



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

eREGIONS

NEWS FROM WASHINGTON

Congress is in recess. The Senate will return on Monday, June 10; the House will return on Tuesday, June 11.

Overview

The House and Senate are out for their Fourth of July recess, so nothing of a legislative nature will happen for the next ten days – though some behind the scenes work on healthcare and tax reform will continue. However, this ten-day recess does provide you with the opportunity to meet with your representatives and senators and share your views on how potential cuts to housing, transportation, human services, job training, low-income home energy assistance, and other programs may **impact your region**.

With just 15 legislative days until the August recess (July 31-September 5), there is great pressure on the House and Senate to: pass a final version of health care reform for the president to sign, adopt a federal appropriations package that will keep the government open after September 30, develop and pass a tax reform bill, and raise the debt limit by early to mid-October. What remains to be seen is how much legislative time health care reform will take and whether the House will begin work on tax reform.

Repeal and Replace Obamacare Stalls

Last week, Senate Republican efforts to repeal and replace the *Affordable Care Act* stalled despite efforts to bring it to the floor for a vote before the Fourth of July recess. The bill, officially known as the ***Better Care Reconciliation Act of 2017***, was met with substantial criticism. Though it would reduce the deficit by \$321 billion, it would also reduce Medicaid enrollment by 15 million, increase the number of uninsured Americans by 22 million over ten years, reduce benefits, and increase insurance copayments and deductibles, according to the Congressional Budget Office. The bill would reduce taxes by about \$1 trillion over 10 years, but the tax cuts would largely benefit high-income households and the healthcare industry, according to the **Tax Policy Center**, a nonpartisan organization established by the Brookings Institution and the Urban Institute. It would also end the mandate that most Americans have **health insurance** and would allow states to drop many of the benefits required by the *Affordable Care Act*, like maternity care, emergency services, and mental health treatment.

House Passes Bill Restricting Some Federal Grants to ‘Sanctuary Cities’

Last Thursday, the House passed the *No Sanctuary for Criminals Act (H.R. 3003)* largely along party lines by a vote of 228 to 195. Under this bill, all local governments, even those with “sanctuary city” policies in effect, must assist and comply with the activities of federal law enforcement authorities. Failure to comply will result in the ineligibility of any U.S. Department of Justice or U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) grant that is related to law enforcement, terrorism, national security, immigration, or naturalization. The bill is **likely to meet resistance in the Senate** because it will require 60 votes to pass, meaning at least eight Democrats will have to vote in favor of the legislation. If it clears the 60 vote threshold, **Trump is likely to sign the bill into law**.

Capitol Hill Briefing on the National Flood Insurance Program

Eyes are on Congress to settle disagreements surrounding the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) before the September 30 renewal deadline. To frame the conversation on the different issues surrounding NFIP reauthorization, representatives of the American Academy of Actuaries' Flood Insurance Work Group came to Capitol Hill last Monday to give a briefing on findings from their recently released monograph, ***The National Flood Insurance Program: Challenges and Solutions.***

While the **House Financial Services Committee has been considering a package of seven bills** related to NFIP reauthorization, there are still a number of details to iron out before Congress can pass it, including how long the reauthorization should last, how the market should balance the coexistence of NFIP and private insurance providers, how current subsidies should change, how to tackle the program's \$24.6 billion of debt, and how the program should account for rising sea levels.

If Congress keeps allowing the clock to tick on this deadline, it may start affecting the housing market in high-risk flooding areas as early as this summer. The uncertainty of whether or not the program will be reinstated will cause delays in home sales and purchases. If the legislation is allowed to expire, the potential effect could be significant – the National Association of Realtors estimate **1,300 home sales could be lost or delayed each day** the program is not reestablished.

EPA, Army Begin Process to Repeal WOTUS Regulation

On June 27, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of the Army, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) published a **press release** stating that they are initiating the first of a two-step process to withdraw and rewrite the 2015 “Waters of the US” (WOTUS) regulation put in place by the Obama administration. President Trump signed an **executive order** in February, which prompted EPA and USACE to review WOTUS for possible revision or repeal.

The 2015 definition of WOTUS has been controversial since its inception because it allowed for more federal oversight over **“ponds, headwaters, wetlands, and other water bodies that feed into larger water areas”** to ensure that these resources were being properly maintained. Supporters of the 2015 WOTUS definition argue that the new regulation protected these bodies of water from pollution, which millions of Americans rely on for drinking water. The new definition protects both the wildlife that depend on these waterways and the people that use them for recreation.

