WASHINGTON, D.C. – Reauthorization of the farm bill, relief from unfunded mandates, and a renewed focus on rural healthcare and substance abuse are among the National Association of Counties’ (NACo) Rural Action Caucus (RAC) 2013 Legislative Priorities. These priorities are designed to help improve the lives of Americans living in rural communities.

RAC members adopted the priorities during the group’s annual meeting held Nov. 8-10 in St. Landry Parish, La. The purpose of the annual meeting is for leaders in county, parish and borough government to discuss the needs and concerns of the rural Americans they represent and decide how best to influence federal legislation, regulations and funding affecting rural people, businesses and communities. This year’s meeting was led by RAC Chair Doris Karloff, supervisor chair, Saunders County, Neb and hosted by the Police Jury Association of Louisiana and the Parishes of Evangeline, St. Landry and Rapides.

NACo’s 2013 Rural Action Caucus priorities include:

- relief from unfunded mandates;
- reauthorization of the farm bill with a focus on rural development;
- renewed focus on improving rural healthcare and substance abuse programs with a focus on rural veterans and youth;
- implementation of the key rural provisions of the Surface Transportation Law (MAP-21), and
- reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools & Self Determination Act and PILT, which are critical to communities with Public Lands.

Participants also provided input on NACo’s strategic planning process and discussed best practices, solutions and innovations that can be replicated by other rural communities, such as “smart justice” system reforms and food system improvements. Other issues discussed include the potential effects of sequestration – looming automatic, across-the-board federal spending reductions – and election results.

Participants toured a Cajun food processing plant and the Cameron International Facility, which is a global leader in the production of oil and gas drilling equipment, in Evangeline Parish and learned about the partnership between the Parish and these local businesses on job creation efforts. RAC members also toured the St. Landry Parish Solid Waste Biogas Facility. Key staff from the offices of Congressional members from Louisiana participated in the tour of the county solid waste facility and sat down with RAC members for a roundtable discussion on related issues.
NACo’s Rural Action Caucus is the voice for America’s rural counties in Washington. It is a bipartisan coalition of rural elected officials, who strive to enhance the quality of life in rural counties through effective federal legislation. The caucus is not only an advocacy arm of the organization, but also serves as the conduit for technical and programmatic assistance through the NACo County Solutions & Innovations Department. More information is available at www.naco.org.

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.