



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

eREGIONS



NEWS FROM WASHINGTON

Congress is in session.

This Week

Congress has two major tasks to complete before they recess for the Christmas holiday in just five short days. One, they must pass a massive tax reform package. The package is quite unpopular due to the caps placed on some important middle-class deductions (like mortgage interest and state and local taxes), but Republicans appear poised to pass the bill. Two, they must pass a continuing resolution (CR) to keep the government open until mid-January. This may prove more difficult because there is quite a bit of disagreement over what the final appropriations bill should look like.

Until it was announced this weekend that Senator John McCain (R-AZ) would not be returning to the Senate until after January 1 due to chemotherapy treatments for brain cancer, it seemed certain that Republicans had the votes needed to pass their tax bill. And Republicans may still have those votes, but Jeff Flake (R-AZ) is a vote they cannot count on just yet. We also do not know whether Senator Thad Cochran (R-MS) will be able to leave the hospital to vote, making the final Senate count uncertain.

Congress must deal with some significant obstacles before it can pass a CR, including whether spending caps should be lifted on defense programs only or across all defense and non-defense programs. Republicans may attempt to attach the defense appropriations bill to the CR so that funding for defense programs would be raised even if all other funding remains level. The problem with this strategy is that it would cause automatic sequestration, which would likely lead to a 13 percent cut across all programs – and that includes defense.

There is also much disagreement over several issues slated for inclusion:

- Should there be funding for the “border wall?”
- Should Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients be subject to deportation or receive protected status?
- How much disaster aid should be included?
- What about reauthorization of the *Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act* (FISA) – without which the system of FISA anti-terror courts would be forced to shut down?
- What about questions related to the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), stabilization of the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) market places, and elimination of some of the taxes that the ACA mandates?
- And should the CR include substantial cuts to non-defense discretionary programs to begin paying down the debt that will result from the tax bill?

The Senate needs a 60-vote threshold to pass any appropriations bill, and Senate Democrats may withhold support unless the bill includes language that protects DACA recipients, includes significant funding for Puerto Rico, and increases the funding caps to benefit defense and non-defense programs equally. Democrats have also indicated that the \$1.6 billion-line item for constructing a border wall, included in both versions of the CR, is a non-starter.

Congress is likely to pass tax reform legislation and a CR, but the road to December 22 is filled with potholes, some deep enough to throw the entire operation into nonalignment.

House to Consider Firefighter Grant Reauthorization

Today the House considers the *United States Fire Administration, AFG, and SAFER Program Reauthorization of 2017 (HR 4661)*, which is set to expire on January 2. The bill would reauthorize grant programs that recruit firefighters, acquire equipment, meet training needs, establish fire safety research centers, enforce fire codes, and fund fire prevention programs by extending the current authorization level of FEMA’s U.S. Fire Administration through FY 2023. The legislation includes some minor program changes, particularly to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) Grants program. A two-thirds majority of the House is required to pass the reauthorization.

NARC Signs Letter Supporting Future Disaster Relief Assistance and EDA

Last week, NARC signed onto a letter that supports supplemental funding for recovery efforts in TX, FL, CA, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The letter specifically supports targeted funding through the Economic Development Administration (EDA) because of their role in providing federal economic development assistance to local governments for long-term community economic recovery planning, project implementation, and redevelopment. The letter urges House and Senate Appropriations Committees to include \$2.04 billion in funding for EDA in the next disaster aid relief package - a number consistent with requests made by state congressional delegations.

EDA Publishes Updated Regulations for RLF Program

EDA has published revisions to the *Public Works and Economic Development Act*, the legislation that governs the agency’s Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) Program. The revisions, which can be viewed on the **Federal Register**, will take effect on January 2. The revisions “incorporate best practices and establishes a risk-based management network that will make RLF rewards more efficient for RLF recipients to administer and EDA to monitor.” A **companion Federal Register notice** for the risk-based management system is also available. Changes also include revision plans for the RLF Financial Report.

Sixty Environmental Rules on the Way Out Under Trump

Since January, the Trump administration has made eliminating federal regulations a priority. This has included many environmental rules seen as too constricting for businesses. Using Harvard University’s **Environmental Regulation Rollback Tracker** and Columbia Law School’s **Climate Deregulation Tracker**, *The New York Times* created a chart that shows 29 environmental rules have been overturned, 24 rollbacks are in progress, and seven rollbacks are in limbo. The article details each policy chosen by the administration for reversal so far.

