WASHINGTON, D.C. – Reauthorization of the farm bill with robust rural development funding, protecting the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds and opposing unfunded federal mandates were among the legislative priorities that member of the National Association of Counties’ (NACo) Rural Action Caucus (RAC) advanced before members of Congress and administration officials during “fly-in” advocacy effort, April 23-25, in Washington, D.C.

Each year, NACo’s Rural Action Caucus identifies the most pressing issues facing rural America and brings them to the attention of key administration officials and members of Congress. This year’s priority issues include:

- Relief from unfunded federal mandates, such as expansion of federal regulation under the Clean Water Act, which would burden rural taxpayers and counties with significant costs.
- Opposition to efforts to change the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds which are a well-established financing tool used by state and local governments for infrastructure and capital needs, such as the construction or improvement of schools, roads, highways, hospitals, bridges, water and sewer systems and ports.
- Reauthorization of the farm bill that supports mandatory funding for conservation, renewable energy, rural development and beginning farmers/ranchers programs.
- Securing federal funding for Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Forest Payments to Counties.
- Renewed focus on improving rural health and substance abuse programs with a focus on rural veterans and youth, including efforts to protect Medicaid and supporting the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant.

Another priority issue is support the Marketplace Fairness Act of 2013 which would grant state and local governments the ability to enforce already existing sales tax laws. It would also level the playing field between our local brick and mortar businesses with online retailers who generally have a competitive advantage because, in many cases, they are not required collect sales taxes. A vote in the Senate is expected this week.

A highlight of the RAC fly-in included a meeting with the co-chairs of the bipartisan Congressional Rural Caucus, Reps. Adrian Smith (R-Neb.) and Mike McIntyre (D-N.C.), to discuss bipartisan solutions to rural challenges and opportunities. RAC members also met with officials from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Transportation and had a dialogue with the White House Rural Council moderated by Agriculture Sec. Tom Vilsack.
RAC, chaired by Supervisor Doris M. Karloff, Saunders County, Neb., is a bipartisan coalition of rural elected officials from across the country striving to enhance the quality of life in rural counties through effective federal legislation. Nearly two-thirds of the nation’s 3,069 counties are designated as rural. County leaders from these rural areas are dedicated to solving many critical issues impacting rural life and development, including infrastructure development, broadband deployment, development of new rural clinics and hospitals, road and bridge construction and maintenance and business development opportunities.

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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 3,069 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.