



PANEL FOCUSES ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING AT CONFERENCE END **PG. 2**



NEBRASKA COUNTY FACES BANKRUPTCY **PG. 4**

ALGER COUNTY, MICH. EXPANDS JAIL, BUT NOT BUDGET **PG. 10**

Wildfires ravage 1 million acres

By **Mary Ann Barton**
senior staff writer

Deadly wildfires whipped by dry conditions, low humidity and high winds over several days, first reported March 6, killed seven people in five counties in Texas, Colorado, Oklahoma and Kansas.

In Texas, the largest of the blazes was spread across 400,000 acres in Lipscomb, Ochiltree and Gray counties, in the Texas Panhandle.

Lipscomb County Judge Willis Smith was monitoring reports about the fire March 6 from the regional planning commission when he realized

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The Armed Forces Color Guard and the U.S. Army Band brass quintet open NACo's 2017 Legislative Conference with the Presentation of the Colors and the *Star Spangled Banner*. A full report, plus photo coverage of the conference, begins on page 5. Photo by David Hathcox

ACA repeal, replacement raises concerns for counties

Counties could see some major shifts in the nation's health-care system under House legislation proposed to repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and replace it with the American Health Care Act (AHCA).

"Counties provide the local healthy safety net, and in many cases, are required by law to provide health care to those who can't afford it," said NACo Executive Director Matt Chase. "We strongly support reforms to make Medicaid even more efficient and focused on those with the greatest need, in-

cluding older adults, people with disabilities and children. Counties are working every day to reduce fraud, pursue innovative strategies and improve health conditions of its residents."

As NACo stated in a letter sent to House leaders in response to their request for input, counties are most concerned about structural changes to the nation's healthcare system, particularly to Medicaid that could shift federal and state costs to counties.

"We are concerned that the

House proposal could erode the federal-state-local partnership for Medicaid and result in local taxpayers picking up the tab for additional uncompensated care," Chase said.

Such changes could create a more challenging dynamic at the local level, because 42 states impose limitations on counties' ability to raise property tax rates and assessments, typically the primary source of revenue for counties. Additionally, counties are just

See **ACA REPEAL** page 3

Major changes for counties under Trump budget

By **Daria Daniel, Jack Peterson**
and **Eryn Hurley**
associate legislative directors

If enacted by Congress, President Donald Trump's proposed \$1.1 trillion FY18 budget would significantly impact the nation's counties. Trump's proposal, called the "skinny" budget, follows the tradition of first budgets from newly elected presidents that typically contain fewer details than a normal budget request — thus referred to as a "skinny" budget. It does not include the tax revenue, mandatory spending or economic growth forecasts that make up a normal presidential budget request.

However, the budget does set overall directions for discretionary spending.

LARGEST PROPOSED CUTS

The largest requested reductions compared to the enacted FY16 budget would be felt by the Environmental Protection Agency (31 percent), the Departments of Agriculture (29 percent), State (29 percent), Health and Human Services (23 percent), Labor (21 percent), and Commerce (17 percent), the Army Corps of Engineers (17 percent), the General Services Administration (17 percent), the Department of Hous-

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Panel explores human trafficking fight's fate in 115th Congress



Discussion moderator Martina E. Vandenberg listens to Sen. Amy Klobuchar, with panelists Jim McDonough, Melissa McKinlay and Rep. Ann Wagner at a town hall discussion on human trafficking held March 1 at NACo. Photo by Hugh Clarke

By Mary Ann Barton
senior staff writer

Although inroads have been made in the fight against human trafficking in the United

States, much more needs to be done, county officials and others said March 1 at a town hall-style meeting at NACo headquarters. The panel discussion and Q&A, "Understanding the Fight

Against Human Trafficking in the 115th Congress," was hosted by NACo, The McCain Institute and Prime Policy Group.

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which victims are controlled by traffickers for commercial sex acts or labor services. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has estimated that one in six endangered runaways are likely to be sex trafficking victims. The National Human Trafficking Hotline reports that 7,572 human trafficking cases were reported in 2016.

"We surveyed the sheriffs and this issue kept coming up," said Matt Chase, executive director of NACo. "These are victims, not criminals. Underage folks especially are being forced into this behavior, from Tysons Corner, Va. to Houston to the oil and gas fields of North Dakota."

Discussion moderator Martina E. Vandenberg, founder and president of The Human Trafficking Pro Bono Legal Center, spoke before a packed confer-

ence center with panelists Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Rep. Ann Wagner (R-Mo.), Vice-Mayor Melissa McKinlay of Palm Beach County, Fla. and Ramsey County, Minn. Commissioner Jim McDonough about their experiences as policymakers combating human trafficking.

Creating awareness at the local level

Many trafficking victims are from the immigrant population as well as the child welfare system, McKinlay said. The ACLU reports that undocumented immigrants are extremely vulnerable to trafficking because of fear of law enforcement and deportation.

One of the ways some counties in Florida are reaching victims is by posting hotline phone numbers in areas where they might be located, such as strip clubs and massage parlors, McKinlay said. Code enforcement officers ensure the signs are in place.

The signs read: "If you or someone you know is being

forced to engage in an activity and cannot leave, whether it is prostitution, house work, farm work, factory work, retail work, restaurant work or any other activity, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline."

