NEWS RELEASE

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County leaders, new video: federal policies matter to county government, residents
Vice President Biden to deliver remarks at NACo annual Legislative Conference

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Vice President Joe Biden, who began his political career as a New Castle County, Del. council member, on Monday, Feb. 23 is scheduled to address county officials at the National Association of Counties (NACo) annual Legislative Conference, which runs Feb. 21 – 25.

More than 1,500 county leaders are in Washington, D.C. to meet with members of the Administration and Congress on key issues like transportation, municipal bonds, healthcare, the environment and public lands. They are taking their message to Congress and the White House, emphasizing that federal policies matter to county government and county government matters to America.

“Counties and their residents feel the effects of countless decisions made in Washington,” said NACo President Riki Hokama, council member, Maui County, Hawaii. “We are here to work with our federal partners as their actions profoundly impact everyday Americans on the ground, where they live and work.”

In meetings with lawmakers and Administration officials, county leaders will outline a number of key federal policy priorities, including:

- preserving the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds
- fixing the Highway Trust Fund and passing a long-term surface transportation authorization bill
- ensuring full funding for the Payment in Lieu of Taxes and Secure Rural Schools programs
- enabling counties to collect existing sales taxes on remote and online sales
- creating a clear, workable definition of “waters of the U.S.”
- protecting the federal-state-local partnership for Medicaid, and
- supporting comprehensive immigration reform.

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Vice President Biden will speak Feb. 23 at 9 a.m. Other members of the Obama Administration who will participate in the conference include U.S. Secretary of Labor Thomas E. Perez; U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman; Jerry Abramson, director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs; Michael Botticelli, director of the White House Office of National Drug Policy; Ronald Davis, director of the Dept. of Justice’s Community Oriented Police Service and executive director of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing; and Thomas L. Tidwell, chief of the U.S. Forest Service.

Featured members of Congress will include House Committee on Natural Resources Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) and House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bill Shuster (R-Pa.).

On Tuesday, NACo will host two congressional briefings on Capitol Hill — “The Road Ahead for County Infrastructure: County Priorities for Transportation and Infrastructure Funding and Financing” and “All Health is Local: Medicaid and the Role of Counties in Local Health Systems.”

There are more than two dozen educational workshops featuring county officials and other leaders in the public, private and non-profit sectors. They will focus on topics like workforce and economic development; transportation and infrastructure; public health and safety; mental health and jails; and cybersecurity and technology.

In conjunction with the Legislative Conference, NACo launched an online video describing top federal policy priorities and why they matter to counties and residents.

“Decisions made by the White House, Congress and federal courts have a major, cascading impact on our ability to lead our communities and pursue a better future,” the video states.

From issues like transportation and infrastructure to health care and criminal justice, counties are on the front lines of serving communities. They own and maintain 45 percent of the nation’s road miles and nearly 40 percent of bridges. They are involved with a third of transit systems and airports nationwide. Each year, they invest more than $70 billion in justice and public safety and just as much in health care services.

At the same time, counties face many uncertainties at the federal level. Congress has continued to pass stopgap measures rather than long-term solutions for the nation’s transportation system. State and local governments have lost billions of dollars in uncollected sales tax revenue from online and remote sales. Key programs that support mandated county services around federal public lands in 62 percent of the nation’s counties are subjected to increasingly uncertain congressional funding.

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Potential federal reforms threaten the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds, the lifeblood for the nation’s public infrastructure, financing trillions of dollars for schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, ports, airports and other public works projects.

“Counties stand ready to strengthen our intergovernmental collaboration. We look forward to working with the Administration and leaders on Capitol Hill,” said Hokama. “Every level of government must work together to shape policies that improve the quality of life for all Americans.”

“Whether it’s building and maintaining infrastructure, providing essential services or fostering conditions for economic growth, America’s 3,069 county governments are working every day to build healthier, safer and more vibrant communities.”

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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 assists America’s 3,069 counties in pursuing excellence in public service to produce healthy, vibrant, safe and resilient counties. NACo promotes sound public policies, fosters county solutions and innovation, promotes intergovernmental and public-private collaboration and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. More information at: www.naco.org.