

**Report of 2006 Washington Policy Conference
National Association of Regional Councils
February 5-7, 2006**

George Kloeppe, Executive Director

LCOG Chair Gary Williams and Executive Director George Kloeppe represented LCOG at NARC's Policy Conference in Washington. Mayor Williams had been appointed in November to the board of the National Association, and Kloeppe serves as a member of NARC's Executive Directors Committee. Both bodies held meetings at the conference.

Approximately 170 people, representing regional councils and metropolitan planning organizations, attended the conference, which was held at Washington's Omni Shoreham Hotel.

From George Kloeppe's perspective—Because Mayor Williams and I split up and attended different sessions, the following highlights are not intended to reflect Gary's perspective.

The Association's "Regional Futures Institute" sponsored a fascinating session featuring three east Texas councils of governments which were heavily involved in addressing their communities' needs after Hurricane Rita. We were offered verbal and visual descriptions of the reality of the devastation and the challenges to local government. All three COGs were asked to play major roles in meeting the immediate needs of local governments and their citizens. The point driven home was the importance of preparedness, not only at the local but the regional level. Another Sunday session provided a description of the organization and structure of the state associations of COGs in five states—Massachusetts, Ohio, Michigan, Florida, and Texas. Each of the examples offered portrayed a more mature and sophisticated state-level presence of regional councils than exists in Oregon. However, each was different from the next, and they ranged from regularly scheduled assemblies of elected leaders and modest pooled resources for support to free-standing associations with substantial budgets and independent staffs.

Also interesting and possibly worth notice here was the Conference Opening Reception Sunday evening. OK... It was a Super Bowl Reception with far too many people from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (Pittsburgh). But those of us from Washington and Oregon, along with a few diehard NFC fans from elsewhere in the country, did our best to support the best interests of the Seahawks.

Alas, the shirts, hats, balloons and other paraphernalia that we brought in were not sufficient to turn the tide. Maybe next year.

Monday was a very full day of plenary and concurrent sessions. Newly confirmed head of the Economic Development Administration, Assistant Secretary of Commerce Sandy Baruah, highlighted the value his agency would place on innovation, entrepreneurship and regional competitiveness. He described the advantages of collapsing the traditional boundaries between EDA programs and expanding the definition of what “regions” are. LCOG members may remember that Secretary Baruah has an Oregon background and, in fact, then chief of staff to the Assistant Secretary, personally came to our office a year and a half ago to present a \$500,000 EDA grant to increase the reach of our Revolving Loan Fund for businesses.

Much of my focus on Monday was on transportation, attending four separate sessions dealing with (1) USDOT’s rulemaking and the implementation of the new transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU; (2) the challenges of “multi-modalism;” (3) freight and goods movement; and (4) transportation finance. All of the sessions were extremely well done with knowledgeable people from the legislative and administrative levels, along with a variety of interest groups’ representatives.

The luncheon on Monday featured a very interesting presentation by R. David Paulison, Acting FEMA Director, Department of Homeland Security. I found Paulison knowledgeable (a veteran of years in the fire service, including Chief in Miami-Dade County) and articulate. He was fully prepared to admit that considerable change is needed in his agency, and he seemed like one who could catalyze such change.

Mayor Williams and I spent a long, but very interesting, morning on Capitol Hill on Tuesday. Meeting in the Rayburn House Office Building, we had an opportunity to hear from and interact with key staff from both the majority and the minority from Appropriations, Budget and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee of the House. Also present to brief us and respond to questions was Susan Brita, Staff Director (minority) Subcommittee on Economic Development. The highlight of the morning was a wide-ranging visit with Congressman James Oberstar who, with over thirty years in the Congress, is Ranking Minority Member of the House T& I Committee and a bedrock supporter of economic development.

As noted, both Mayor Williams and I also had separate obligations for meetings of the decision making structure of the Association. All in all, it was a very well orchestrated and useful conference.