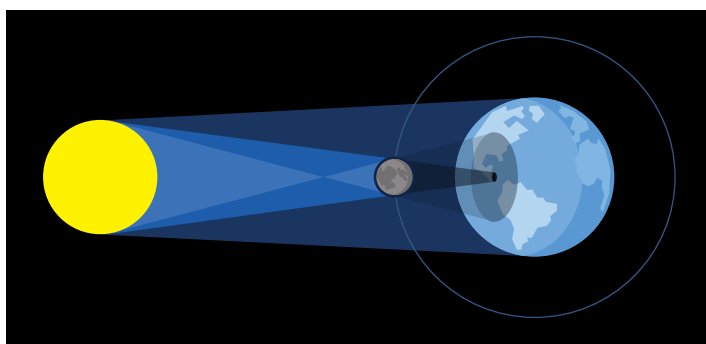
The National Human Trafficking Hotline, 888.373.7888, is operated by Polaris, a non-profit. Statewide in Florida, the hotline signs are also required (since January 2016) to be posted in airports, welcome centers and emergency rooms.

Partnering with industries where trafficking occurs

Industries where human trafficking often occurs are also helping in the fight to combat human trafficking, participants at the March 1 panel discussion said. Those industries include hotels and motels, airlines and the trucking industry.

Employees who work in these industries are being trained to

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SNAP/STATS

COUNTY SEATS IN THE PATH OF AUGUST'S TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE

Salem (Marion County), Ore.
Casper (Natrona County), Wyo.
Grand Island (Hall County), Neb.
Jefferson City (Cole County), Mo.
Columbia (Richland County), S.C.

By Charlie Ban, senior staff writer, source: NASA

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Published biweekly except August by:
National Association of Counties
Research Foundation, Inc.
660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400,
Washington, D.C. 20001
202.393.6226 | FAX 866.752.1573
E-mail cnews@naco.org
Online address www.countynews.org

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Mail subscriptions are \$100 per year for non-members. \$60 per year for non-members purchasing multiple copies. Educational institution rate, \$50 per year. Member county supplemental subscriptions are \$20 each. Send payment with order and address changes to NACo, 660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400, Washington, D.C. 20001.

POSTMASTER: send address changes to County News, 660 N. Capitol Street, N.W. STE. 400, Washington, D.C. 20001

(USPS 704-620) n (ISSN: 0744-9798)
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Research Foundation, Inc.



Replacement could alter

From ACA REPEAL page 1

coming back from the Great Recession, with many smaller counties — mainly in Southern states — having yet to reach pre-recession conditions.

In its analysis, NACo outlined several ways that the proposed legislation would impact counties, including:

- **The proposed legislation would fundamentally alter the important federal-state-local partnership for Medicaid and reduce Medicaid coverage levels.**

Since 1965, the Medicaid program has been crucial to helping counties meet their often state-mandated obligations to provide healthcare to low-income populations. Counties help some states administer the program and contribute to the non-federal share of Medicaid in 26 states.

The AHCA would fundamentally transform the nature of the Medicaid program, changing it from an open-ended entitlement program to one in which states would receive a capped amount for each person enrolled in Medicaid.

The demand for Medicaid goes up when the economy goes down; therefore, county costs grow while county budgets and resources shrink. Medicaid was designed to fluctuate based on the economic conditions of states.

NACo opposes efforts to cap federal spending to Medicaid, as it would shift costs to states and eventually counties.

- **The proposed legislation could indirectly or directly affect county health systems, including county public health departments.**

Although each state is different, county governments play an integral role in paying for and providing health services. Counties invest \$83 billion annually — or about one of every five dollars of county budgets — in community health systems. Counties are major

Counties battle deadly wildfires in the Great Plains

From DEADLY page 1

the county might be in trouble. “The wind was blowing something awful that day,” he said. His secretary stepped outside the courthouse that afternoon and could see a plume of smoke high up in the air, about 25 miles from town. Smith walked the 40 to 50 feet to the sheriff’s office, and began fielding calls to and from volunteers, residents and the media.

A few hours later, at about 7 p.m., he and the sheriff decided to evacuate Higgins, a small town of about 400 in the county, in the direct path of the fire. They contacted the regional planning commission, which sent out the evacuation order by text and robo-call, telling residents to head east to a shelter in Oklahoma. Winds changed course just before the fire got to Higgins and “saved that little town,” Smith said. He estimated that if the fire had stayed on course just five more minutes, “half that town would have been gone.”

Emily Nolte gets out evacuation orders as the regional preparedness planner at the Panhandle Regional Planning Commission. She gathers and

dispenses information from sheriffs, emergency management coordinators and judges as well as the National Weather Service in Amarillo, which uses satellites to monitor fires and their direction. The Panhandle Regional Planning Commission is a voluntary association of cities, counties and special districts in the Texas Panhandle.

Smith said Lipscomb County was short firefighters from their five volunteer fire departments, which use Army surplus trucks, after some had been dispatched earlier to nearby counties fighting fires in Oklahoma.

A local resident died in Lipscomb County in the fire that night. “He was coming home from work,” Smith said. His body was found 300 to 400 yards from his vehicle early the next morning, at about 2 a.m., Smith said. “People think they can drive through it [smoke and fire]. Your vehicle can die. You don’t want to fool with Mother Nature.”

The Texas Panhandle fires also spread to Hemphill and Roberts counties. The latest total, provided March 7 by the Texas A&M Forest Service, showed 478,935 acres had burned in the Texas fires.

Volunteer firefighters got help from the Texas A&M Forest Service and the Department of Public Safety. At least five firefighters in Texas were injured, two critically. In Ochiltree County, about 500 hogs died and several homes were burned, Ochiltree County Sheriff Terry Bouchard said. Thousands of farm animals and wildlife also perished in the fires across the four states.