Forbidden Words Reported at CDC and other HHS Agencies

Since the story came out in *The Washington Post* that the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) had reportedly been given “forbidden” words, anonymous officials at two other agencies under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have claimed they received a similar list. The words not to be used in official documents include: “entitlement,” “diversity,” “vulnerable,” “evidence-based,” “science-based,” “transgender,” and “fetus.” The agencies were also asked to use “Obamacare” instead of the “Affordable Care Act” and “exchanges” instead of “marketplaces.” HHS pushed back on the original *Washington Post* report, saying that the banned words were a mischaracterization of budget formulation process discussions.

OTHER NEWS

First State Opt's Out of FirstNet as Deadline Looms

New Hampshire is the first state to announce their intention to ‘opt-out’ of FirstNet, the national wireless first responder communications network. Instead New Hampshire will have Rivada Networks build and maintain the **LTE** radio access network instead of AT&T. Governor Chris Sununu said the proposed Rivada plan would bring great value to New Hampshire, unparalleled public-safety infrastructure investments, and a level of control it would not have had with the opt-in scenario. Thirty-nine states have decided to opt-in to FirstNet, leaving ten states to make their decision by the December 28 deadline.

Building Regional Resilience Tool

The University of Missouri’s Institute of Public Policy at the Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs developed an online resiliency tool for regional planners, community leaders, government officials, and researchers alike. The Building Regional Resilience toolkit provides communities with the ability to prepare resilience plans for natural and manmade threats. They developed research-based indexes that measure regional vulnerability and resilience in each county of the U.S. Each county was mapped on the index according to resiliency and vulnerability relative averages in four categories: social, economic, infrastructure, and environmental.

Numbers Rising for Children Being Removed from Parent’s Care because of Drugs

The Children’s Bureau of the Department of Health and Human Services recently released a **report** that shows that the number for drug-related foster care cases are on the rise. In FY 2016 alone, about 92,000 children were removed from their homes because at least one parent had a drug abuse issue. The opioid epidemic has helped contribute significantly to the total of 437,500 children in the foster care system as of FY 2016. Steve Wagner, acting assistant secretary for children and families at the Administration for Children and Families, said “the seriousness of parental substance abuse, including the abuse of opioids, is an issue we at HHS will be addressing through prevention, treatment, and recovery-support measures.”

REGION SPOTLIGHT

MVRPC Receives “SAFETYS” Award from Ohio DOT

The Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVRPC) recently accepted a “SAFETYS” award and \$3,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Transportation (DOT) for their “Street Smart” pedestrian safety campaign. Launched in 2016, “Street Smart” has presented posters, digital billboard ads, newspaper ads, bus exterior ads, social media posts, and a **webpage** with safety tips for pedestrians and drivers. Powerful images of men, women, and children with black tire marks across their faces reminded drivers and pedestrians alike that “passengers don’t come with airbags” and to wear bright, reflective clothing at night. MVRPC Executive Director Brian O. Martin said, “the images represent people in your life such as your neighbor, family member, or friend. We want to remind everyone to watch out for pedestrians and that pedestrians should stay alert, establish eye contact with drivers, and walk defensively.” Congratulations, MVRPC!

MEMBER REQUEST

OCWCOG Request: Policy Processes for Advocacy

The Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments (OCWCOG) seeks COG policy processes for advocacy. OCWCOG is looking for written procedures on how other regional councils perform advocacy work. Please send materials and comments to Anna Rosenbaum, anna@narc.org.

MPOAC Request: Transportation Asset Management Plan Guidance

The Florida Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council (MPOAC), the Florida statewide MPO association, seeks examples and ideas from NARC member MPOs on Transportation Asset Management (TAM) Plan guidance. MPOAC is particularly interested in

your MPO's plans, and any conversations you have had or guidance you have received from your Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regional representative on addressing the TAM plan requirement in the Transportation Performance Measures.

Have you heard from FTA on this issue or made your own plans on how to address this part of the Transportation Performance Measures? Do you have any documents you would be willing to share with other MPOs on how to address the requirement? Please send responses and questions to Erich Zimmermann, erich@narc.org.

FEATURED JOBS

View full list of jobs!

Safe Communities Coalition Assistant

Lane Council of Governments, Eugene, OR

Executive Director

San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, Alhambra, CA

Transportation Director

Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments, Colorado Springs, CO

Transportation Performance Measures Planner

Pima Association of Governments, Tucson, AZ

RFP for an ITS Architecture Comprehensive Update

Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency, Cleveland, OH

Metropolitan Planning Organization Coordinator

Green River Area Development District, Owensboro, KY

Senior Planner

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Springfield, MA

TX Serves Intake Specialist – Part Time

Alamo Area Council of Governments, San Antonio, TX

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.

