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State and Federal Relations

Running a county government in the 21st century is more complex and demanding than ever before. Citizens want top-of-the-line services delivered effectively and efficiently, superior quality of life, and a clean and healthy environment. At the same time, they want to receive tax relief at the federal, state, and local levels of government. The ideal 21st-century county official must therefore be smart, innovative, and politically astute. County commissioners need to be able to work well with their counterparts in municipalities and other counties as well as with officials in federal and state government. Understanding, developing, and maintaining effective intergovernmental relationships can determine whether a county meets its future goals.

County commissioners should strive to develop good working relationships with their state legislators and members of Congress. To foster these relationships, counties and county interests are represented at both the federal and state levels by professional organizations, including the National Association of Counties and, in the state of Georgia, the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

At the federal level, the National Association of Counties (NACo) serves Georgia counties and their peers across the nation. NACo was created in 1935 to give county officials a strong voice in the nation's capital and continues to fulfill that role. Membership is voluntary, and dues are based on population. NACo's membership includes counties from across the United States and represents three-quarters of all counties and over 85 percent of the nation's population.[1] NACo describes itself in the following way:

> NACo is based on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., and is a full-service organization that provides an extensive line of services including legislative, research, and technical as well as public affairs assistance to its members. The association acts as a liaison with other levels of government, works to improve public understanding of counties, serves as a national advocate for counties and provides them with resources to help them find innovative methods to meet the challenges they face.[2]

At the state level, the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) represents Georgia's 159 counties. ACCG is a Georgia non-profit corporation, begun in 1914 in Athens with 19 charter member counties. ACCG's mission is to serve as the consensus-building, training, membership services, civic engagement, and legislative advocacy organization for Georgia's county governments. ACCG brings Georgia counties together on matters of public policy that have special impact on local governments.

In order to properly develop membership consensus, both NACo and ACCG utilize a policy development process that draws upon the active participation of each organization's membership—rural, suburban, and urban county government officials from both the elected and appointed ranks. Once formally adopted by the memberships, these platforms are the basis for the lobbying work of the organizations' professional staff, elected board of managers, and statewide membership.

ACCG considers the policy development process to be one of its core responsibilities. The association's policy system has six standing committees: General County Government, Economic Development and Transportation, Health and Human Services, Public Safety and the Courts, Revenue and Finance, and Natural Resources and Environment. This process is officially initiated with the appointment of committee officers and members by the ACCG president. Both elected and appointed county government officials are encouraged to actively participate in this policy process. Deliberations at committee meetings are open, and a free exchange of ideas is encouraged. Each committee sets its agenda following the appointment process in May of each year. The level of detail in the agenda dictates the frequency of meetings throughout the summer and early fall. Committees finalize their work typically by early September. The recommendations from all six committees are then distributed to the entire ACCG membership in draft form for review prior to the Legislative Leadership Conference (typically conducted in early October). Before the Legislative Leadership Conference in the fall, the ACCG Policy Council considers comments from the general membership and resolves any incongruities from the recommendations received from the six policy committees. The proposed county platform is then presented to the full association membership at the Legislative Leadership Conference. Each county, having an equal vote, votes to adopt or reject the policy recommendations that are developed. The county platform is the result of that final vote.[3]

