



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

eREGIONS

NEWS FROM WASHINGTON

Congress is in session.

The Week Ahead

Congress has two major issues to deal with before they break for the Christmas holiday on December 22, a week later than originally scheduled. The first is tax reform, which has now passed the House and Senate. The second is adoption of a spending bill that will keep the government open. Neither will be easy, but leadership believes that they can get both bills to the president's desk before they adjourn for Christmas recess.

Tax Reform

The House and Senate will have to reconcile key differences between their two versions of tax reform after the Senate voted last week to approve comprehensive tax reform legislation (51-49). While these differences are not considered major, they could pose negotiation problems when the chambers draft their compromise bill. These differences include:

- *State and Local Taxes* – The Senate bill would repeal the entire deduction for state and local taxes (SALT), making no exception for property taxes. The House bill, in a bid to win support from moderate Republicans, would allow deductions of up to \$10,000 for property taxes.
- *Municipal Bonds* – Neither bill would repeal municipal bonds, but the Senate bill would prohibit their use for stadium and sports complexes.
- *Private Activity Bonds* – The House bill would eliminate private activity bonds (PABs) while the Senate bill would retain them. However, the Senate would eliminate their tax-exempt status, thereby substantially increasing the cost of the bonds, and decreasing their usefulness for such common purposes as funding affordable housing projects; clean water activities; and public private partnerships, such as airports, hospitals, and schools.
 - Changes to PABs have caused substantial concern among the various state and local government organizations and a concerted effort is being made to change this section of the legislation. **A letter** to conferees, which NARC signed, calls on Congress to undo the restrictions and limitations that have been placed on PABs in both versions of the tax bill. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) also **issued a letter** to House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell stating their transportation-related concerns with the tax reform proposals.
 - Contact your senators and representatives immediately. Urge them to share your concerns about the elimination or limited use of PABs, and to vote against any bill that would do this. Explain to them how your city, county, or region has used PABs to support private sector efforts to meet public sector needs. Let them know how important they are to ensuring that your city, county, or region is able to meet its affordable housing objectives.
- *Home Mortgage Interest Deduction* – The Senate would maintain the deduction for newly purchased homes up to \$1 million while the House plan would cut the threshold to \$500,000.

- *Popular Tax Credits and Deductions* – The Senate would maintain a variety of popular tax credits and deductions that were scheduled for elimination in the House version released last week. The House would eliminate the Historic Tax Credit and New Markets Tax Credit, while the Senate would place limitations. Both bills maintain the Low Income Housing Tax Credit.

Congress to Address Government Funding Expiration This Week

With little time left before the current continuing resolution (CR) runs out on December 8, it is up to the House and Senate to pass another continuing resolution or an omnibus appropriations package that covers the entire federal government.

GOP leaders introduced a **short-term CR** over the weekend to fund the federal government until the Friday before Christmas. If approved by both chambers, it will save the government from a shutdown. It is unclear whether extension of the National Flood Insurance Program, which also expires on December 8, will also be included in the final CR. The CR would release some money to states for the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which has not been renewed since its funding expired on September 30.

With 60 votes required for passage, House and Senate Republicans will have to persuade eight Democrats to support the bill. This is not an easy feat; Senate Democrats may not be willing to pass another CR. They have said repeatedly that they will only agree to a spending bill if it includes protections for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) youth. And President Trump has indicated that he may veto any final spending bill that does not include funds for a U.S.-Mexico border wall.

Even if this CR passes, House leaders say they may have to pass another one that will take them into mid-January. How this ends up is anyone’s guess, but both parties have said they want to avoid a government shutdown.

Hearings to Keep on Your Radar

Tomorrow at 10 AM ET, the Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education will host a hearing, ***Addressing the Opioid Crisis in America: Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery***. Witnesses will discuss and answer questions on current prevention, treatment, and recovery approaches related to the American opioid epidemic. On Thursday at 10 AM ET, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt will serve as a witness in House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing, ***The Mission of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency***.

More Disaster Aid Expected in Late December

After a summer of major hurricanes and California wildfires, Congress is tentatively planning to package the next round of disaster aid assistance in the short-term CR. According to Representative Pete Sessions (R-TX), GOP’s CR has a “working agreement to that model.” There is no word yet on whether the new disaster aid package will be larger than the \$44 million that the **White House officially requested** last month for ongoing recovery efforts.