The rescension of the 2015 definition means that the *Clean Water Act* will be re-codified to the regulatory text set in place in 2008. The agencies will then have the opportunity to rewrite the WOTUS definition, which is expected to be revealed this fall. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt says that this repeal will “return power to the states and provide regulatory certainty to our nation's farmers and businesses,” who felt strapped by the extended reach of the federal government over these waterways. The National Association of Counties (NACo), National League of Cities (NLC), and U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) also **cited concerns over the 2015 rule**, indicating that the broad definition of WOTUS may even have an impact on locally maintained properties, such as roads, roadside ditches, bridges, and stormwater systems. They stressed the need for the federal government to recognize that local governments play a large role in environmental regulation as well, and should be included in discussions regarding new federal rules and regulations.

Brownfields Legislation Passes in House Energy and Commerce Committee

When NARC, NACo, NLC, and USCM put up a **united front** on reauthorizing and improving the EPA Brownfields Program, the House listened. We are happy to report that the *Brownfields Enhancement, Economic Redevelopment, and Reauthorization Act of 2017 (H.R. 3017)* passed the House Energy and Commerce Committee with amendments favorable to our requests. It authorizes appropriations for the program at \$200 million for fiscal years 2017 through 2021, and up to \$50 million for each of the five fiscal years to support state response programs. The bill increases the size of cleanup grants from \$200,000 to \$500,000, with an award ceiling of \$750,000. The bill will also establish a multipurpose grant that provides up to \$1 million at one or more brownfields sites in a community, and allows properties acquired before the Brownfields Program was created in 2002 to be eligible for grant funding. We look forward to seeing this

legislation reach the House floor for a vote so that local governments will be a little closer to tackling the 400,000-600,000 remaining sites in the U.S.

REGION SPOTLIGHT

Data USA Relaunches With More Data and Analysis Tools for Local and State Governments

Looking to see how your region compares with the rest of the U.S.? **Data USA relunched its website** with more analysis and mapping capabilities. Explore the site's new health datasets, with breakdowns for things like the amount of air pollution contributed or amount of deaths caused by opioid overdoses. You can also compare cities and counties side by side to understand how they differ in five major variable categories: economy, health and safety, demographics, education, and housing and living. These state and local level visualizations are available for anyone to use and could be a great tool to help share the story of your region with others.

Incorporating Health into Long-Range Transportation Planning in North Central Texas

This new case study from FHWA focuses on incorporating health into planning at the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG). In developing *Mobility 2040*, NCTCOG used resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to compare counties and identify health status indicators to select six transportation strategies to improve health outcomes.

REGIONS LEAD

Visit www.regionslead.org to read up on the latest NARC blogs. We invite members to submit blogs to the site too.

The Federal Budget and Appropriations Process: in Limbo

by Neil Bomberg

Neither the House nor Senate has passed a budget plan that outlines spending for fiscal year 2018 because the majorities in both chambers cannot agree on how much to spend on defense and non-defense programs. Moderate Republicans are concerned that a budget plan similar to the ones proposed by the president or the House speaker would make it very difficult for the House or Senate to maintain spending at current levels, let alone increase spending where consensus to increase spending existed.

Where Do Job Programs Stand in the Face of Potential Labor Department Cuts?

by Neil Bomberg

On Tuesday, June 27, 2017, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education held a hearing at which the current Labor secretary, R. Alexander Acosta, testified on the president's budget and other matters. While the conversation often strayed in various directions, including worker safety, foreign workers, public safety, and worker layoffs, it ultimately returned to jobs, and the clear belief by most members of the subcommittee that putting Americans to work requires a robust and effective workforce development system.

FEATURED JOBS

View full list of jobs!

Community Development Administrator

Wasatch Front Regional Council, Salt Lake City, UT

Planner I

Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization, West Palm Beach, FL

Data Analyst

Houston-Galveston Area Council, Houston, TX

Grants Assistant

West Florida Regional Planning Council, Pensacola, FL

Grants Coordinator

West Florida Regional Planning Council, Pensacola, FL

Executive Director

Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments, Sumter, SC

FUNDING

View full list of grants!

USDA: Rural Community Development Initiative

Applications Due: July 25

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is **accepting applications** for a community development initiative targeting rural areas with 50,000 people or less. Grantees will act as intermediaries, providing financial and technical assistance to recipients to develop the ability to take on projects related to housing, community facilities, or community and economic development. A 1:1 matching fund is required. The minimum grant award is \$50,000 and maximum is \$250,000.

DHS Offering Grant to Fill Nationwide Preparedness Gaps

Applications Due: July 26

The DHS Continuing Grants Program is looking for organizations to create new training programs that bring multiple stakeholders and jurisdictions together for effective disaster response and deliver on the core capabilities of prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery.