RELATIONS WITH STATE GOVERNMENT

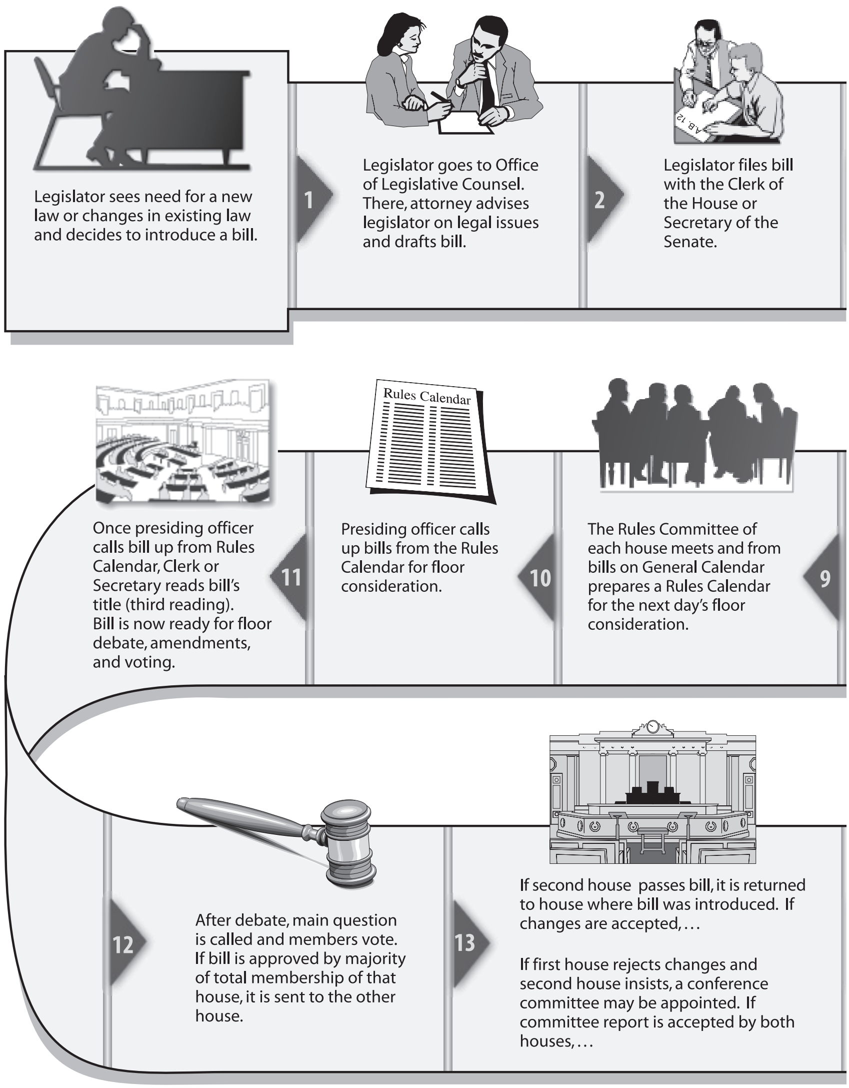
The Legislature

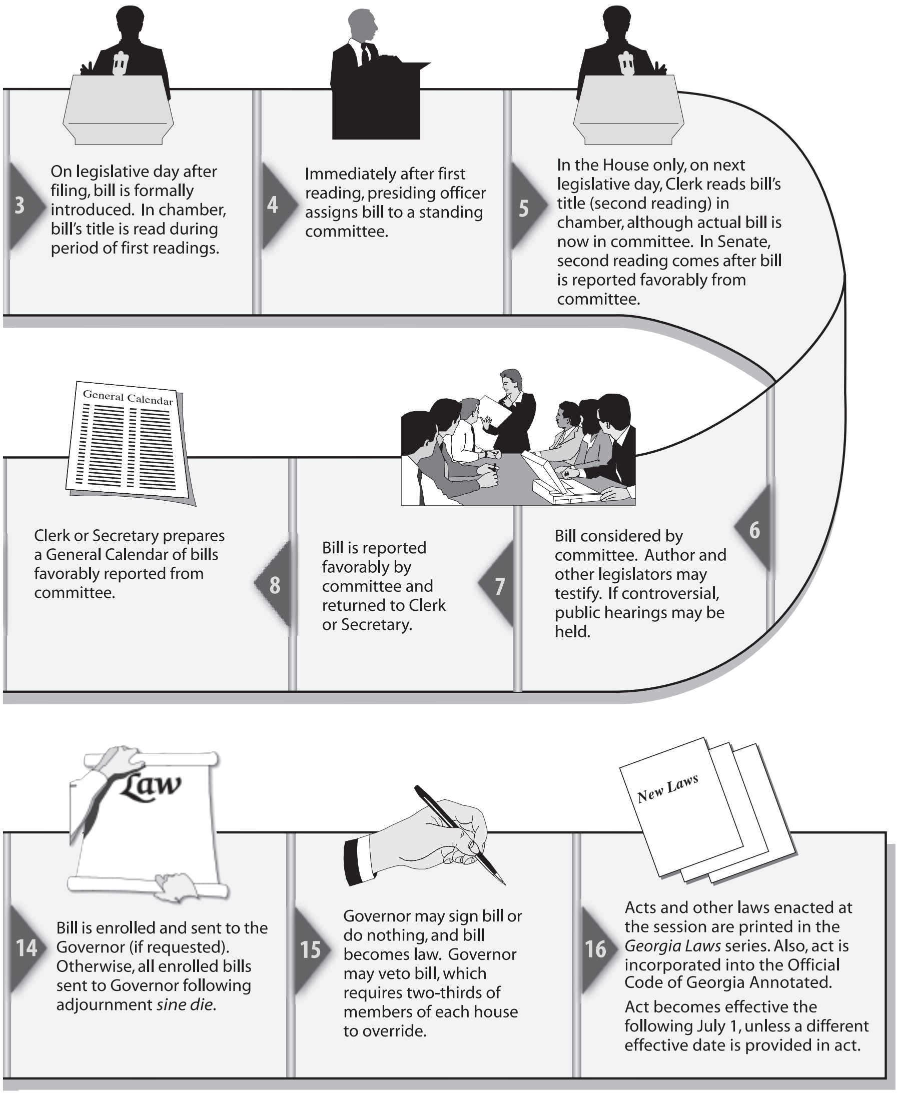
The Georgia General Assembly convenes annually on the second Monday in January for its 40-day legislative session to adopt the state budget and to address legislation and resolutions introduced each session. State legislators are elected for a two-year term of office, a period known as a biennium. The first session is held in odd-numbered years, and the concluding session of the biennium, in even years. Legislative matters pending at the end of the first session can be carried over to the second. Any business still pending at the end of the second session dies, however.[4] Should important matters arise between regular legislative sessions, the governor may call the General Assembly back into special session. In recent decades, most special sessions have been called to deal with legislative and congressional reapportionment or with state budget crises. To convene a special session, the governor issues an executive proclamation stating the subjects to be considered. The decision to call a special session is not subject to review by the courts, and there is no limit as to how many subjects may be included in the proclamation.[5]

