



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

eREGIONS



converge ■ learn ■ share

**2017 executive directors conference
october 22 - october 24
san antonio, tx**

save the date!

NEWS FROM WASHINGTON

The Senate is in session, and the House will be back on September 5.

Overview

It is almost August, and true to Washington tradition, the House has adjourned for its August recess through Labor Day. Atypical, however, is the Senate's decision to remain in session. Originally, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) set aside this extra time to pass legislation to repeal and replace the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA). Instead, the Senate will turn its attention to tax reform and efforts to confirm multiple executive branch appointments.

What remains unclear is how the Senate and House plan to get through the budget and appropriations process, and whether they will be able to find a way to pass an increase in the debt ceiling. Failure to pass appropriations bills would lead to a government shutdown, while failure to pass a debt ceiling increase would lead to both a shutdown and the inability of the federal government to pay its bills.

Questions that will remain unanswered until both chambers reconvene in September are:

- Do the Senate and House plan to pass a budget agreement permitting them to raise spending caps on defense and non-defense programs, so that Congress does not have to cut funding to domestic and non-defense discretionary programs?
- Can both chambers move forward with their appropriations bills in regular order, and pass individual appropriations bills by the FY2017 deadline of September 30, or will they be forced to pass a last minute continuing resolution or omnibus appropriations bill to keep the government open.
- Will Republicans and Democrats be able to draft passable health care legislation that will shore up ACA exchanges?
- Will Democrats and Republicans be able to come together to pass a number of other important bills, including energy, environment, transportation and infrastructure bills?
- Will the administration demand that Congress adopt a "clean" debt ceiling bill that would simply raise the borrowing cap, as Treasury Secretary Mnuchin wants? Or will the

administration demand a debt ceiling bill that would raise the debt ceiling at the expense of domestic cuts, as Office of Management and Budget Director Mulvaney wants?

- In turn, will Congress be able to find a way forward on the debt ceiling or will it remain heavily divided between those who want a clean bill and those who want a bill that would cut domestic spending? And if the divide remains, are there enough votes on either side of the aisle to pass a clean debt ceiling increase?

How Congress acts after this recess should tell us a lot about what to expect for the rest of the year.

Senate THUD Bill

Last Thursday, the Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously approved a \$60.1 billion FY2018 spending bill that provides \$3.6 billion more than the House Appropriations version. The Senate total includes \$550 million for the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program. The Senate measure would provide \$19.5 billion in discretionary funding for USDOT, \$3.3 billion more than the president's budget request and \$978 million above current levels. It also provides the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development with \$40.2 billion, a 3.7 percent increase from FY2017, including \$3 billion for Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). The \$60.1 billion draft bill would also provide \$2.1 billion for the New Starts program and includes a provision to increase the \$4.50 cap that airports can charge per person for facilities, according to airport groups.

NARC Urges T&I Committee to Reauthorize and Improve EPA's Brownfields Program

On July 27, the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee passed the *Brownfields Reauthorization Act of 2017 (H.R. 1758)* for floor consideration. This follows a **letter** sent by NARC, the National League of Cities (NLC), National Association of Counties (NACo), and U.S. Conference of Mayors. The letter commended them on working on a bipartisan bill to reauthorize and improve the EPA Brownfields Program. The organizations also expressed appreciation for listening to recommendations that would increase cleanup grant amounts, create a multi-purpose grant, allow for administrative costs, and clarify liability issues for local governments. The bill includes many of the asks we made to improve the program for cities, counties, and regions. It is unclear when the bill will be considered by the full House.

EPA Superfund Task Force Releases Recommendations Report

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt has identified a clean-up of Superfund sites as a priority. Superfund sites are areas contaminated by hazardous waste that pose a risk to public health or the environment – over 1,330 of these sites currently affect U.S. communities. EPA assembled a task force to conduct a review of these sites and set goals to clean them up as soon as possible. Here are the five major goals the task force recommended to make these Superfund sites safe for local use:

- Expedite cleanup and remediation
- Re-invigorate responsible party cleanup and reuse
- Encourage private investment
- Promote redevelopment and community revitalization
- Engage partners and stakeholders

NTSB Safety Alert: Train Approach Warning

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) today issued a safety alert warning rail workers of the risks of working on the tracks using only a watchman/lookout to provide the train approach warning. The alert was prompted in part by the deaths of two rail workers who were struck and killed by a train in South Dakota this last January. The Federal Railroad Administration requires that workers be able to clear the tracks at least 15 seconds before a train moving at the maximum authorized speed can pass the work location safely.

