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Rural development program cuts would hurt counties, hamper economic growth

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Donald Larson, commissioner, Brookings County, S.D., today told a national forum that cuts in federal rural development programs would handcuff county governments during a most difficult period of declining local revenues and increased demand for public services.

Larson, who chairs the National Association of Counties (NACo) Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee, made his remarks during a Farm Foundation national forum, “Rural Development in a Time of Fiscal Constraints,” held June 14 at the National Press Club. [Click here to read full remarks.]

“Cuts in rural development coupled with more unfunded mandates on counties would make local rural development initiatives extremely difficult to plan and implement,” Larson said. “Counties are truly in a dire situation. Rural development efforts – the roads, water systems, broadband and the other key infrastructure necessary for economic growth – are in serious jeopardy.”

Larson also offered ideas for improving existing programs. He said the current structure of federal community and economic development programs for rural communities do not provide enough flexibility to encourage and assist communities with their regional economic development efforts. He said that NACo will continue to work with Congress and the Administration to protect and improve key rural development investments in the appropriations process and the upcoming reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

Larson emphasized the need for Congress and the Administration to work together in a bipartisan manner on rural development.

“As rural America loses legislative influence at the federal and state level with redistricting, it is important that rural advocates in Congress and the Administration work in a bipartisan manner to help these communities meet the current economic challenges,” said Larson. “NACo will stand with you in that effort.”

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The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation’s 3,068 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public’s understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit www.naco.org.