



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

eREGIONS



NEWS FROM WASHINGTON

Congress is in session.

Overview

NARC staff were on location at NARC's 2017 Executive Directors Conference and Board Retreat in San Antonio, Texas last week. The conference covered a range of topics, including a facilitator-led discussion on how to push your organization from good to great, natural disaster response and recovery, energy efficiency, a discussion on ways regional councils can reflect 21st century needs, partnerships to help move your council forward, and a NARC staff update on legislative and regulatory activities. Presentations are available on the [conference webpage](#).

Although Congress has not been able to reach agreement on all its legislative goals, Congress passed an important disaster relief bill to provide funding for Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Florida, and Texas, while also eliminating the National Flood Insurance Program's deficit. Congress also passed a budget that sets the stage for tax reform. And **Senators Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and Patty Murray (D-WA) developed a proposal** to address some of the problems associated with the *Affordable Care Act*, though we will have to see if it gains traction.

Even with these wins, Congress has a long way to go to get back on schedule. Right now, many must pass bills are stuck in committee. And many other bills that have been voted out of committee are slow to reach the House and Senate floors. These items include: the adoption of

appropriations bills to keep the government open after December 8; reauthorization of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which has been bogged down in partisan bickering but may finally move forward in the House this week; and reauthorization of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). It is likely that none of these bills will move forward in any meaningful way right now, as Congress is hyperfocused on tax reform domestically, and the Russia probe internationally.

Republicans are expected to introduce their tax reform proposal this week, which has many significant obstacles to passage. One such concern is the potential elimination of the state and local tax (SALT) deduction. Though the Senate and House are taking different approaches – the Senate would eliminate both the property and income tax deductions, while the House would eliminate the income tax deduction but preserve the property tax deduction – SALT is under attack and the impacts of elimination of one or both could be significant.

The **Government Finance Officers Association** (GFOA) estimates that 30 percent of taxpayers in every congressional district would be impacted by the loss of the deduction, putting great pressure on every state and local government to reduce taxes to make up for the loss in benefits through the tax code. Furthermore, GFOA estimates that this elimination would decrease infrastructure spending by \$150 million in every congressional district. There is zero doubt that eliminating this deduction will significantly impact infrastructure spending since states and local governments account for **75 percent** of all U.S. infrastructure spending.

NARC has joined with the National League of Cities (NLC), National Association of Counties, and other state and local groups to fight the elimination of the SALT deduction. We look to you and your local elected officials to **make the argument** to your senators and representatives.

What to watch this week in Congress:

- The *HEALTHY KIDS Act* (**HR 3921**), a bill that will extend the CHIP program through 2022 and provide \$1 billion to support Puerto Rico's Medicaid program, will be considered on the House floor.
- The House will be considering the *Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2017* (**HR 2936**) on the House floor. This bill will ease environmental reviews to expedite forest management activities conducted by federal agencies and allow wildfires to be designated as major disasters and provide agencies with additional funding as needed.
- The Independent Payment Advisory Board established under the *Affordable Care Act* would be established by the House bill up for consideration this week: *Protecting Seniors' Access to Medicare Act of 2017* (**HR 849**).
- Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Hearings:
 - Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross will testify **tomorrow at 2:30pm ET** regarding the 2020 Census.
 - Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator Brock Long and other emergency response officials will testify **tomorrow at 10:00am ET** regarding the federal response to the recent hurricanes.
- Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee Hearing
 - The committee will meet with a panel of experts **tomorrow at 2:30pm ET** to discuss how health information technology is being used to carry out the **21st Century Cures Act**

Democrats Pushback on Repeal of Clean Power Plan

Nineteen Democratic senators issued a **letter** to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt last week questioning the repeal of the *2015 Clean Power Plan Rule*. The *Clean Power Plan* aimed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants by 32% by the year 2030. They are concerned with "[the 2017 Repeal's] mathematical slights of hand to overstate the costs of industry compliance with the 2015 Rule and understate the benefits that will be lost if the 2017 repeal is finalized." In the letter, they requested more details about EPA's views on global warming and the agency's plan to repeal and replace the *2015 Clean Power Plan Rule*. They also asked to see all documents related to EPA's cost-benefit analysis that informed the repeal process.

Trump Declares Opioid Epidemic a National Public Emergency

Last Thursday, the administration **officially declared the opioid epidemic a national public health emergency**. Trump directed Health and Human Services Acting Secretary Eric Hargan to declare the emergency under the *Public Health Services Act*. This action will make federal agencies provide more funding from their current budgets. This declaration does not allow the federal government to use FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund to provide immediate need to those affected by the opioid epidemic. **According to CNN**, former Obama health officials hope this move will urge Congress to increase the amount allocated to the Public Health Emergency Fund to fight the crisis.