FEMA approved Fire Management Assistance Grants for seven wildfires in Kansas and one in Oklahoma to help cover costs of staffing, equipment and emergency work, according to a FEMA spokesperson.

Oklahoma

Across the border in Oklahoma, Beaver County Commissioner Brad Raven said the county’s emergency management director interrupted a meeting the morning of March 6 to let them know about a large grass fire burning in the county.

Raven started dispatching graders from county yards, as well as county water trucks, to the scene. The graders created berms in hopes of preventing the fire from spreading. He also made sure that fire trucks

didn’t run out of gas.

Firefighters arrived from neighboring counties and as far away as Pittsburg County, Okla., more than five hours away, Raven said. Texas and Kansas also sent firefighters to help fight the fire. Some fire departments were paged and others responded on their own to help fight the fire. “That is our way of life out here,” Raven said.

Working with the sheriff’s office, Raven evacuated two towns in his district along with about 50 other homes. Monday night, a mobile command center was set up, where community members and others from neighboring counties brought in food and drinks for those fighting the fires.

By March 9, more than 300,000 acres of grassland, including some fencing, as well as some homes and barns, had burned in Beaver County. “We also lost several hundred livestock,” Raven said. “It could reach into the thousands. We are just now starting to do damage assessment.”

“This is by far the most devastating fire in Beaver County,” he said.

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Clark County, Kan. fire burns early in the morning March 8. Photo by Eric Gerard

See ACA REPEAL page 18

Nebraska county faces bankruptcy after \$28.1 million judgement

By Mary Ann Barton
senior staff writer

A small rural county in Nebraska, Gage County, is facing bankruptcy after a jury awarded \$28.1 million to six people who sued the county. They were exonerated by DNA evidence after being wrongly imprisoned for a crime that took place there in 1985. Collectively, they spent 75 years in prison.

While Gage County waits to see if the verdict gets tossed out on appeal, county supervisors are weighing their options. Two bankruptcy attorneys hired by the county “are working on giving us information on how that [bankruptcy] would proceed and how that would affect the county,” Gage County Board Chair Myron Dorn said.

With a population of a little more than 20,000, the county has an annual budget of \$27 million and collects about \$8 million in taxes per year. Legal fees totaling more than \$3 million have already sucked funds from the county’s operational budget over the past seven years.

Nebraska limits the amount counties can collect from property taxes; the county could increase their property taxes to raise another \$4 million annually, before it hit that ceiling, Dorn said. County residents could also vote to raise their own taxes even more, but “we’ve had that discussion,” he said “and our Board agrees that that wouldn’t pass.”

The county could also look to the state legislature to pass a generic bill at a future session that would provide funding for the county, he said.

Exonerated by DNA evidence

The specter of bankruptcy is the result of the decades-old crime case that dates to Feb. 6, 1985, when a 68-year-old grandmother was found raped and murdered in her home in Be-



Gage County Courthouse in Beatrice, Neb. Photo by Ammodramus

atrice, the county seat.

The people who served time for the crime, three men and three women, became known as the “Beatrice Six.” They were exonerated by DNA evidence in 2008. By then, they had collectively served 75 years in prison.

Jury awards \$28.1 million

The Beatrice Six filed a federal lawsuit against Gage County, as well as a former sheriff’s deputy and reserve deputy, claiming that investigators worked to close the case despite contradictory evidence. Last summer, a federal jury awarded the Beatrice Six \$28.1 million, plus additional money for legal fees.

Unless the verdict is tossed out on appeal, the county will need to pay the \$28.1 million plus lawyer fees.

“Everything is still on the table until the Eighth Circuit makes a ruling,” Dorn said. In January, Gage County asked the Eighth Circuit to overturn the federal jury ruling or set a new trial. They expect oral arguments to take place this spring before a three-judge panel of the Eighth Circuit.

Nebraska Intergovernmental Risk Management Association

(NIRMA), Nebraska Association of County Officials and the Nebraska Sheriffs’ Association filed friend of the court briefs. The groups did not side with either Gage County or the Beatrice Six, but wanted to weigh in because the outcome could have significant effects upon the state’s counties, law enforcement and all Nebraska residents, Dorn noted.

Insurance claims denied

In 2009, Gage County filed claims with both the risk-sharing pool and a private insurer, Dorn said. The county used the private insurer when the Beatrice Six were arrested and convicted. Both insurers denied the county’s claims.

The county hired two lawyers to dig into the county’s insurance history to leave no stone unturned in hopes of finding something that would help the county pay the judgement, Dorn said.

“They have filed in court on behalf of the county,” Dorn said. “One suit was filed against our current insurance company since about 1997. The other was against the insurance company the county had before 1997.

Both lawsuits are challenging the companies’ claims of ‘no’ liability or insurance coverage. “If we don’t pursue it, we won’t know if we will get anything [from them],” Dorn said.

“We [the Gage County Board of Supervisors] meet every two weeks and we have closed sessions just about every meeting about this,” he said.

“It has taken on its own personality; it has a life of its own. Whatever the verdict, it will have a profound impact on the county.”

One of the kickers to the story: A DNA test in 1989 that could have cleared things up in the cold case was deemed too expensive. Cost? \$350, the Associated Press reported.

DNA evidence has exonerated hundreds

Of the 349 people exonerated with DNA evidence nationwide, 254 have been awarded compensation though state statutes, civil suits or private bills, according to the Innocence Project. These 254 people have been awarded a total of \$657 million.

Some 144 people have been awarded compensation though state statutes, 119 through civil suits and 26 through private

bills, the Innocence Project said.