All legislation introduced in the Georgia General Assembly is classified as either a bill or a resolution. The word bill refers to proposed legislation. A resolution is similar to a bill but may not have the force of law, depending on the subject matter and intent of the legislature. A bill becomes an act, law, or statute when it passes both houses in identical form and is signed by the governor, becomes law without the governor's signature, or is passed despite the governor's veto.[6]

The effective date for a general bill passed at a regular session of the General Assembly is the following July 1, unless a specific date was provided for in the legislation. Often, a general bill will specify that it shall become effective upon approval of the governor or upon its becoming law without approval (see Figure 24-1).[7]

Figure 24-1. *How a Bill Becomes Law*




3
On legislative day after filing, bill is formally introduced. In chamber, bill's title is read during period of first readings.
4
Immediately after first reading, presiding officer assigns bill to a standing committee.
5
In the House only, on next legislative day, Clerk reads bill's title (second reading) in chamber, although actual bill is now in committee. In Senate, second reading comes after bill is reported favorably from committee.
6
Bill considered by committee. Author and other legislators may testify. If controversial, public hearings may be held.
7
Bill is reported favorably by committee and returned to Clerk or Secretary.
8
General Calendar
Clerk or Secretary prepares a General Calendar of bills favorably reported from committee.
Law
14
Bill is enrolled and sent to the Governor (if requested). Otherwise, all enrolled bills sent to Governor following adjournment *sine die*.
15
Governor may sign bill or do nothing, and bill becomes law. Governor may veto bill, which requires two-thirds of members of each house to override.
New Laws
16
Acts and other laws enacted at the session are printed in the *Georgia Laws* series. Also, act is incorporated into the Official Code of Georgia Annotated.
Act becomes effective the following July 1, unless a different effective date is provided in act.

Many bills that are introduced ultimately have an impact (fiscal or otherwise) on county governments. Counties must often provide mandated services that are solely funded by local property taxes and other local revenues. In other cases, required services may be funded by combined financial commitments from both state and local governments. These services include criminal prosecution and punishment, indigent legal defense, mental health/mental retardation and substance abuse care, environmental management, cooperative extension service, and transportation infrastructure. It is therefore very important that state legislators hear from county commissioners regarding the potential effect of a proposed bill on the county.