House Passes Bill Reauthorizing Brownfields Program

Last Thursday, the House overwhelmingly passed the *Brownfields Enhancement, Economic Redevelopment, and Reauthorization Act of 2017 (HR 3017)* by a vote of 409-8. The bill reauthorizes the program until 2022, authorizing \$200 million in funding per year. \$50 million will be authorized annually for state and tribal grants, and the program will also make multipurpose grants available. Representative John Shimkus (R-IL) said, “the EPA brownfields program is critical to states and local communities as they address contaminated industrial and commercial properties and return them to productive use.” NARC and three other local government associations applauded the approval of H.R. 3017, releasing this **joint statement** on the bill’s priorities for the agency, including his “back to basics” policies and how they will impact his activities going forward.

OTHER NEWS

Rising Sea Levels May Put Historical Landmarks Underwater Within this Century
In a study led by David Anderson from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, researchers found that sea level rise in this century could threaten the following American landmarks:

Jamestown in Virginia; the Kennedy Space Center in Florida; and the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse in North Carolina. After analyzing data from the Digital Index of North American Archaeology, a dataset that collects American archeological and historical data, they predict more than 13,000 archaeological and historical sites will be in danger of rising sea levels. If their projected trends continue, the U.S. could see a 3.3 foot rise in sea levels by 2100. This poses as a serious issue, especially because more than 40% of the world's population lives within 60 miles of a coastline.

REGION SPOTLIGHT

SCAG COO Darin Chidsey Recognized as an Outstanding Southern California Leader

Darin Chidsey, Chief Operating Officer of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), was recognized last Thursday at the 2017 Southern California Leadership Network (SCLN) Visionaries Awards. SCLN honored 30 outstanding alumni from their fellowship programs, and Darin was chosen as one of the greatest civic leaders in the region. Darin drives the vision and strategies of SCAG every day, using innovation to implement new initiatives to make the region better. SCLN Executive Director Nancy Olson said, "Darin has demonstrated commendable skill and dedication to making a positive impact on the region, state, and nation. His work exemplifies the SCLN mission of driving change." Congratulations, Darin!

MARC to Host Tenth Annual Sustainable Success Stories

The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) has announced six successful sustainable programs as the honorees for their tenth annual Sustainable Success Stories program. Since 2008, the program has recognized 79 honorees that serve as models for sustainability in the region, including urban agriculture, green buildings, green infrastructure, complete streets, and workforce development. At the December 14 recognition event, honorees will share their progress, best practices, and plans for expanding their success.

SEMCOG Launches Parks and Recreation Task Force

Last week, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) announced the chair and vice chair of their newly formed Parks and Recreation Task Force: Chair of the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners Jeff Bohm and Brighton City Councilmember Kristopher Tobbe, respectively. For eight to 12 months, the task force will be charged with analyzing the region's parks and recreation system "to understand how well the system meets the needs and desires of residents and visitors, identify connections and gaps in accessibility to parks and trails, and ensure that maintenance and continued improvements can be made strategically." The task force will also develop regional policies with opportunities for implementation at the local level.

Apalachee RPC Partners with the Big Bend Continuum of Care

The Apalachee Regional Planning Council (RPC) in Florida recently became a federally designated collaborative applicant for the Big Bend Continuum of Care (CoC), a regional organization aimed at ending homelessness in the Big Bend area of Florida. CoC's goals include building a network of homeless service agencies, promoting educational opportunities around homelessness, and providing funding efforts to quickly rehome individuals and families. Apalachee RPC will serve as the umbrella agency for CoC, providing their employees workspace and administrative services to carry out their mission.

New MAPA Transportation Tools

The Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area Planning Agency (MAPA) created new transportation tools to help its constituents get around the region. MAPA launched a new rideshare **website** and mobile **Apple** and **Google** apps to help users connect with others in the community who are interested in carpooling, biking, walking, or riding a bus together. Whether you are a resident or visiting the area, you can enter your travel route information and the tool will partner you with those that have similar routes and schedules. MAPA also developed a **metro area bike map** for its region, complete with information on the BikeOmaha System and Heartland B-Cycle, the region's growing bike sharing program.

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.

Why the SALT Deduction Matters. Why You Should Save It.

by Neil Bomberg

Now is the time to let your senators and representatives know that you oppose elimination of the SALT deduction and that they should vote against any tax proposal that would do this. Over the next weeks and months, Congress will be debating legislation to “reform” the nation’s tax system. That debate will focus on many things, including corporate taxes, inheritance tax, individual tax brackets, and charitable tax deductions, among others. But none of the debates may prove as important to states, counties, cities, and towns as the state and local tax (SALT) deduction, which allows individuals and households to deduct what they pay to states and localities in the form of income, property, and sales taxes from their federal returns.