Pretrial settlement limits damages

In a somewhat similar case, New York resident Jeffrey Deskovic served nearly 16 years in prison after he was wrongfully convicted in Westchester County, N.Y., but got separate awards from the City of Peekskill, the county of Westchester, the state of New York and the New York State Police.


A federal jury in 2014 awarded him \$40 million after finding ex-Putnam Sheriff’s Investigator Daniel Stephens fabricated evidence and coerced Deskovic’s false confession in the 1989 murder of a Peekskill High classmate, *USA Today* reported.

Lawyers told the newspaper they believed it was the largest jury award in a wrongful conviction case. Putnam County was expected to pay less than the \$40 million -- \$10 million -- because of a pretrial settlement that limited damages.

Going bankrupt

Other jurisdictions that have faced bankruptcy include Jefferson County, Ala., as well as several cities. The Alabama county’s debt escalated after bond issuance deals for upgrading the county’s sewer system soured, Reuters reported. The county filed a \$4.23 billion bankruptcy in 2011, the largest ever for a jurisdiction until Detroit’s \$18 billion case two years later.

The City of Dallas is facing financial hardships due to unfunded public safety pensions for retired police officers and firefighters and back pay liabilities, and is reported to be \$5 billion in the red, *The New York Times* recently reported.

The Times reports that officials are considering raising property taxes, borrowing money for the pension fund, delaying long-awaited public works or even taking back money from retirees. 



Packed town hall brings out many perspectives on opioid epidemic



Phyllis Randall, Loudoun County, Va. Board chair, draws on her experience as an addiction counselor in local jails while speaking in the Opioid Town Hall discussion. Flanking her are Boone County, Ky. Judge-Executive Gary Moore (left) and Chris Jones of the Department of Health and Human Services. Photos by Leon Lawrence III

By Charlie Ban
senior staff writer

If a county has a courthouse, it probably also has an opioid drug problem.

That sobering fact drew a standing-room-only crowd at what was dubbed a town hall discussion on the opioid crisis Feb. 26 during NACo's Legislative Conference.

"If you're sitting right now thinking, 'we don't have this problem either, it hasn't touched our community,' you're either not paying attention or it's right next door and it's about to get to you shortly," said Russ Hamill, Montgomery County, Md.'s assistant chief of police.

Hamill's sentiment was shared by other speakers, including Erie County, Pa. Executive Kathy Dahlkemper, who served on the NACo-NLC Joint Opioid Task Force. She heard a familiar refrain while visiting communities.

"As I listened to everyone from across the country, from

both cities and counties, almost every single person... said, 'we are at the epicenter of the opioid epidemic,'" she said.

She, along with county and city elected officials, law enforcement and federal health specialists, presented several perspectives on the crisis that, after brewing for more than a decade among prescription painkiller users, erupted in the last few years as addicts moved to cheaper heroin.

On top of the human toll, counties bear costs in responding to and being proactive about the problem. Richard Jorgensen, coroner in DuPage County, Ill., identified why.

"Every aspect of addiction is paid for by the county," he said. "You pay for the sheriffs, you pay for the police officers, the jail, the public defender, court system. When you reduce addiction, you reduce those costs to your county."

Phyllis Randall is the Board chair for Loudoun County, Va., but she also works as a mental health counselor in neighbor-



Arapahoe County, Colo. Commissioner Bill Holen comments during the opioid town hall meeting.

ing Prince William County's jails, where she has seen the problem change firsthand in recent years.

"Substance abuse therapists haven't been caught as off-guard as the law enforcement and political community," she said. "Substance abuse seems to come in five-year cycles. We had crack cocaine, then PCP, then methamphetamine and now opioids. Five years from now will be something else."

She said a basic treatment model to fight substance abuse

would go a long way toward addressing whatever specific effects different drugs have on the brain.

This epidemic has been different, she said, because of how addicts view the drugs.

"With any other addictive substances, if they get a garbage batch of PCP, nobody goes back to that dealer," she said. "With heroin, they want to get the dope that gets you closest to death as possible."

According to Hamill, law enforcement in his Washington,

D.C. suburb was surprised by the epidemic.

"Four years ago we weren't seeing this on the horizon," he said. "We weren't seeing arrests for opioids, including heroin, we weren't seeing crimes related to it."

Now, Montgomery County's homicide and narcotics units work fatal overdose cases together, treating them as homicides.

Gary Moore, judge executive in Boone County, Ky. has served as a co-chair of the task force, and his advice for counties dealing with the epidemic reflected that cooperation.

"We didn't talk about cities or counties, we talked about communities," he said. "Don't try to do this alone, work collaboratively as a region."

Huntington, W.Va. Mayor Steve Williams, another task force member, seconded that.

"It doesn't know geographic boundaries, it doesn't know political boundaries," he said.

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Capitol Hill leaders serve up proposals and warnings

Capitalism, immigration and the decentralization of government power were among some of the topics touched on by Capitol Hill leaders who addressed county officials at the 2017 NACo Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.



Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.) outlines to the Opening General Session how the government safety net could be adjusted to match a new economy. Photos by David Hathcox

New social contract needed for America's ailing middle class

At the Opening General Session, Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.) argued that the changing business environment demanded an updated and more flexible safety net.

The former governor and tech investor, who considered a run for the presidency in 2006, described himself as proud capitalist, but admitted that the current capitalist system in America wasn't working for enough people.

"At the macro level, I can give you numbers," about a strong economy, he said. "All of those numbers, statistics and data points don't mean squat if you lost a factory in town."

