

Bond Case Briefs

Municipal Finance Law Since 1971

NLC 2017 Congressional City Conference.

Every week leading up to the 2017 Congressional City Conference we'll feature a "Meet Your City Advocate" spotlight as part of a series introducing you to NLC's Federal Advocacy team. This week, I sat down with Brett Bolton, principal associate for finance & intergovernmental relations at National League of Cities.

Name: Brett Bolton

Area of expertise: Finance and Intergovernmental Relations

Hometown: Pensacola, Florida

Hey Brett, thanks for taking the time to do this interview with me. Why don't you share a little bit about your background and why you are passionate about cities?

I was born and raised in Pensacola, Florida - the Navy originally brought my mom's family down that way. I went to college in Birmingham, Alabama, and grad school in Tallahassee, Florida, before eventually making my way up to Washington. After school, I interned for Congressman Steve Southerland in his D.C. office. He represented Florida's second district - basically the area along the panhandle between Panama City and Tallahassee. I wound up getting a staff position as a legislative correspondent and stayed there for two years. After my time on the Hill, I lobbied for the state of Florida. Most of my work there focused on securing funding for the Everglades and building partnerships between the state and FEMA. And then I came to NLC.

Why am I interested in cities? Well, there are a couple of reasons. Hurricane Ivan hit Pensacola in 2005 and pretty much wiped out whole neighborhoods in the city. The storm and ensuing devastation were horrible, but it did bring together a lot of actors in the same room to discuss rebuilding. Local leaders helped play a role in creating a renaissance in the city, and today the downtown is booming and businesses are thriving. It made me proud to watch my hometown get back up on its feet after the worst had happened. More importantly, the whole experience sparked an interest in local politics for me.

Secondly, I happened to be finishing up a degree in public administration at Samford University in Alabama right as the surrounding Jefferson County entered into bankruptcy. At that time, it was the largest municipal bankruptcy filing, and I began following how local finance.

Right, so Birmingham's restructuring process really guided you into the world of municipal finance?

Yeah, it played a role for sure. It was an interesting process to watch as an MPA candidate. Honestly, working on Everglade issues also opened my eyes to how much a project's execution could be improved simply by infusing more local control and directing more money to local governments. When cities are given the directive and the resources, projects just get done faster, more efficiently and with better end results. I also realized that states and the federal government can be partners to cities, but cities often have to rely on their own financing capacity bridge the gap between what they need to do on a daily basis and what they have been provided.

Interesting. Along those lines, what do you think 2017 has in store for municipal finance?

Well, that's the million-dollar question right there. There's some uncertainty for sure, but I don't think we should expect any immediate or sudden changes in this lane. As you probably know, Speaker Ryan released a plan for tax reform in June, President Trump campaigned hard for corporate and personal tax reform, and Congressman Brady, the House chair of the Ways and Means Committee, says there will be a tax reform proposal. At the end of the day there are a lot of promises, but the fact of the matter remains that we haven't seen many details as of yet.

Nonetheless, this all leads me to believe some sort of tax policy proposals will happen, just maybe not this instant. That's what resolves us to keep pushing so hard to make sure city interests and voices are well heard at the table. We're out there, and we are pushing to make sure the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds is protected, that state and local tax deductions remain, and we're still working to get Chairman Goodlatte, from the House Judiciary Committee, to address marketplace fairness.

Sounds like a busy 2017. So what is your spirit city?

This is the hard one! Is it cheesy if I go with my hometown?

No, not at all!

You know what? I have to say Chicago here. I am a food fanatic and the city of broad shoulders has the best food in my opinion. Best steak, best pizza, best everything. It's a beautiful city with great people.

You ever go to the food festival?

No, never. I need to go, though!

[Join us at the 2017 Congressional City Conference](#) and meet Brett and the rest of your City Advocates.

About the author: Brian Egan is the Public Affairs Associate for NLC. Follow him on Twitter @BeegleME.