Legislation is often introduced as the result of a specific issue raised by a state legislator's constituents. County commissioners should be among a state legislator's most important constituents. Whether a county's needs at the state level are legislative or financial, county commissioners should not underestimate the benefits of having an effective working relationship with state legislators. While ACCG will communicate counties' positions on issues, it is vitally important that legislators hear directly from the voters in their home districts, especially county commissioners and other community leaders (see Table 24-1). Being able to clearly explain a situation and why it needs a legislative remedy will increase the chances of getting desired legislation introduced and adopted, especially

Table 24-1. *Effective Lobbying at the State Level*

Input from county commissions and staff can broaden the scope of information that legislators typically receive. As ACCG advises, "Remember to develop an ongoing rapport with members of your legislative delegation. Remind your legislators that county officials and ACCG/NACo are among the very few sources of information where a legislator can learn about the impact of legislation on an entire community."

When speaking to legislators about issues, always remember that your presentation matters and can be quite influential as long as you remember a few key rules:

- Be brief and succinct. Don't tell them how to build a watch; tell them what time it is.
- Stay on point. Don't clutter the message with extraneous information.
- Maintain lots of contacts. Develop and utilize networks.
- Public opinion affects legislative opinion. Set your priorities accordingly.
- Honesty is not the best policy: It is the only policy.
- Remember, today's opponent may be tomorrow's ally. You might be angry, but act professionally; otherwise, you will diminish your effectiveness. Don't burn bridges.
- Thank your legislators for the good things they do. Complaints not balanced by appreciation can wear thin over time. Take time to say thank you.
- Use the golden rule as your guide. Treat your legislators as you would like to be treated when it comes to issues of public importance.

Sources: Lobbying the Legislature (ACCG); NACo Lobbying Techniques (NACo).

if commissioners have maintained ongoing communication and a good working relationship with their legislative delegation.

During each session, the General Assembly considers many bills that are referred to as local legislation. A local act is a legislative measure that applies to a specific county, city, or special district named in the act. Such acts are commonly used to alter forms of government, create local authorities or special districts, create cities, change city boundaries, and make other changes that apply only to the political subdivision named in the act.[8]

Perhaps the General Assembly's single most important function each session is to authorize funding for all agencies and programs of state government. Although appropriations acts are passed in the same way as legislative statutes, there are differences. For one thing, statutes continue in effect until repealed, amended, or overruled as unconstitutional. Appropriations acts, however, are valid only during the fiscal year for which they are enacted. A second difference is that, unlike statutes, appropriation acts are not incorporated into the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.).[9]

According to Georgia's constitution, "the General Assembly shall annually appropriate those state and federal funds necessary to operate all various departments and agencies." No money can be drawn from the state treasury unless appropriated by law. Every appropriation must expire at the end of the fiscal year for which it was enacted.[10]

In Georgia, the budgetary process leading to a general appropriations act is a year-round process involving both executive and legislative branches (see Table 24-2). During the fall, the governor meets with state agency heads to give them a chance to explain their budget request for the coming fiscal year. Prior to the legislative session, department heads also present their budget requests before the appropriations committees of the House and Senate. The constitution requires the governor to present to the General Assembly within five days of its convening each year an annual budget message, a detailed report on the financial condition of the state, and the draft of a general appropriations act for the next fiscal year.[11]

Once the legislature enacts a new state budget, the governor has extensive authority in its implementation, with broad powers and responsibilities over how state agencies spend their funds. Many observers of state government consider budgetary power to be the governor's single most important power. To help with this responsibility, a full-time agency, the Office of Planning and Budget, exists within the governor's office.[12]

Table 24-2. *The Budget Cycle in Georgia*

Activity	Date
Budget request instructions to agencies	June
Agencies prepare budget requests	July
Budget requests submitted to Office of Planning and Budget (OPB)	September
OPB analyzes requests	October–November
OPB presents initial recommendations to the governor	November
Governor meets with agency heads on budget	November–December
Final budget decisions	December–January
Budget document sent to General Assembly	January
Legislative appropriations process	January–March
Appropriations bill to governor for action	February–April
Operating budget instructions to agencies	April
Agencies prepare annual operating budgets	April
Operating budgets approved by OPB	May–June
OPB monitors allotments and expenditures	July

The Internet is an excellent resource for researching various legislative issues. There are numerous Web sites specific to Georgia issues, law, and regulations. As a service to ACCG members, the organization's Web site (www.accg.org) tracks key issues and has links to many state government entities, including www.georgia.gov, which is perhaps the most comprehensive link to virtually all aspects of Georgia state government. It links to the governor's office and allows access to daily legislative activity and legislation being considered by the Georgia General Assembly as well as to archives containing bills that were considered in previous sessions. It also links to regional, county, and municipal Web sites as well as state regulatory agency sites.