"We need a Capitalism 2.0."

His proposal focused on three ways the government safety net could be updated to match current national economic conditions and trends.

"Social insurance programs, like unemployment benefits and workman's compensation, allowed you to get through bad times, but in the Gig Economy, work brings no social insurance," he said. The 'Gig' economy features a labor market characterized by the prevalence of short-term contracts

or freelance work as opposed to permanent jobs.

He stressed that the local government level is ideal for experimenting.

Warner also said businesses see better returns on investment in worker training than the government, and finding a way to incentivize private spending on training, possibly with a tax credit versus a tax deduction, would lead to better results.

"We can't just give someone a voucher for training and no direction, and be surprised when they don't have a job in the end," he said.

The shift to a short-term approach to corporate management has created a dynamic Warner likened to renting versus owning a house. "CEOs don't have owners, they have renters," he said. "Something is wrong when 95 percent of earnings are spent on share buybacks and dividends."

He suggested mandating a longer timeframe, possibly three years, to earn breaks from capital gains taxes.

Warner is the vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and called out the Russian manipulation of the news media Americans were

viewing, not in support of the Republican party but to generally weaken American interests for Russia's gain.

For residents of certain Midwestern states, he said, "If you searched for 'hacking in the election,' you wouldn't get Fox News, or NBC or CNN; you would literally get — for the first five stories — Russian propaganda... You'd get stories about Hillary Clinton being sick."

He advised county leaders to take a stand and speak out if they saw



Rep. Rob Bishop (R-Utah) tells the General Session audience that he expects more details of federal policy to come from Congress, rather than the Executive Branch.

those kinds of manipulations and "fake news" taking root in their communities, echoing a warning by Jim Vandehei, who spoke before him.

"If we don't get our arms around it, it's only going to get worse," he said. "People (in your counties) still know you as human beings and you can push back."

Minnesota senator: federal changes will impact counties

Former Hennepin county attorney and current Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D) spoke to the General Session about how federal issues affect local governments.

The senator warned county leaders to be very concerned about federal proposals that will inevitably, "land in the counties' laps," such as the upcoming healthcare reform.

"This really isn't a joke," she said. "Sometimes laws can pass without anyone noticing and then there is a big effect on the local level. As we go through this tumultuous time, we need to be thinking about people in counties and how this all works in local government."

Klobuchar noted that it is important to keep an eye on upcoming changes to tax poli-

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) waves to the General Session audience after speaking.

cy and how it will impact local governments.

For example, brick and mortar storefronts face more taxation than online retailers. Klobuchar described this situation as "ridiculous," as "you want to have competition but you want to have fair competition." Under the new tax system, this may change so online retailers face similar taxes.

Klobuchar also emphasized the impact immigration reform will have on counties.

"This is a workforce issue as well as a social issue. But I like to talk to my constituents about it as an economic issue," Klobuchar said, explaining that Trump's caps on refugees will eventually trickle down to hurt states and counties that struggle to find workers to fill certain jobs.

She concluded, "Thank you so much for still having faith in the work you do, having faith in our country and having faith in a country that, as Barbara Jordan once said, is 'as good as its promise.'"

Utah congressman: 'Choice is the important part'

Rep. Rob Bishop (R-Utah) told a General Session audience that returning regulatory authority to Congress as proposed in House Speaker

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Several sessions track the changing healthcare landscape for counties

By Ariel Cohen
special correspondent

Counties can't control the national healthcare debate, but local governments can help improve their community's health outside the healthcare system through public efforts.

"Healthcare is complex. It's more than just the attention of healthcare practitioners and the providers or insurers," said Toni Carter, a Ramsey County (Minn.) commissioner who chairs the NACo Healthy County Initiatives Advisory Board.

"Each one of us out in our counties deserves the opportunity to be healthy. And we know that health is largely about the conditions for health and well-being."

As the state of healthcare changes under the Trump administration, much of the future of healthcare depends upon how local governments use their limited resources. Since then-President Barack Obama signed the Affordable Care Act (ACA) into law in 2010, citizens have relied on government-mandated health coverage. Now as the Trump administration works with Congress to repeal the ACA, counties will be left to deal with the repercussions.

While speaking with county leaders at the 2017 NACo Legislative Conference, NACo President Bryan Desloge explained that while the American healthcare system excels at both speedy delivery and quality care, it struggles with maintaining costs, and this is what will trickle down to counties.

"We are the people on the local level who deliver services," Desloge told county leaders, noting that the federal government often sets their financial ability to provide healthcare services. "So we have to pay close attention to where this



Toni Carter, Ramsey County, Minn., leads off the Hill briefing on counties' role in the health care system. Carter is chair of the NACo Healthy County Initiatives Advisory Board. Photo by David Hathcox

[administration] goes."

Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), echoed Desloge's warning in her keynote speech to county officials at the conference, warning that county commissioners should be very concerned about federal healthcare reform proposals that will inevitably "land in the counties' laps."

"This really isn't a joke," Klobuchar said. "Sometimes laws can pass without anyone noticing and then there is a big effect on the local level. As we go through this tumultuous time, we need to be thinking about people in counties and how this all works in local government."

Unfortunately, there isn't one central system to keep track of the changes in healthcare, and this can hurt local governments' capacities to provide efficient care, she said.

Even though state and federal government dictate much of a county's ability to hold down costs, there are still incremental ways in which counties can take cost-cutting actions.

Counties can lower drug prices through pharmacy

management, smart buying and looking where doctors are overprescribing certain medications. But in addition to lowering the cost of healthcare, counties can also work to lower risk factors for illness through public health initiatives.