HUD Offers an Update on \$7.4 Billion in Disaster Grant Funding

After receiving \$7.4 billion in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program funding from Congress last month, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is still deciding how to allocate the funds after a series of major U.S. natural disasters. This type of funding is not typically used to cover immediate needs, but it is a vital resource for long-term recovery efforts. HUD recently allocated \$57.8 million to Texas for post-Hurricane Harvey efforts, funding projects that can fix/rebuild housing, businesses, and infrastructure. They will finish collecting and assessing data on Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands before deciding how to divvy up the rest of the funds among the areas recovering from the hurricanes.

OTHER NEWS

New Tools to Help Children Connect with Nature

Connecting children to the outdoors is a much-needed endeavor that NLC and the Children & Nature Network took on to improve health outcomes, academic achievement, social connections, and self-esteem in children, and may also help develop tomorrow's environmental stewards. Elected officials are encouraged to use the following two resources to help support this initiative in their own communities: the Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) **Municipal Action Guide** and **CCCN Resource Hub**. The resources provide leaders with strategies, actionable steps, and planning guidance, as well as important questions to consider when implementing this initiative. The partners hope that these tools will push national efforts to "promote equity in nature access for low-income children and children of color."

Today is National Weatherization Day!

The U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy is celebrating National Weatherization Day by highlighting their Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). For 40 years, WAP has been helping low-income households, seniors, and those with disabilities save on energy costs. For those that need weatherization assistance, the office highlighted three easy steps: 1) find a local weatherization agency using this **interactive map**; 2) apply for assistance and provide the accompanying materials required; and 3) wait for eligibility to be determined. If selected, the local weatherization agency will carry out an energy audit, provide a recommended list of the most cost-effective conservation measures for the home, and make any energy-saving upgrades.

Survey of City Halls Shows Why Census Count Accuracy is Vital for Local Governments

According to a recent **Sunlight Foundation survey**, federal demographics, housing, and economic data are the three most frequent types of information that city agencies rely on to inform resource allocation, project prioritization, and municipality performance. The survey also showed that city staff were evenly split on whether the administration could carry out an accurate and accessible Census survey. The results of the survey show that local leaders are concerned that the lack of accurate information would lead to less equitable decisions for their communities. In the next five years, 43 percent of respondents said they planned on using federal data on everything from budget planning to long-term planning efforts, showing that Census accuracy is the determinant factor for many regions and their communities.

eBook Highlights U.S. County Government Challenges and Solutions

Route Fifty recently released a useful eBook targeted to county officials: *At the Center of Everything: The Challenges, Great Ideas, and Big Issues Shaping U.S. County Governments*. The eBook provides short case studies that describe a problem facing many U.S. county governments and offers possible strategies others can incorporate into their own communities. Topics include

unused prescription drugs, cybersecurity and multi-factor authentication, and drones for a post-coal economic uplift catalyst.

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.

Texas Regional Council Preparation and Recovery Efforts for Hurricane Harvey

by Maci Hurley

Some areas of Texas received more than 50 inches of rain from Hurricane Harvey. The *Houston Chronicle* reported that the hurricane broke the record for heaviest rainfall ever logged in the U.S. during a tropical storm, totaling 64.58 inches in Nederland, Texas. Local, state, and federal officials all agree on one thing: it will take Southeast Texas months, if not years, to fully recover. Local officials and regional councils had pivotal roles to play in the preparation and recovery efforts for Hurricane Harvey...

FEATURED JOBS

View full list of jobs!

Alamo Regional Transit Scheduler

Alamo Area Council of Governments, San Antonio, TX

Regional Planner II

Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, Dayton, OH

Water Quality Program Administrator

Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, Toledo, OH

Government Relations Manager

Wasatch Front Regional Council, Salt Lake City, UT

Director of Analytics, Modeling and Data Services

Wasatch Front Regional Council, Salt Lake City, UT

Senior Business Development Analyst

San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego, CA

Senior Policy Analyst – Transportation

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Chicago, IL

REQUESTS

CDBG Coalition Requests Your CDBG Stories

Does your regional council have any success stories about the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) in your region? The CDBG Coalition, of which NARC is a member, is looking for CDBG project information and stories to include in their *CDBG National Report*. Please submit your stories to Sarah at sarah@narc.org by November 30 and include the following information: project name, location, project year, project description, use of CDBG funds, target population, amount of CDBG funds, leveraging, jobs created (if any, both temporary and permanent), project impact, a high-resolution photo, quote from a beneficiary, and project contact information.

Regional Council Anniversaries

Has your regional council celebrated a milestone anniversary recently or somewhat recently? If so, NARC would love to hear about it. Please share the details of events you hosted, social media campaigns, and general marketing collateral with Anna at anna@narc.org.

FUNDING

View full list of grants!

