

April 9, 2025

MEMO TO: David Raatz, Director
Office of Council Services

F R O M: Ellen McKinley, Legislative Analyst *EBM*

SUBJECT: **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE** (PAF 25-010(2))

The National Association of Counties held its 2025 Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., from March 1 through 5, 2025. I attended, along with Council Vice-Chair Sugimura and Councilmembers Johnson, Paltin, and Rawlins-Fernandez.

Some of the content of interest is summarized below.

Rural Action Caucus meeting

- Cross-border collaboration between the United States and Canada will be damaged by the “fast and furious” impacts of the tariffs, including predicted United States’ hikes in infrastructure costs, energy layoffs, aluminum company closures, and tourism loss.
- The Housing Assistance Council, a national nonprofit helping rural communities build and preserve affordable housing, may help to provide technical assistance and project funding. The needs will be great for the elderly and disabled if work requirements for government benefits are implemented; one way to address the problem could be a property tax exemption for seniors.
- Rural communities may benefit from outdoor recreation and tourism unless those businesses are owned by outside capital which will create a low-wage economy, and more waste and pollution.

NACo West Region Caucus meeting

The meeting included an update on government affairs. Areas of concern include the fiscal impact to counties through:

- Proposed cuts, elimination of services, and work requirements for Medicaid.
- Planned elimination of the tax exemption for municipal bonds which would raise the cost of county capital improvement projects and result in higher tax burdens to counties.
- Reshaping or elimination of Federal Emergency Management Agency. NACo is trying to get a seat on the task force.
- National Environmental Protection Act permitting reform would roll back requirements to what they were in 1977. Each federal agency may get its own guidelines, and public comment may no longer be required.

National Association of Native County Leaders & Allies (NANCLA) meeting

NANCLA was accepted as a NACo Official Affinity Group, which allows advocacy for native policy. Presiding Officer Pro Tempore Tasha Kama is Vice-Chair of NANCLA.

The group recognized that at this political moment, it might be best to pause, observe, and build relationships, as the Federal administration is antagonistic toward diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Resilient Counties Advisory Board

The Board received a presentation from Julie Parker Communications on best practices in crisis communication for county leaders. Some key points included:

- Reaching a younger audience through Instagram (not TikTok)
- Monitoring social media
- Correcting misinformation without emotion
- Leaving trolls alone
- Assisting legitimate complaints offline
- Creating a “myths and facts page” to correct rumors
- Going to trusted reporters in the event of a cyber incident

Western Interstate Region discussion with Hawai'i

This meeting was held to go over financial feasibility, ideas, and next steps for holding the 2026 WIR Conference on Maui. NACo expects 350 people to attend and informational packets will be available at the 2025 Annual Conference in Philadelphia and the 2026 Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.

Listening session with Hawai'i's elected officials and Department of Defense

Councilmembers were introduced to D. Noelani Kalipi, Senior Advisor, Hawai'i Coordination Cell, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations and Environment. Ms. Kalipi's role is to facilitate communication and help strengthen the DOD's relationship with Hawai'i. For example, she would like to elevate the public's perception of the U.S. SpaceForce presence on Haleakalā through education regarding its role to protect above-Earth systems.

It is possible that the Hawai'i State Department of Land and Natural Resources will not renew expiring military leases, but land exchanges are possible. Condemnation is also an option, but it is not ideal.

HSAC meetings with Senators Schatz and Hirono and Representatives Case and Tokuda

Councilmembers attended meetings with Hawai'i's United States Senate and House of Representatives officials on Capitol Hill. In reaction to the President's mass firing of federal employees and cutting federal funding, they each urged Councilmembers to send their staff stories of how those actions are impacting local individuals, businesses, and communities.

Senator Schatz urged the counties to be judicious with spending but said there is no need to panic yet. When applying for federal funds, use neutral terms and avoid using "native," "climate," and "women."

Representative Case expressed concern over attacks on the federal government's system of checks and balances and eliminating the federal role in assuring healthcare, environmental protection, and fair allocation of resources to address the counties' needs.

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Representative Tokuda said the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is a likely target for cuts, so it is important to get funds obligated as soon as possible.

Senator Hirono and the other officials urged everyone to raise their voices over firings and program cuts. She said the State and counties may need to fill gaps created by reduced federal funding (the State budget is 20 percent federally funded). She suggested levying a tax on second homes valued at over \$2 million and tiering other property taxes.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend this informative conference. If you have any questions or would like more information on these topics, please contact Ellen at ext. 7661.

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cc: Deputy Director of Council Services