Social factors and public efforts to impact healthcare play as much a role in keeping communities healthy as doctors and hospitals do, said Dr. Umair Shah, executive director of the Harris County (Texas) Public Health department and vice president of the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

Public health is when "we work together as a society to assure the conditions in which people can be healthy," Shah told county officials.

Public health initiatives also work to recognize and alleviate the social and economic conditions that impact health and the vitality of communities, he noted.

This may mean building more public parks, increasing access to healthy foods or supporting children's sports teams, he said. Counties

should try to involve as much of the community as they can in their public health efforts, whether that means collaborating with schools, the police force or the private sector, he noted.

"It's not just what happens in the hospital," Shah explained. "It's what we do in the community." For example, if a doctor tells an obese patient to lose weight, the number of public parks, trails, and access to healthy food in the patient's community could help determine his or her success, he said.

Today, only 3 percent to 4 percent of healthcare spending goes toward public health initiatives, while the rest goes to the hospital system and treating diseases, he said, noting that this reactive healthcare system helps cure diseases, but does nothing to prevent them.

Shah encouraged leaders to focus on public health efforts, and not to abandon these efforts once a public health crisis — the Zika virus, for example — subsides.

Investing in public health alternatives may cost counties

more in the short-term, but it would lower healthcare spending in the long run, he said.

"When we do our jobs [in public health] it is largely invisible," Shah explained.

"So I always see public health as the offensive line of a football team," he said.

"At the end of the day, nobody's going to say that Tom Brady's success at the Super Bowl in Houston was not because of Tom Brady, but because his offensive line made sure he had time to throw those passes.

So that's why it's really important for us to think about what public health does."

Communities with stronger economies are much more likely to offer activities that help their communities' overall health than poorer communities and this creates a health disparity between communities, Shah said.

In order to create "health equity communities," he said, local officials should focus on economic development, education, creating a healthier environment and community engagement. **CN**



NACo members discuss strategies to engage Congress

By Ariel Cohen
special correspondent

Local elected officials have much greater potential to engage members of Congress than everyday constituents, due to their prominence and public office. But, to effectively advocate on behalf of their constituents, county officials must make sure they get the most out of their face time with members of Congress.

This is where Bradford Fitch comes in.

Fitch, a former Capitol Hill staffer and current president and CEO of the Congressional Management Foundation, now spends his time breaking down the barriers between Congress and constituents. During the 2017 NACo Legislative Conference, he spent extensive time working with NACo members to ensure their county got noticed in Congress.

Having an effective meeting

Senators and House members typically have upwards of 12 meetings per day, and their staffers usually have another 12-15. Since you will be one of many faces the lawmaker sees, use the short time to make sure you are the representative's most memorable meeting of the day.

Fitch told county officials that bringing an effective story into their meeting to illustrate a point does far more than any spreadsheet full of facts and figures could.

"Telling a story well is the difference between persuading someone and not persuading someone," Fitch explained. "The more people feel immersed in a story, the more likely they are to change their beliefs."

More than anything, a message to a lawmaker should be short and sweet. In the 1980s, the average American attention



(Left to right) Emily Bonilla, Orange County, Fla.; Yuki Lei Sugimura, Maui County, Hawaii and Lynne Pancrazi, Yuma County, Ariz. team up on crafting a message during the workshop, "How to Create Stories to Move Lawmakers' Hearts, Minds and VOTES." Photo by Leon Lawrence III

span was 22 seconds, Fitch explained. But today, the average attention span is 2.8 seconds, due to the prevalence of technology and social media. Compare that to a goldfish, which has an attention span of nine seconds.

Here's a step-by-step guide to crafting your message in a way that will grab your representative's ear, as created by both NACo members and Fitch:

- Begin your story with the end in mind. Nothing is more boring than a meandering tale with no purpose. Everything you say should relate to your ending.

- The first sentence should make the lawmaker want to know more about whatever you're talking about, but also show context and establish what's at stake.

- As you tell your story, illustrate the conflict by playing up the role of the underdog. Your overall goal may be to get more funding, but if you can involve the lawmaker's heartstrings and not just their wallets, you are more likely to succeed.

- Remember that 2.8-second

attention span? Include some sort of surprise for the legislator to re-engage them in the story. Throw a wrench in the plotline that completely changes perspective and adds depth.

- Conclude with a "we can win" moment and show the lawmaker how they can be a part of this policy victory. Members of Congress and senators love to be involved in legislation that makes a difference in their district, especially if they don't have to put too much effort into it. Show the lawmaker that your local government already has done 90 percent of the work and you just need their help to push that 10 percent over the finish line.

Holding a memorable event in your district

Every member of Congress goes back to their district about 40 times per year, so there are multiple opportunities to attract your senator or House member to an event.

When scheduling events back in their district, members first and foremost value things

that make them look good in the public eye -- whether that means a great photo op wearing a hard hat, an event with local children or a high-stakes policy discussion with local experts. Make sure the lawmaker feels like the event is mutually beneficial; this includes minimizing the risks of the lawmaker looking bad. For example, if there's a high risk of angry constituents firing off questions about a controversial matter, the lawmaker will probably decline the invite.

Lawmakers, and the schedulers who make their daily agendas, prefer events that are narrowly focused, such as a factory tour or a talk about a specific healthcare policy, so the lawmaker can prepare and look their best.