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!](#)

Database Administrator

San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego, CA

Criminal Justice Research Analyst

San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego, CA

FUNDING

[View full list of grants!](#)

Smart Cities Readiness Challenge Grant

Applications Due: December 15

The Smart Cities Council, the world's largest smart cities network, will award additional benefits through its 2018 Readiness Challenge Grants to five North American communities looking to accelerate their smart city initiatives. The program is available for all communities in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico, including cities, counties, states, provinces, and regional authorities. Each grant recipient will receive a year’s worth of free mentoring; a custom-designed, on-site Readiness Workshop; membership in the Smart Cities Leadership Circle; and worldwide publicity. The winning communities will also receive free products and services worth hundreds of thousands from leading organizations, including Qualcomm, Battelle, SYNEXXUS, CompTIA, and IES.

Grants to Improve the Lives of Post-9/11 Impacted Veterans and Their Families

Applications Due: January 10, 2018

The Bob Woodruff Foundation invests in programs that support post-9/11 impacted veterans, service members, their families, and their caregivers. They are currently accepting proposals that operate within one of these three core areas: education and employment to enable and enrich the next chapter of their lives; long-term rehabilitation and recovery to heal both the physical and hidden wounds of war; and enhancing quality of life through sense of purpose, places to live, healthy family relationships, and outlets for socialization. Programs must demonstrate commitment and access to their target community, establish planned and measurable program outcomes, collaborate with existing community resources and organizations, and plan for program sustainability.

Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Competitive Grants Program

Letter of Intent Due: January 11, 2018

Applications Due: February 8, 2018

Up to \$1 million grants are available to nonprofit organizations that apply through the USDA Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans (AgVets) program. The overarching goal of AgVets is to increase the number of military veterans gaining knowledge and skills through comprehensive, hands-on and immersive model farm/ranch programs offered regionally that lead to successful careers in the food and agricultural sector.

EVENTS

View full list of events!

Public Service in Difficult Times

December 5, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

The public sector, legislatures included, has faced intense criticism and scarce resources for many years. There are techniques available to public employees to not only cope with these challenges but to thrive. This webinar will explore various ways in which legislative staff can expand their capacity and practice self-care in challenging times. The key is to transform our mindset from one that is in “survival mode” to one that seeks ways to be helpful and solution oriented.

One Water Webinar: Developing Policy & Programs to Regulate Onsite Non-Potable Water Systems

December 7, 1:00-2:00 PM ET

One of the most exciting developments in One Water management is the integration of smaller onsite systems that collect, treat, and reuse water within individual buildings or at the local scale. As an emerging innovation, the success of onsite non-potable water systems (ONWS) depends on strong collaboration between municipal utilities and public health agencies to ensure projects protect public health and meet water quality standards. To help advance the use of ONWS, the National Blue Ribbon Commission for Onsite Non-Potable Water Systems—convened by the U.S. Water Alliance, Water Research Foundation, and the Water Environment & Reuse Foundation—released a guidebook for developing and implementing local and state regulations for these type of onsite reuse systems. Based on best-in-class science and research, this guidebook will help advance a consistent national approach to the regulation and management of ONWS. This One Water Webinar will bring together public health and water utility leaders from the National Blue Ribbon Commission to discuss the contents of the guidebook and how it can be used in local jurisdictions across the country.

Made in Place: Small-Scale Manufacturing & Neighborhood Revitalization

December 7, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

Join this webinar for a deep dive discussion of the strategies outlined in *Made in Place: Small-Scale Manufacturing and Neighborhood Revitalization*, a new report from Smart Growth America and Recast City, funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. Learn how your community can leverage recent technological and economic shifts to help more people produce and sell their own goods. The National League of Cities will also be weighing in with findings from their upcoming report, *Discovering Your City's Maker Economy*.

Trees and Stormwater: A Tool for Your Community

December 14, 2:00-3:30 PM ET

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 Water Environment Federation, National Municipal Stormwater Alliance, 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.

Opportunities in the 2018 Farm Bill: Federal Efforts to Advance Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems

January 9, 3:00-4:15 PM ET

The Farm Bill shapes our local, regional, and national food systems, from farm and crop production, to access to healthy food, to nutrition and hunger programs. The process to reauthorize the Farm Bill in 2018 is underway. Stakeholders, advocates, and community members all have a role in ensuring that the next Farm Bill protects and expands progress made thus far,

while strengthening policies that advance equitable and sustainable food systems. This webinar will provide a brief overview of the Farm Bill and status of reauthorization, as well as highlight four key policy pillars within the legislation: the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), healthy food incentive programs such as Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI), and sustainable agricultural and local/regional food system development. Speakers will discuss challenges and opportunities in each policy arena and highlight opportunities to get involved in shaping the next Farm Bill.

CONTACT US

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