation's roads and bridges. In press appearances following the president's speech, Chao suggested the use of public-private partnerships to finance investments, including the possibility of raising tolls. In recent congressional hearings, lawmakers continue to express concerns over reliance on public-private partnerships for infrastructure, noting that they were not the appropriate solution for rural areas and an infusion of new funding would be necessary to build rural roads.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, only 26 private-investment projects were completed or underway nationwide in 2015. The president has assembled his own team of developers to oversee his infrastructure plan.

Connecting America: Improving Access to Infrastructure for Communities Across the Country Hearing

Last Wednesday the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held a hearing on improving rural infrastructure. South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard emphasized that public private partnerships will not work for rural areas, and requested the use of formula funding in any new infrastructure package. Shirley Bloomfield from NTCA - The Rural Broadband Association discussed their work improving broadband in rural areas and the importance of including broadband programs in infrastructure legislation.

Senate Confirmations

By a 58-41 vote last Thursday, the Senate confirmed Mr. Ben Carson. Unlike many other cabinet members chosen by President Trump, Mr. Carson did not face much pushback from Democrats during his confirmation process.

On Wednesday the Senate confirmed Ryan Zinke's nomination to lead the U.S. Department of Interior by a 68 to 31 vote. Zinke will head a department that manages a fifth of the nation's land, a total that doesn't include millions more acres and natural resources underground. Interior has an enormous environmental footprint, with agencies that decide how resources such as coal are managed and which animals are eligible for listing under the *Endangered Species Act*. Zinke told employees Friday he is concerned about the agency's FY2018 budget request from the White House, citing programs like wildfire management and property tax reimbursement for counties with large areas of federal land.

Additional Funding for FY 2017 and 2018 Likely to Include Substantial Cuts

Last week, NARC staff attended a series of meetings with Senate and House Appropriations Committee staff. The message from every staff person regardless of party was clear: non-defense discretionary programs (which make up most if not all federal funding to regional councils) are likely to be cut by as much as 20 percent in FY2018 and by some smaller but not insignificant amount in FY2017's final appropriation, which Congress must pass by April 28, when the current continuing resolution expires.

The reason: the president is likely to propose, and Congress is likely to adopt, a \$54 billion increase in defense spending. Congressional leaders and the administration have made clear that they expect this increase for defense to be paid for from existing funds. The only way to achieve that is for Congress to take these funds from non-defense discretionary programs.

Current budget rules place a cap on spending that cannot be exceeded. If Congress fails to adhere to the caps, the Office of Management and Budget would be bound by law to make a percentage cut across all programs to bring funding in line with the caps.

In addition, not having secretaries and their political teams in place has made the job of working with the administration more difficult. With no one in the U.S. Department of Labor and secretaries only recently approved for Education and Housing, staff have not had the agency connections they need when adopting a budget.

Funding for the National Institutes of Health is a priority, and as a priority will get more funding in the final appropriation bill for FY2017 and FY2018, thereby necessitating further cuts in other non-defense discretionary programs.

Over the next several weeks, as Congress moves forward with its FY2017 appropriations process and the White House offers its FY2018 budget proposal, we should be able to see more clearly what the final appropriations for FY2017 and 2018 will look like and how departments and programs that matter to regional councils will fair. In addition, NARC is about to launch a weekly blog that will provide readers with an overview of where the appropriations stand and what we can expect in the future. The first blog is expected to be published this Wednesday and every Wednesday thereafter until Congress completes the FY2018 budget.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt Interview

In **one of Scott Pruitt's first interviews** as EPA Administrator he discussed the importance of improving water and air quality as the job of the EPA. He spoke about cleaning up Superfund sites and hitting air quality targets as two of his biggest concerns, as well as improving water infrastructure. Pruitt will also have a focus on creating jobs and growing the economy by ensuring regulatory certainty, which could be good for business. Overall, the new administration stated that the agency exists to administer the law and its role should not change with administrations.

Examining Environmental Barriers to Infrastructure Development Hearing

The House Oversight Committee held a hearing last Wednesday to identify examples of environmental regulations that inhibit infrastructure development and consider ways to expedite projects. During the hearing, panelists addressed staffing shortages at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, bureaucratic costs, and the value of the *National Environmental Protection Act* as a whole.