The Executive Branch

The links to Georgia's regulatory agencies, which are a part of the executive branch of state government, can be especially helpful to county commissioners and their staff. Local officials should not only work with state legislators but also understand how state regulatory agencies and their governing boards operate. Since these boards typically meet monthly to create policies, promulgate rules, and take actions that can affect the operations of a county, it is crucial for county commissioners and key appointed county staff to know and communicate with appropriate state agency personnel and board members.

Administrative and regulatory agencies are created to address specific issue areas (such as the environment, transportation, and health care), and in many instances, their charge is to interpret how the laws passed by the legislative branch are to be implemented. In other words, the legislature may delegate to regulators the power to create the criteria that will allow a law to go from theory into practice, of course staying within the bounds established in law by legislators. If regulatory agencies exceed their rule-making authority, new rules and regulations may face possible court challenges.

State boards, such as those overseeing the Department of Transportation, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Community Affairs, and the Department of Community Health, regularly take actions that have the force of law and that affect local government significantly. Most state agency board members are political appointees who do not answer directly to a voting constituency. Commissioners and county government staff should regularly give input to state agency board members regarding issues that may impact counties.

RELATIONS WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Unfunded Mandates, Devolution, and Preemption

During the past three decades, there have been significant reductions in federal program assistance (fiscal and technical) for local governments that negatively impact the relationship between federal, state, and local governments. Further eroding successful intergovernmental relations are the adoption of new unfunded federal mandates, the establishment of devolution as a federal policy, and the increased federal preemption of local home rule.

Unfunded mandates are directives from one level of government—federal or state—to another level of government (typically local). Local governments begin to feel the full impact of these mandates when federal revenue sharing and other federal grant-in-aid programs are either eliminated or drastically cut. Measures have been taken to provide for closer federal agency scrutiny of the fiscal impacts of proposed federal legislation and regulations in order to restrict the adoption of new unfunded mandates.[13] Over the past decade, responsibility for public programs that were federally mandated and federally funded has increasingly been returned to state and local governments. This process is known as federal government devolution. In principle, devolution signified a return to the original spirit and intent of the U.S. Constitution, returning responsibility for public programs to states and communities, since local government is the level of government closest to the people. In practice, however, devolution has meant passing the responsibility for operating public programs and, inadvertently or not, the responsibility to fund such programs to local governments. While home rule is vital to local governments, it is difficult for counties and municipalities to assume additional financial responsibilities for programs devolved from higher levels of government. Counties have worked to limit the devolution phenomenon whenever it has presented local responsibility for programs without the necessary funding.

How preemption works can best be seen through the process of national legislation and federal court decisions taking precedence over "traditional" local authority and decision making. The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act is an example of the federal legislative system taking actions that are detrimental to the local land-use decision-making process.[14] This act limits the ability of local governments to proscribe the siting of religious organization facilities and thus preempts local input into a local land-use matter.

With the federal government actively involved in the passage of legislation that affects local governments and with the ability of local governments to seek annual federal appropriations assistance, it is imperative that local officials maintain contact with congressional delegation members. Although it is more difficult to maintain the same level of communication with Congress and the federal executive branch than it is with state government, maintaining contact at the federal level is vital. Utilizing the lobbying service of NACo is one means of keeping current with the issues under consideration in Washington, D.C. In addition, through Web sites such as www.naco.org or thomas.loc.gov, local officials can keep abreast of information on federal government issues. Whether visiting members of Congress in their district offices in Georgia or in Washington, local officials should follow several important guidelines (see Table 24-3).

How Congress Can Help: Financial Assistance

Through the federal appropriations process, Congress directs funding to numerous county and local governments for a wide variety of projects. There are several opportunities that local governments could pursue.