OTHER NEWS

NMTC Coalition Helps Bring Private Investment to Rural Communities

A New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) Coalition report highlights NMTC's impact on jobs and investment in rural communities. NMTC was established in 2000 by the *Community Renewal Tax Relief Act*, and has since financed over 800 businesses and facilities and helped create thousands of jobs. NMTC has provided \$11.6 billion in project costs since its inception directly

benefiting rural communities. In the healthcare industry alone, they have financed 107 rural healthcare facilities and clinics totaling nearly \$800 million. The coalition's efforts have helped soften the blow of diminishing community banks and several manufacturing industries.

States are Raising Gas Tax to Repair Roads

With no promises fulfilled on the \$1 trillion federal investment on infrastructure yet, *Stateline* has reported that states are looking at alternative ways to fund their maintenance projects. A popular target for more revenue has been to increase the state gasoline tax. Despite the pushback from constituents, 26 states have raised their gas tax in the last four years. A combination of more fuel-efficient cars, rising infrastructure costs, and the new proposed cuts to the Department of Transportation puts states in a tough spot. Some state lawmakers have begun looking at other potential sources of revenue, like other vehicle fees and additional fees on electric vehicles, but they are still relying on the gas tax to help fund essential projects for our roads.

Counties Must Take Up Arms Against Cyber Attacks

Retired four-star Marine General John Allen gave the keynote speech at NACo's Tech Town Hall, focusing on how counties are on the front lines of cyber war. He says that Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, ISIS, and transnational criminal organizations have all jumped into cyberspace to fight for influence and profit. No example is clearer than the 120 electoral officials that reported their email systems were hacked the night before the 2016 election. He warned that hackers are attempting to infiltrate the lowest levels of our American electoral system, threatening our democratic processes. We must find weaknesses in our local systems and put in safeguards to make sure that our systems are not compromised and our constituents' information is protected.

See information for NARC's upcoming webinar on cyber security in the 'Events' section.

Bridging the Skills Gap the Local Way

In a special contribution to *Route Fifty*, Arkansas House Representative Warwick Sabin and Cook County Commissioner Bridget Gainer discuss the skills gap in the U.S. Many companies struggle to find qualified applicants for job openings here in the U.S. To compound that, outsourcing and automation have further limited the types of positions and quantity available to job seekers. The authors argue that we must create pathways for students to transition from school to community colleges and apprenticeships, and eventually to their first employers. Investing in these programs now will help local economies for future generations.

REGION SPOTLIGHT

More Time in the Courtroom for EPA?

The Hill reported that Maryland and Connecticut have filed formal notices with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) threatening to sue the agency if they do not follow through on certain enforcement actions. These states have previously filed petitions with EPA, asking EPA to force power plants in upwind states to curb their air pollution. This enforcement power comes from a section of the *Clean Air Act*, which protects downhill states like Maryland and Connecticut that receive air pollution from northern states. Cross-state pollution makes it difficult for downhill states to follow their own air pollution standards, which is why they seek EPA intervention.

CMAP's Future Leaders in Planning Program

Last week 35 high school students participated in Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) Future Leaders in Planning (FLIP) program, a leadership development program for high school students in Northeastern Illinois. At no cost to themselves, teens explored the issues that shape their region and shared thoughts with other teens from Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will counties. Other organizations that helped with the effort include the Historic Pullman Foundation, Google, Metropolitan Planning Council, UI Labs, and the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.

REGIONS LEAD

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

Guest Blog: Implications of Southeast Michigan's 2045 Forecast

by Dr. Xuan Liu, Research Manager, SEMCOG

Demographic and socio-economic trends discussed in the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments' (SEMCOG) 2045 Regional Forecast will necessitate some lifestyle changes in the greater Detroit, Michigan region. The biggest of these trends is the aging of the population and the lack of incoming young people. These trends will create a labor shortage that can impact a regional economy.