Senate and House Bills Introduced to Repeal MPO Coordination Rule

Last Thursday Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Representative Dan Lipinski (D-IL) each introduced identical legislation to repeal the MPO Coordination Final Rule as enacted in January. Both bills have strong bipartisan support, a key element that we hope will help them move fairly quickly.

REGION SPOTLIGHT

2016 SANDAG Milestones and Accomplishments Video

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) created a video highlighting last year's regional accomplishments in transportation for their Board of Directors retreat. SANDAG either completed or began construction on 23 projects in 2016, including their Mid-Coast Trolley extension.

MEMBER REQUEST

Please send responses to anna@narc.org.

Emergency Planning and Evacuation

The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) is exploring opportunities in the areas of emergency planning and evacuation. They seek feedback from other NARC members that are currently working in these areas. They are especially interested in speaking with COGs or other regional councils who have received federal grant funding for these activities.

Please provide us with a general overview of what you are doing, and indicate if you are willing to speak with SACOG about these efforts.

FEATURED JOBS

View full list of jobs!

Economic Development Planning Program Manager

Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization, Akron, OH

Planning Data and Research Program Director

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Washington, DC

Program Coordinator, Short-Range Planning

Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, Oklahoma City, OK

FUNDING

View full list of grants!

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program Funding

Letters of Intent Due: March 7

Applications Due: April 4

The Corporation for National and Community service is offering funding to develop Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) projects that support volunteers 55 years and older in serving specific local and community needs in communities that do not currently have RSVP programs.

Rita and Alex Hillam Foundation: Healthcare Grant

Initial Applications Due: March 20

Full Proposals Due: July 10

Rita and Alex Hillman Foundation is seeking grant applications from nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and faith-based organizations for programs that deliver patient- and family-centered approaches that challenge conventional strategies, improve health outcomes, lower costs, and enhance the patient and family caregiver experience. The goal of the Hillman Innovations in Care Program, an initiative of the Rita and Alex Hillman Foundation, is to advance leading-edge, nursing-driven models of care that will improve the health and healthcare of vulnerable populations. Two grants of up to \$600,000 are awarded each year.

EVENTS

[View full list of events!](#)

LISC Webinar: Rental Assistance Demonstration

March 9, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

In 2013, HUD established the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program to provide public housing authorities and private owners of at-risk properties with the opportunity to preserve and address the capital needs of this much needed affordable housing stock. The RAD program provides public housing authorities and private owners the ability to access long-term, project-based Section 8 contracts to leverage private debt and Low Income Housing Tax Credits and other equity sources to recapitalize these housing assets for long term financial and physical sustainability.

RUPRI Webinar: State Innovations in Arts Engagement, Investment and Infrastructure

March 14, 11:00 AM ET

The Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI), as part of its Next Generation 2017 Digital Exchange Webinar Series, will continue the Rural Creative Placemaking Summit conversation on *State Innovations in Arts Engagement, Investment and Infrastructure*. Hosted by Art of the Rural and RUPRI and supported by the National Endowment for the Arts and the McKnight Foundation, the webinars draw on the power of connection to bridge conversation across the regions, sectors, and place-based philosophies that make the work of creative placemaking so essential to the future of our rural places. Registration is free of charge, but requires you to **download Zoom**. Click **HERE** for more information.

America's Rural Opportunity Series: Supporting Entrepreneurial Economies

March 17, 12:00-1:30 PM ET

Rural Development Innovation Group and The Aspen Institute are co-sponsoring *America's Rural Opportunity*, a six-part series of panel conversations focused on advancing a rural opportunity agenda. Each panel features rural innovators who, together with their partners, are working to create economic opportunities for rural people, businesses, and communities. This installment will be available by live feed and focus on a group of entrepreneurs and the organizations that support them. Particularly in rural communities, entrepreneurs are the engines for job growth and, with support, can become anchors for community economic development. Rural entrepreneurs bring leadership, create wealth that stays in the community, and diversify local economies to create resilience in uncertain economic times. In many rural communities, the legacy of reliance on a single employer or economic sector has stunted the development of an entrepreneurial culture. The panel will highlight how leading rural economic development practitioners take on the task of cultivating entrepreneurs and how the entrepreneurs themselves leverage that support into successful business ventures.

Save the date! 51st Annual Conference & Exhibition

June 4-7 - Monterey, CA

Join NARC and the California Association of Councils of Governments for NARC's 51st Annual Conference and Exhibition, which focuses on promoting effective regional cooperation and solutions through interaction and education.

CONTACT US

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