Prior to the event, provide the congressional staff with as much information as possible about who will be in attendance, the layout of the space, the agenda and exact time commitments. Make sure to make logistics clear and be as specific as possible. Members of Congress usually don't take more than 30 minutes

for an event, so try not to take up too much of their time.

Once a scheduling request is received, it is reviewed by the member's scheduler, then if approved by the scheduler, it will be reviewed by senior staff for final approval. An event could also be marked as "tentative," depending on how crucial staffers see the invitation.

Members of Congress get many requests every day, so it's extremely important to follow up and be persistent with the scheduling director.

But at the same time, it's important to be patient as these requests may take a long time to process.

After the event takes place, it is most important to follow up by writing thank-you notes, sharing the good news and evaluating how it went. Finally, after the lawmaker attends your event, write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper thanking them for being there.

"That letter will be read by your member of Congress," Fitch said. "I absolutely guarantee it." **CN**



NACo members zero in on cybersecurity, tech safety

By Ariel Cohen
special correspondent

Cybersecurity has become a topic of national and international consequence in recent months, but local governments are also affected by online hackers. County leaders recently discussed readiness to respond to such attacks and how to update their systems at the 2017 NACo Legislative Conference.

Ninety percent of all data that exists today has been generated since 2010, and most of that data is not properly secured, said conference speaker Bill Wright, director of government affairs and senior counsel at Symantec. The public sector is especially at risk for cybercrime, as government sites are ranked fourth among reported cyber-attacks in the past year, he said.

"You cannot expect perfection. As a county official, you have to say 'When we get hit' not 'If we get hit,'" said Steve Hurst, director of safety and security strategies at AT&T. "Figure out the steps you will take so you can go immediately into a data-disaster recovery plan the second there is a breach," he added.

Hurst, along with Rita Reynolds, CIO of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, helped county leaders create a plan to work through likely cyber threats. Reynolds emphasized that no matter your perceived level of risk, every county should have a plan ready to go. If your local government is unsure how to create a plan, most states have templates for a county to follow.

• Before doing anything else, county leaders should determine which department has the most valuable data and prioritize its protection, the experts advised. While every department will argue its data

is most important, determine what is most necessary to protect the safety of your citizens.

• Hiring a third party to perform a risk assessment of your county's tech systems and data can help you do the difficult work of prioritizing needs, Hurst and Reynolds advised.

• Local officials should also keep an eye on the growing dominance of crypto-ransomware. Symantec's Thomas MacLellan encouraged counties to pay closer attention to cybersecurity on devices that are a part of the "Internet of Things," such as high-tech refrigerators, toasters or even self-driving cars. "I look at cybersecurity as infrastructure at this point," MacLellan said. "It's no different than a road, it's no different than a school, and it's going to cost money. We're going to have to get over that."

"Ransomware has evolved from an annoyance to a serious

threat," Wright added. "If you see something that says 'Click here to watch Justin Bieber get punched in the face' you can't do it. Tempting as it is, even for a guy like me, you just can't click it."

While counties can work to shield themselves from hacking, local government can't completely shield their constituents from attacks. In his speech to NACo members during the opening general session, Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, warned county officials to be wary of the media influence Russian hackers could have on their districts.

"If you searched for 'hacking in the election,' you wouldn't get Fox News or NBC or CNN; you would literally get — for the first five stories — Russian propaganda...You'd get stories about Hillary Clinton being sick," Warner said. "If we don't

get our arms around it, it's only going to get worse."

The rapid spread of information can be very useful, but disastrous when used incorrectly.

Jake Williams, manager of strategic initiatives at StateScoop, explained that it has become too easy to spread misinformation or "fake news," on social media, and counties would be wise to monitor information circulating online about their communities.

Many counties don't focus enough on their social media presence or do not have a large enough budget to monitor all social media channels. Of the 85 percent of local governments that use social media platforms to connect with their constituents, 55 percent do not track or monitor their social media interactions, according to Public Technology Institute. Not only does monitoring social media channels help stop

the spread of "fake news," but it also helps county officials keep a pulse on the needs of their residents.

In the past year, many communities have grappled with the growing shared economy and the technological and regulatory challenges that come with it. Oftentimes, these "shared economy" services, such as Airbnb, Uber and EatWith draw in new users with a simple registration process, which is often far easier than registering a new business with the government, said Tim Woodberry, director of government affairs at Accela.

Woodberry said that "things like EatWith straddle the line between friends getting together and an unlicensed restaurant." While each county handles the issue differently, he suggested that simplifying the government licensing process would improve local compliance rates. **CN**



Larimer County, Colo. Commissioner Lew Gaiter has all devices at the ready (including his Stetson) at the NACo and PTI Technology and Innovation Symposium. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Journalist dissects Trump White House

By **Ariel Cohen**
special correspondent

Jim VandeHei, political insider, and co-founder of both Axios and Politico, spoke to NACo members about political changes brought by President Donald Trump and advised local governments what to expect from the White House over the next four years.

“Keep expecting volatility, then just be delighted when normal stuff happens,” VandeHei told the crowd during the NACo opening general session.

It has been difficult to predict the actions of the White House since Trump took the oath of office, he said. VandeHei explained this is because Trump and his team have refused to follow any sort of blueprint or plan since he won the election. Instead, Trump’s White House has mainly been reactive to the media.

But, VandeHei countered, the “only place he’s been consistent on is this idea of ‘America first,’” so local governments



Axios CEO Jim VandeHei, who founded Politico, analyzes the Trump administration’s volatility for the Opening General Session. Photo by David Hathcox

can expect him to keep focusing on stimulating the economy, reducing illegal immigration and protecting American manufacturing.