Programs will need to cover the following nationwide gap areas in disaster preparedness: cybersecurity, economic recovery, housing, and rural and tribal preparedness. Training programs developed through this grant opportunity will need to accomplish the following objectives:

- Provide training solutions to address specific national preparedness gaps
- Correlate training needs with exercise activities and outcomes
- Incorporate the core capabilities identified in the National Preparedness Goal
- Ensure training is available and accessible to a nationwide audience

Date Correction! NEA Seeks Creative Placemaking Proposals for Our Town Grant Program

Applications Due: September 11

The **National Endowment for the Arts** has published **guidelines and the application** for the next funding round of Our Town, the agency's primary creative placemaking grants program. The grant program supports creative placemaking projects that help to transform communities into lively, beautiful, and resilient places with the arts at their core.

The program offers support for projects in two areas:

- Arts Engagement, Cultural Planning, and Design Projects: Projects in this category should represent the distinct character and quality of their communities. They also must involve a partnership between a nonprofit organization and a local government entity, with one of the partners being a cultural organization. Matching grants will range from \$25,000 to \$200,000.
- Projects that Build Knowledge (about creative placemaking): Grants in this category are available to arts and design service organizations and industry or university organizations that provide technical assistance to those doing place-based work. Matching grants will range from \$25,000 to \$100,000.

INFRA Program Will Replace FASTLANE Grants

USDOT announced changes in the Federal Register to the FASTLANE freight grant program that was created in the FAST Act reauthorization. The Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) program, with a new set of criteria for project selection, will have \$1.5 billion available for its first round of awards (this is most of the funding for fiscal year 2017 and all of the funding for 2018). The Notice of Funding Opportunity can be found **here**. Applications submitted at the end of 2016 under the Obama Administration's FASTLANE program will have to be modified and resubmitted to respond to the new criteria. New applications will also be accepted at this time.

On a call with USDOT yesterday, staff indicated the new criteria would focus less on actual project outcomes, and more on developing process improvements and innovations. While the national or regional economic vitality the project will create is still important, applications will also be rewarded for the amount of local effort exhibited in a project, including the amount of funding a

local sponsor will provide, the availability of ongoing operations and maintenance funding to support a project, and performance and accountability assurances as to project budget and timing. Streamlining and other project delivery innovations will also be considered. USDOT released a **fact sheet** and **FAQ page**, and will be holding webinars and an outreach summit to discuss these changes.

EVENTS

View full list of events!

NACo Webinar: Strengthening Economies in Coal-Reliant Communities through Brownfield Redevelopment

July 11, 3:00-4:00 PM ET

The decline of the coal industry is calling for coal-reliant communities across the U.S. to look for other ways to spark their local economy. This webinar presents the opportunity of brownfield development of former factories, warehouses, or mine lands to produce economic investment and growth. They will also be discussing best practices for these brownfield sites and presenting technical assistance resources you can use for your next project.

NACo State and Local Legal Center Webinar: Supreme Court Review

July 13, 1:00-2:00 PM ET

First Amendment and police cases dominated the Supreme Court's state and local government docket this term. Discuss these and other cases of interest to states and local governments with Mike Scodro, Mayer Brown, who argued one of the police cases this term, Kyle Duncan, Schaerr Duncan, and Ken Jost, author of Supreme Court yearbook and Jost on Justice.

NLC Webinar: Leadership in Community Resilience

July 13, 1:15-2:45 PM ET

Since its launch in 2016, NLC's **Leadership in Community Resilience** program has been dedicated to providing technical assistance and professional development opportunities for 10 cities that have committed to developing local resiliency initiatives. This joint webinar with Arizona State University highlights the City of Tempe, Arizona, sharing their process of planning and implementing sustainability and resiliency initiatives.

11th Annual Competition and Call for Communications Concepts with John and Jane Q. Public: Communicating the Value of Long-Term Transportation Planning

Entries due July 24

In 2007, the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Planning and Environment Group launched a new competition looking for fresh and creative methods for communicating technical transportation issues with "John and Jane Q. Public" to share with others within the profession. The inaugural competition had an open theme that solicited communication strategies for technical issues. The contest yielded overwhelming results, with 70 entries received and 11 invited to present at the 2008 TRB Annual Meeting. Since then, the competition has featured a different theme, ranging from a focus on sustainability and climate change to last year's contest that focused on emergency management.

This year is the 11th annual competition to find top methods for communicating transportation concepts to non-professional audiences. Entries, which should focus on communicating the value of long-term transportation planning, are due by July 24, 2017. **Additional information on the contest and entry instructions** are available online. The entries will be evaluated by a panel of judges representing technical as well as communication disciplines. The winner will be announced at TRB's 97th Annual Meeting, January 7-11, 2018, in Washington, D.C.

Celebrating 20 Years of Making America a Great Place to Walk

July 26, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

It is the 20th anniversary of America Walks and they are celebrating by looking back at the growth of the organization and the walking movement. Join America Walks to hear from some of the founders of the organizations, experts in the walking movement, and their staff for an inside look at how they are making America a great place to walk.

CONTACT US

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