Commerce, Justice, and Science

The Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill is a broad-based bill that funds many different federal departments and agencies.

Table 24-3. *How to Communicate with Congressional Offices*

Before meeting with your U.S. senator, representative, or his or her staff, it is important to have a thorough understanding of the major aspects of any issue, project, or financial request for which you are seeking assistance. If possible, bring background material and a brief white paper outlining the request. Prepare answers to potential questions if you are seeking financial assistance. Be prepared to explain the alternatives that have been examined, the level of support the project enjoys, and the resources the county will contribute. If you are instead communicating a specific position about an issue that needs a federal legislative remedy, you should thoroughly understand the issue in order to be able to communicate what the local impact will be if your position is (or is not) supported at the federal government level.

Understanding how a congressional office functions and having strong relationships with key staff is vital. Generally, the Washington, D.C., office has legislative staff, and the district and state offices have staff who focus on constituent services, such as helping with federal benefits and assistance with federal agencies.

For purposes of acquiring federal appropriations, county officials should interact with the Washington, D.C., staff. The Washington office of a House member typically includes 8 to 10 people, and a senator's office can have as many as 30 staff members, depending on the size of the state. The Washington staff typically consists of a chief of staff, legislative director, several legislative assistants, legislative correspondent, press secretary, scheduler, and staff assistant. The chief of staff oversees both the administrative and political operations of the office. The legislative director monitors the legislative schedule and works to implement the member's overall agenda. Legislative assistants each focus on a set of specific policy issues (e.g., health care, defense, environment, etc.). Legislative correspondents respond to constituent inquiries on policy matters. The press secretary oversees communication between the member and the media and public. The scheduler prepares a daily minute-by-minute schedule for the member and establishes the travel arrangements. The staff assistant performs general support duties.

Maintaining contact with the district offices of congressional members is also beneficial. These offices maintain daily contact with the Washington, D.C., office and are the local "eyes and ears" for members of Congress. The district offices typically concentrate on specific constituent services that members of Congress can assist with at the federal level, such as tracking down missing federal assistance payments—like Social Security checks for example. In addition, the offices maintain staff members who regularly attend policy issue meetings within the member's district. These staff members are very close to their congressional member and typically accompany him or her on travels within the district.

When meeting in Washington, D.C., be flexible. Every effort will be made to arrange a meeting between a county official and the particular member of Congress or the Senate. Unfortunately, due to the unpredictable congressional schedule, you may find yourself meeting with staff only—and sometimes in a hallway—but take advantage of the opportunity. Meeting with staff can, in many cases, be as important as meeting with your U.S. senator or representative. The representative or senator will be fully apprised of your visit and issues of concern. Congressional staff members play a vital role in the process, and members are heavily dependent upon them for input and advice.

After the meeting, follow up with a brief note. In the note, review the topics discussed and outline next steps. Also use the note as an opportunity to answer any questions that were left unanswered during the meeting. Finally, thank the legislator and staff for their time and attention.

The most applicable sections for counties are the Justice Department accounts covering areas such as violent crime reduction, community-oriented policing services, and juvenile justice. Through the Bureau of Justice Enforcement, the Commerce, Justice, and Science bill funds programs to address violent crime. Competition for these funds is fierce and often requires an innovative approach to reducing violent crime. The community-oriented policing services program has traditionally helped communities meet their law enforcement needs by providing law enforcement equipment, mobile emergency communication systems, 911 infrastructure, and public safety programs. Any funds secured in this account through a congressional earmark would be in addition to funds secured through the discretionary grant application process. In the past, the Commerce, Justice, and Science bill has included funding for specific juvenile justice programs around the nation that include after-school programs, innovative partnerships, and many juvenile rehabilitation programs.

Energy and Water

Included in the Energy and Water appropriations bill is funding for the Army Corps of Engineers. These funds are most often directed toward the maintenance of water systems and waterways. The corps is involved in many projects, including harbor deepening, seawall construction and restoration, ecosystem restoration, and shore protection. As with other federal programs, the corps requires specific authorization from Congress to proceed on such projects, which generally means that a project takes two years to initiate: one year to secure congressional authorization and a second year to secure funding. The other main account within this bill is the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy account under the Department of Energy. This account funds projects that enhance the nation's energy productivity through means such as biomass and biorefinery systems; solar, wind, and hydropower technologies; weatherization activities; and enhanced green building technologies.