To Sell or Not to Sell? Small Local Governments Look at Privatizing their Public Water Systems

by Maci Hurley

The Washington Post highlighted that the idea of water privatization has left small and mid-size communities, many of which are already struggling with budget deficits, with a tough choice. Should these local governments continue to manage and maintain their own public water systems? Or is selling their water system to a private corporation a more reasonable option?

MEMBER REQUESTS

Financial Managements Systems

The Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) is assessing their financial management system, and would benefit from knowing how other NARC members structure their financial management. What financial software package does your regional council use? GPCOG would like to talk to some great Finance Directors to understand what they do and how they do it. If you have the answers to these questions or want to have a conversation with GPCOG directly, please send your responses and/or contact information to anna@narc.org.

FEATURED JOBS

[View full list of jobs!](#)

Deputy Director, Metropolitan Transportation Planning

Metro, Portland, OR

Economic Development Officer

Durham County, Durham, NC

Veteran Programs Coordinator

Alamo Area Council of Governments, San Antonio, TX

Community Development Director

City of Winston-Salem, Winston-Salem, NC

Senior Transportation Planner

City of Spokane Valley, Spokane Valley, WA

Planner I

Central Texas Council of Governments, Belton, TX

FUNDING

[View full list of grants!](#)

USDOT Announces \$226.5 Million in Funding to Improve Transit Bus Service

Applications Due: August 25

The FTA announced the opportunity for \$226.5 million in competitive grant funding for transit bus projects under the Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Infrastructure Investment Program. Eligible projects include those that replace, rehabilitate, lease, and purchase buses and related equipment as well as projects to purchase, rehabilitate, construct, or lease bus-related facilities. The program allocates a minimum of ten percent to rural bus needs.

EVENTS

[View full list of events!](#)

NARC Webinar! Cyber Security for Public Agencies: Top Mistakes to Avoid

TOMORROW, August 1, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

Public sector agencies are becoming increasingly focused on the need to secure government information networks and data. Today's public officials must be aware of threats such as ransomware, cyber extortion, hacktivism, attacks on critical infrastructure, cyber risk, breaches, and operational failure. Join this NARC and Public Technology Institute webinar to learn about the importance of cyber security for regions. The webinar will explore the current cyber security environment and provide insight on:

- Why public agencies are targets
- Who and what is behind the attacks
- The need to promote awareness within the public sector
- Resources that are available
- Tips to make you “cyber safe”

Trees: The Original Green Infrastructure – and How Urban Tree Canopies Help With Stormwater Management

August 4, 1:00-2:30 PM ET

The American Planning Association South Carolina Chapter will be discussing the value of trees for green infrastructure, specifically urban tree canopies. Speakers will provide case studies from South Carolina and Virginia showing successful project implementation and a project that will help combat sea level rise.

Community Development with Urban Agriculture – Release of Model Ordinance

August 9, 1:00-2:15 PM ET

Urban agriculture has a lot of benefits for communities: increasing civic participation, complying with storm-water regulations, revitalizing neighborhoods, addressing food scarcity, increasing economic opportunity, and achieving sustainability goals are just a few. This webinar, hosted by Local Government Academy, will share best practices for establishing community gardens in your region. Speakers will showcase a model urban agriculture ordinance that local leaders can use to start building their own urban gardens.

RSVP Today! NARC Conference Call on Appropriations

August 9, 3:00-3:45 PM ET

Always complicated, and always impactful, this year's appropriations process is shaping up to be one of the most complicated and impactful in years. The threats to reduce or eliminate funding for many programs important to regional councils -- including funding for CDBG, TIGER Grants, WIOA programs, Administration on Aging, water infrastructure, and other environmental programs, to name just a few – are real.

Join NARC, NLC, and NACo for a conference call designed to bring you the most up-to-date information on the status of federal appropriations. Our goal is to inform you, and also provide you with effective strategies for letting your representatives and senators know just how you feel about potential cuts. *Please RSVP to Neil Bomberg at neil@narc.org, so he can provide you with handouts prior to the call!*

CONTACT US

Copyright © 2017 National Association of Regional Councils, All rights reserved.

[unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)