Concerns Grow Over the Impacts of House and Senate Tax Bills

by Neil Bomberg

Congress is back from Thanksgiving break and confronted with some significant choices, including passage of a tax bill that substantially reduces the corporate tax rate and eliminates some common individual tax deductions. From the outset, the goal has been to pass a tax cut bill – good or bad – before Congress breaks for the Christmas holiday. To do this House and Senate Republicans are moving at breakneck speed to get the bill to the president for his signature.

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.

FUNDING

[View full list of grants!](#)

Environmental Literacy Grants: Supporting the Education of K-12 Students and the Public for Community Resilience

Applications Due: April 6, 2018

The goal for this grant opportunity is to support the education of K-12 students and the public so they are knowledgeable of the ways in which their community can become more resilient to extreme weather events and/or other environmental hazards, and become involved in achieving that resilience. This process is typically performed by scientists and municipal planners, but for resilience to occur, other members of a community must have some understanding of the hazards they face and how to mitigate them both at the individual and the community level. Projects should leverage and incorporate relevant state and local hazard mitigation and/or adaptation plans and collaborate with institutions that are involved in efforts to develop or implement those plans. Projects may focus on a single type of environmental hazard or a range of hazards that may impact a community or communities.

National Endowment of the Arts' Challenge America Program

Applications Due: April 12, 2018

The Challenge America program offers support primarily to small and mid-sized organizations for projects that extend the reach of the arts to underserved populations – those whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability. Age alone (e.g., youth, seniors) does not qualify a group as underserved; at least one of the underserved characteristics noted above also must be present. Please provide details about the underserved audience you select in your application. Grants are available for professional arts programming and for projects that emphasize the potential of the arts in community development.

EVENTS

[View full list of events!](#)

Schools and Local Government: Protect Your Data from Cyber Attacks

December 19, 9:30-10:00 AM ET

Increasingly sensitive school and local government data is being targeted by cyber criminals. In 2016, there was a startling 40 percent growth in data breaches, with over 172k records exposed in the U.S. Join Presidio for a 30-minute webinar to understand how cyber criminals are approaching their targets; discover how phishing, hacking, and selling info in the black market works; and learn valuable tools and strategies to secure private information from cyber criminals.

Increasing Public Safety: Getting the Right Information at the Right Time

December 19, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

Information that's inaccurate, incomplete or inaccessible is a risk to public safety, but it is unfortunately a reality for many government agencies. Siloed systems and business processes make it difficult to securely share data. When this happens, warrants can be denied, cases may be dropped, or dangerous individuals may be wrongly released. To protect our communities, public safety agencies must drastically improve their information sharing capabilities.

Presented in a Q&A, panel-style format, this interactive one-hour webinar will discuss how agencies can integrate existing systems within the criminal justice process and allow for information sharing across system and departmental boundaries. Panelists will cover: key challenges to information sharing – and how to overcome them; how public safety agencies can increase inter-agency collaboration, real-time decision making, and analytics that can expose trends for criminal investigations; and what implications better information sharing has for the rest of the government enterprise.

Building a Multi-generational Workforce Webinar

December 19, 2:30-3:15 PM ET

Businesses benefit from hiring and retaining 50+ workers, as they demonstrate greater levels of engagement, lower rates of turnover, and stronger applied skills and experience. And building a multi-generational workforce can lead to business success by enhancing recruitment, retention, and profitability. Join Susan Weinstock, Vice President for Financial Resilience Programming at AARP and Heather Tinsley-Fix, Senior Advisor, Financial Resilience Programming at AARP, to discuss the benefits of hiring older workers and how employers can build a multi-generational

workforce through targeted recruiting strategies and workplace programs. AARP will walk through specific case studies highlighting multi-generational workplaces and discuss specialized resources it has developed to help support employers, including its **Business Case for 50+ Workers guide**.

National Stormwater Calculator for Managing Runoff Using GI: Cost Module and Mobile Web App Added

January 31, 2018, 2:00-3:00 PM ET

EPA developed the **National Stormwater Calculator** to help support local, state, and national stormwater management objectives and regulatory efforts to reduce runoff through infiltration and retention using green infrastructure (GI) practices as low-impact development controls. It is designed to be used by anyone interested in reducing runoff from a property, including site developers, landscape architects, urban planners, and homeowners. It can be used for any location within the U.S., including Puerto Rico. This webinar will provide potential and example applications, and will present the new cost module and mobile web application version that can be used on mobile devices.

CONTACT US

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