Interior and Environment

Several accounts in the Interior and Environment bill are important to counties, but one in particular is much more popular than the others. Each year, the Interior and Environment bill has included funding for wastewater and storm water infrastructure needs in the State and Tribal Assistance Grant account, which is under the jurisdiction of the Environmental Protection Agency. This account has become highly competitive in the past few years and is typically one of the most requested sources of federal appropriations funding.

Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education

The Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Departments appropriation bill is the largest of the annual domestic appropriations bills and provides some opportunities that warrant consideration. Within the Department of Labor, funds are routinely set aside for local job training and other workforce demonstrations that may involve activities such as youth employment, worker retraining, welfare-to-work, or reemployment efforts aimed at reducing recidivism. Within the Department of Health and Human Services, funds are available for the construction and renovation of health care facilities, which can encompass capital expenditures related to a wide variety of facilities such as counseling centers and public clinics. There are also opportunities to seek funds for demonstrating innovative proposals to provide improved health services to county residents. In the Department of Education, identified funds can frequently be obtained for a variety of educational undertakings, including distance-learning activities and after-school children's programs. Counties may be interested in pursuing such opportunities in conjunction with area schools or as part of a separate adult education effort.

Transportation and Housing and Urban Development

Each year, Congress must approve a transportation appropriations bill that funds the activities of federal transportation agencies as well as investments in local transportation infrastructure, including buses, intelligent transportation systems, ferry boats and ferry terminal facilities, airports, railways, and roads and bridges. Funding for buses and bus facilities is a common element in federal action plans for counties. Because the funds can be used to acquire buses, shuttle buses, and bus-related facilities, many specific projects are identified in this account. Every local government can use this funding to offset local funding currently obligated for this purpose. Securing an individual line item for a project in the appropriations bill under this account would complement any pending grant applications in the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Intelligent transportation systems programs have also become popular in the past several years, with many counties seeking funds for signal coordination and prioritization as well as installation of variable message signs. Intelligent transportation systems are designed to apply high-technology solutions to the everyday problems of traffic. Examples include the use of remotely controlled traffic signals to direct the flow of traffic during heavy congestion and the use of variable message signs alerting motorists and residents to changes in traffic patterns, as in the case of hurricane evacuations.

Another notable account funds road, highway, and bridge projects. The Transportation, Community, and System Preservation account funds projects that increase transportation efficiency, minimize environmental impacts, and encourage community development while providing a sustainable transportation infrastructure in order to reduce the need for future investments.

In addition to transportation, the bill includes funding for Economic Development Initiative grants. These grants fund project such as land acquisition for public use and the rehabilitation and/or construction of parks, community centers, and museums. There must be a demonstrated overall economic development component to the projects funded. Typically these grants are directed toward locations that are underdeveloped or economically distressed or to projects that benefit low- and moderate-income persons.

Annual Federal Appropriations Process

Each year, Congress passes and the president signs 12 appropriations bills that make up the federal budget. For each of these, several steps must be taken before the legislation becomes law (see Table 24-4).

Even though the process should be completed by September 30, the end of the fiscal year, there are relatively few deadlines imposed on Congress to force compliance. In short, it is a dynamic and fluid series of events that change each year and vary among the 12 appropriations committee subcommittees. In some years, the process extends into October, possibly even December. It is important to note, however, that in an election year the process generally follows the earlier dates, leaving members of Congress more time to campaign.

Presidential Budget Submission. The president initiates the appropriations process by submitting his budget to the Congress on the first Monday in February. The president's budget is the result of months of discussions between the federal agencies and the Office of Management and Budget and reflects the president's views on federal revenues and expenditures.

