

# **Report on Anchorage Assembly Representation at the 2025 NACo Legislative Conference, Washington D.C. - Prepared by G. Martinez, March 2025**

## **Executive Summary**

The 2025 National Association of Counties (NACo) Legislative Conference provided timely insights into technology modernization, disaster preparedness, economic development, tribal relations, rural infrastructure, housing policy, and public safety.

While federal programs remain a key resource, many county leaders expressed concerns about shifting federal priorities, evolving executive orders, and the unpredictability of long-term federal support. One central discussion area was disaster preparedness and emergency response, particularly in preemptive housing policy. Rather than addressing housing shortages based on current and projected needs, Anchorage must adopt a disaster response lens, recognizing that housing instability is a key vulnerability in any emergency scenario.

This report summarizes key takeaways, identifies action items, and highlights strategies for securing Anchorage's interests in a dynamic federal landscape.

## **Conference Sessions and Key Takeaways**

### **Technology and Innovation**

#### ***NACo Technology Innovation Forum & Reception***

- Key Points: Cybersecurity, AI governance, broadband expansion, and IT modernization were discussed. Federal funding remains available, but counties must prepare for potential policy shifts that could alter grant structures and federal technology initiatives.
- Potential Actions for Anchorage:
  - Establish a Cybersecurity Task Force to mitigate vulnerabilities and reduce reliance on uncertain federal assistance.
  - Pursue state and private sector partnerships for broadband expansion to hedge against shifting federal funding priorities.
  - Develop a federal monitoring system to track policy changes impacting digital infrastructure.
  - Advocate for legislative clarity on AI governance and cybersecurity compliance for county governments.

#### ***Telecommunications & Technology Policy Steering Committee Meeting***

- Key Points: Broadband expansion and digital equity remain key national priorities, but federal priorities could shift under new executive directives.
- Potential Actions for Anchorage:
  - Strengthen local investment strategies for broadband expansion to reduce dependence on federal support.
  - Develop contingency planning for IT modernization in case of federal policy reversals.
  - Enhance regional partnerships to align with state and private funding sources.

## **Disaster Preparedness, Emergency Response, and Housing**

### ***Disaster Response Training***

- Key Points:
  - Preemptive action is critical to mitigating disaster impacts.
  - Many federal emergency relief programs remain in flux due to shifting executive orders and administrative priorities.
  - Housing shortages dramatically worsen disaster response challenges, requiring a new preemptive housing framework.
  - Zoning reform and incentives must prioritize disaster-resilient housing development.
- Potential Actions for Anchorage:
  - Implement preemptive emergency mitigation policies, including zoning reform, infrastructure reinforcements, and streamlined permitting for rapid post-disaster reconstruction.
  - Establish a Disaster Housing Task Force to develop policies ensuring Anchorage can rapidly house displaced residents after an emergency.
  - Incentivize resilient housing development through tax credits, streamlined approvals, and partnerships with private developers.
  - Advocate for permanent federal disaster housing funding and ensure compliance with evolving federal emergency regulations.

- Expand community-based emergency training programs to educate residents and businesses.
- Monitor federal housing policies closely, particularly regarding FEMA and HUD disaster response funding, to ensure Anchorage remains eligible for support.
- Strengthen public-private partnerships to develop non-federal emergency response housing strategies.

### ***New Housing Model: Flipping the Framework***

- Traditionally, housing development has been based on shortages for current and projected needs.
- This model fails in the face of disaster, where emergency displacement exacerbates shortages and demands immediate large-scale housing solutions.
- New Approach: Anchorage must build housing not just for today's needs but for disaster readiness, ensuring a stockpile of adaptive, resilient, and rapidly deployable housing units.
- Zoning reform and incentives must prioritize:
  - Pre-permitted accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and modular housing that can be rapidly deployed in emergencies.
  - Mixed-income, high-density developments that include emergency housing provisions.
  - Building code updates that emphasize disaster resilience.

### **Economic and Community Development**

#### ***Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities (BRECC) Forum***

- Key Points: Workforce retraining and economic diversification are key to resilience, but federal funding remains uncertain.
- Potential Actions for Anchorage:
  - Secure federal workforce transition grants, while developing state and private alternatives.

- Develop a Green Energy Workforce Training Initiative adaptable to shifting federal energy policies.
- Advocate for multi-year economic development commitments from federal agencies.

### ***Leveraging the Arts to Promote Community and Economic Development***

- Key Points: Creative industries are critical economic drivers, but federal cultural funding remains volatile.
- Potential Actions for Anchorage:
  - Establish an Anchorage Arts District supported by state and private investment.
  - Develop a Cultural Economy Grant Program that does not solely rely on federal grants.
  - Monitor federal arts funding trends to advocate for sustained cultural investment.

### **Tribal and Rural Relations**

- National Association of Native County Leaders and Allies (NANCLA) Meeting
- Key Points: Tribal funding and governance policies often shift with executive orders, requiring continuous advocacy.
- Potential Actions for Anchorage:
  - Strengthen tribal-municipal partnerships to ensure local control over shared economic initiatives.
  - Advocate for long-term federal funding commitments for tribal economic development.
  - Develop state-backed tribal economic partnerships to create alternative funding streams.

### **Recommendations and Action Plan**

Given the concerns about shifting federal policies and funding priorities, Anchorage should take a cautiously optimistic approach. It should consider securing local resilience while actively monitoring federal changes and advocating for policy stability.

### **Short-Term (0-6 months)**

1. Develop a Federal Policy Monitoring Team to track executive orders and funding shifts.
2. Implement preemptive disaster mitigation strategies, including zoning reform for disaster-responsive housing.
3. Strengthen broadband and cybersecurity strategies with state and private investments.
4. Establish local and state-backed economic initiatives to reduce federal funding dependence.

### **Mid-Term (6-12 months)**

5. Advocate for long-term funding stability through congressional engagement.
6. Expand emergency response training and compliance efforts.
7. Develop adaptable Green Energy Workforce Training programs.
8. Institutionalize diversity and equity policies beyond federal mandates.

### **Long-Term (12+ months)**

9. Reduce reliance on federal economic funding through international partnerships.
10. Strengthen local governance and tribal economic relations.
11. Enhance Anchorage's creative economy through private investment.
12. Ensure sustainable, locally-driven development strategies.

By taking these steps, Anchorage can maximize opportunities while safeguarding against federal uncertainty, ensuring resilient economic growth, technological advancement, and effective governance.

### **Potential Next Steps:**

- Engage with state leaders, private sector partners, and federal representatives to secure support.
- Launch the Disaster Responsive Housing Task Force and draft preemptive zoning reforms.