USDA Assistance to High Energy Cost Communities

Applications Due: December 11

The High Energy Cost Grants Program assists energy providers and other eligible entities in lowering energy costs for families and individuals in areas with extremely high per-household energy costs. This type of assistance increases economic opportunity and the quality of life in rural communities nationwide by maintaining a seamless electric network for all Americans, regardless of where they live. Eligible areas must demonstrate annual average household energy cost exceeding 275 percent of the national average under benchmarks published in the ***Notice of Solicitation of Applications***. The funds may be used to finance the acquisition, construction, or improvement of facilities serving eligible communities and to implement energy efficiency improvement and conservation measures.

FY 2018 Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training Grants

Applications Due: December 15

Through the link to on-the-ground assessment and cleanup activities, Environmental Workforce Development and Job Training (EWDJT) Grants train unemployed and under-employed residents of communities impacted by a variety of waste facilities, blighted properties, contaminated sites, and other environmental issues. EWDJT Grants help residents take advantage of the jobs created by the management, assessment, cleanup, and revitalization of solid and hazardous waste sites, as well as other environmental projects in their communities. Applicants must target dislocated workers, or those laid off because of recent manufacturing plant closures, severely under-employed individuals, or unemployed individuals, including low-income and minority residents of waste-impacted communities, veterans, and those with little to no advanced education. EPA anticipates awarding approximately 15-16 EWDJT cooperative agreements with amounts up to \$200,000.

EVENTS

View full list of events!

2017 FEMA Individual and Community Preparedness Awards Recognition and Idea Sharing

October 31, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

Join FEMA for a webinar to honor the preparedness efforts of the 2017 FEMA Individual and Community Preparedness (ICP) Award winners and learn about their programs. FEMA will host the webinar with the awardees to generate conversation, and share ideas, insights, and experiences. Winners will provide models of preparedness programs to help others take similar actions in their community.

One Water Webinar: Addressing Nutrient Pollution in our Nation's Waters

November 3, 1:00-2:30PM ET

Nutrient pollution is one of America's most widespread, costly, and challenging problems. It is a challenge for many different bodies of water across many different regions, but the response to nutrient pollution has been siloed and fragmented. To forge large-scale progress on nutrient pollution, we are going to need a new approach that is more strategic and holistic in its structure and execution. Collaboration across agriculture, utilities, businesses, environmental groups, government, and academia will be necessary to truly make progress towards adopted goals.

Together, the US Water Alliance, National Association of Clean Water Agencies, and Water Environment Federation released a policy brief outlining a new collaborative approach on how to reduce nutrient pollution in our nation's waterways. The paper, ***Addressing Nutrient Pollution in Our Nation's Waters: The Role of a Statewide Utility***, presents options for a collaborative approach that would focus on cost-effective, results-driven investments and projects that would truly move the needle on nutrient levels.

Opioid Epidemic: Economic Consequences

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

This REMI presentation will build on a 2016 study that modeled the main direct costs of opioid abusers and dependents on our society. At the regional level, heavily impacted states face potential out-migration as well as increased costs for health care, substance abuse treatment, and the incarceration of drug offenders. This combination of factors places a severe strain on state budgets as expenditures rise while the tax base falls. At the national level, the loss of workers to either premature deaths or extended absences from the labor force depress production and lower

aggregate demand, slowing down the growth of the economy. Join this presentation for a dynamic fiscal analysis to quantify the negative impacts of the opioid epidemic.

NARC & APA Webinar! Trees and Stormwater: A Tool for Your Community

November 9, 2:00 PM-3:00 PM EST

Using trees in landscape design provides a multitude of environmental benefits, particularly when they are used in new and retrofitted stormwater management installations. This webinar will introduce a new free interactive web-based tool developed by the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Council of Governments and the U.S. Forest Service that will help you maximize the value of trees in stormwater management. Join the American Planning Association, National Association of Regional Councils, and national experts in green infrastructure design for an introduction to this exciting new tool that enables strategic placement of trees to improve stormwater management.

G2G Marketplace: Oakland County's Solution to Providing Better Citizen Services

November 15, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

Government agencies are operating in challenging times. They are facing a retirement wave, uncertainty with federal regulations and funding, and increasing demands from citizens for improved services. Technology can often help, but complicated procurement processes, implementation times, and costs are prohibitive.

As a Top Digital County and Digital Experience Award recipient, Oakland County, MI, knows a thing or two about implementing technology successfully. In 2014, the county created G2G Marketplace -- an online store that offers solutions from government partners and approved vendors -- to help other governments easily research, purchase, and implement technology and services. Oakland County leaders Phil Bertolini and Kevin Bertram will talk about their digital journey, the value that G2G Marketplace brings, and how governments can take advantage.

CONTACT US

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