Subcommittee Hearings (House and Senate). Shortly after the president submits a budget, staff members of the 12 appropriation subcommittees, in both the House and Senate, begin to closely review the document for

Table 24-4. *The Federal Appropriations Process*

Activity	Approximate Date
Presidential budget submission	Early February
Subcommittee hearings (House and Senate)	February–April
Budget resolution	By April 15
Subcommittee allocations	April–May
Subcommittee approval (House and Senate)	April–July
Full committee approval (House and Senate)	May–July
House passage	June–September
Senate passage	June–September
House-Senate conference committee meeting	September
House passage of conference report	September
Senate passage of conference report	September
Presidential signature (if vetoed, the process repeats)	By September 30 (but may be extended)

changes in budget or policy. After reviewing the president's budget, each subcommittee holds a series of hearings to gather input from the federal agencies and the public. The number and length of hearings varies with each subcommittee. Some limit hearings to as little as two weeks while others conduct hearings for months. These hearings often take place February through April.

Budget Resolution (House and Senate). According to the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Act of 1974, as amended, the Congress should pass a budget resolution by April 15, which establishes aggregate revenue and expenditure levels for the federal government. The act prohibits House or Senate consideration of any revenue or appropriations bill until the budget resolution is adopted by the Congress, or May 15, whichever is earlier.

Subcommittee Allocations or 302(b)s (House and Senate). Following adoption of the budget resolution, the appropriations committee allocates the budget among the 12 subcommittees. The overall amount of spending is referred to as the 302(a), which references §302(a) of the 1974 act. The amount allocated to each of the subcommittees is referred to as the 302(b), which references §302(b) of the 1974 act. In April or May, the full appropriations committee meets to approve allocation of the 302(b) levels.

Subcommittee Approval (House and Senate). After subcommittee hearings are held, the staff reviews the testimony presented and prepares recommendations to the subcommittee chairperson. Following discussions with the staff, the chairperson presents his or her recommendations, known as the Chairman's Mark, to the subcommittee at a meeting known as a markup. The subcommittee members offer amendments to the Chairman's Mark and give approval to the document. The subcommittee markup often takes place April through July.

Full Committee Approval (House and Senate). Following approval by the subcommittee, the bill and its accompanying report are drafted and printed for distribution to the members of the committee. The entire committee thereafter meets to discuss the subcommittee's version of the bill and make changes as desired. The full committee markup often takes place May through July.

Full House and Senate Approval. Once the appropriations committees have approved the legislation, it is forwarded to the full House or Senate for consideration by the entire body. By tradition, the House considers the bill first and sends the measure to the Senate, where the entire text is deleted and replaced with that approved by the Senate appropriations committee. Approval by the chambers often takes place June through September.

House-Senate Conference Committee. Following approval of a bill by the House and Senate, a committee is appointed to negotiate the differences between the two versions. The negotiators, known as conferees, are usually the members of the appropriations subcommittee in which the measure originated. Upon reaching agreement, the final bill, known as the conference report, is drafted. Conference committees usually meet in September.

Full House and Senate Approval of the Conference Report. After approval by the conference committee, the conference report is sent to the House and Senate for final approval. Debate on the conference report is conducted under very narrow rules allowing for virtually no amendments. Passage of the conference report by the House and Senate often takes place in September.

Presidential Signature. Once the House and Senate each approve an identical conference report, it is forwarded to the president to be signed into law, usually in September or October.

Maintaining a strong federal and state government relationship is vitally important. Whether seeking legislative remedies, regulatory relief, appropriations assistance, or some other matter, the reality will always remain that county governments must strive to work with federal and state governments. There are numerous ways to succeed in this task, including becoming involved in professional organizations such as ACCG and NACo. Those county officials who strive to maintain relationships with the state and federal government will ultimately benefit.

NOTES

1. NACo overview at www.naco.org.
2. Ibid.
3. 2009 ACCG County Platform.
4. Edwin L. Jackson, Mary E. Stakes, and Paul T. Hardy, *Handbook for Georgia Legislators*, 12th ed. (Athens: Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, 2001), 59.
5. Ibid., 61–62.
6. Ibid., 101.
7. Ibid., 193–94.
8. Ibid., 109.
9. Ibid., 134.
10. Ibid., 135.
11. Ibid., 138.
12. Ibid., 139.
13. 2 United States Code Annotated (U.S.C.A.) §1501 et seq., Pub. L. 104-4. A national initiative was undertaken in the early 1990s by NACo, with strong support from organizations such as ACCG, to drastically curtail adoption of new unfunded mandates. This initiative culminated with the approval of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995.
14. Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000, 42 U.S.C.A. §2000cc et seq.