“I don’t want to be the one to break it to you but [Trump] is not going to be impeached. This is the reality. ...Forget the hyperventilating. Look at what

are the things we know about Donald Trump, and what does that mean about how he’s willing to govern?” VandeHei said, noting that when a president has the full control of Congress they can likely push their agenda through both the House and the Senate.

VandeHei added, “Here’s

what we do know, there’s not a lot of method to the madness”

One way to predict Trump’s actions is to keep a close eye on the beliefs and actions of those around him, especially his family and closest advisors.

“If there’s one thing you should spend your time reading up on, it is Steve Bannon

and his vision of America first and his vision of nationalism. You hear his words coming out of Donald Trump’s mind more than anyone else, even his daughter,” VandeHei said. “And this guy for better or for worse has a very different worldview than most conservatives.”

Looking forward, VandeHei predicted that Republicans could do very well in the 2018 midterm elections since conservatives typically “are better voters in off-year elections.” Also, many Democratic Senate seats are up for grabs in states Trump won in the 2016 election.

While much of today’s political debate occurs on the national level, VandeHei praised the elected officials in the room for the work they do locally. He noted that he got his start in journalism covering county government in small-town Wisconsin.

He told the local officials, “You actually get a lot more done than politicians do on the national level.” **CN**

Upgrades pay for themselves at Upper Peninsula jail

By **Charlie Ban**
senior staff writer

For decades, the Alger County, Mich. jail has stayed the same, but its residents have changed.

“Most of them have some kind of drugs onboard, or alcohol,” Jail Sergeant Steve Webber said of the inmates. “Between that and prescription medication, it’s a different kind of inmate now. They’re going through detox, they’re going through withdrawals. Back in 1968, when this jail was built, nobody had an inmate like that.”

And women.

“Ten years ago, 20 years ago, to have a woman in jail was uncommon. Today they outnumber the males in our population.”

Thanks to a \$1.2 million

expansion, the small county on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula has newfound flexibility to manage its jail population, without shaking up its tight budget.

“I told staff I’m all for building a new jail but what we really need is to figure out how to do that on a budget,” said County Board Chair Jerry Doucette. “We have a small county, a lot of our folks are living on limited income and we have to be very careful.”

It was simple enough — double its capacity while essentially filling those new beds with inmates from other places. A Department of Agriculture loan supplied \$1.1 million, which will be paid back via a 20-year contract to house inmates from nearby Luce County, which only has a lockup for holding people for a few days. Housing

other counties’ inmates will close the gap. The state corrections department will also house inmates in Alger County, rather than making a longer and costlier trip to its correctional facility in Chippewa County.

“It’s a win-win for everyone,” Doucette said. “We’re able to enhance the security and functionality of the jail and not go to the taxpayers. The state saves money and time.”

That tight budgeting explained why the jail wasn’t updated in nearly 50 years.

“We looked around for grants, but there wasn’t much to support a bricks-and-mortar expansion,” Webber said.

“We’re a pretty heavy public land county, so we don’t have a lot of money lying around,” Doucette said.

The expansion will include two eight-person pods and

three two-person cells.

“That gives us plenty of options for isolating high-risk inmates or separating people who are in for the same crime and can’t be housed together,” Webber said.

Outside of housing inmates, the jail had a few additional upgrades. The jail now finally has a sally port — a fortified entrance to the jail that limits deputies and inmates’ exposure when they are transferred to the jail.

“That transition area is where a lot of things can go bad,” Webber said. “Now, with that transfer being done in a secure area, it’s much less of a concern.”

Along the same lines, refitting doors inside the jail means now no two doors can be open at the same time, which makes the building more secure.

The central control room has also been updated, improving

functionality and the work environment for jail deputies.

“Part of our control room used to be in a closet,” Webber said. “Everyone who works there is a lot happier now. The quality of life, both from functionality of our equipment and something as simple as the lighting, is making a big difference for our people.”

Doucette said the improvements to the control room could decrease the staffing needs for the jail, now that operations are consolidated to fewer workstations and new options for managing the populations will reduce the workload for deputies.

“Life is really good and we’re really happy with it,” Doucette said. “We’re running an improved jail with no added expense to our county, and we got it done on time.” **CN**

Health care dominates Rural Action Caucus meeting

By **Bev Schlotterbeck**
executive editor

The diagnosis is not good for health care in rural America and the prognosis is not much better, either, if you take to heart data provided by Diane Calmus from the National Rural Health Association at the conference's Rural Action Caucus meeting. She was one presenter in a lineup of speaker-experts addressing challenges faced by the country's rural counties.

The challenges health care poses for rural communities are significant. Sixty-two million patients rely on rural providers, and that population is older, sicker and poorer than their urban counterparts, Calmus said. A new Centers for Disease Control study shows a widening death gap between the rural and urban parts of the U.S.

Some part of that gap can be blamed on what Calmus characterized as "deaths of despair," fatalities linked to the opioid crisis.

There's another worrisome

gap — access. Since 2010, 80 hospitals have closed in rural America. Some closings are due to population change, but many, she said, can be blamed on the way hospitals are being paid under the Affordable Care Act. Rural hospitals rely more heavily on Medicare and Med-

icaid payments.

When those funding sources receive across-the-board cuts, such as happened with Medicare reimbursements under ACA, the impact falls more heavily on rural health care systems. Profit margins for rural hospitals declined 6 percent

under the ACA, while they increased 7 percent in urban areas.

Even more disturbing, 673 rural hospitals — a third of the total — risk a similar fate, she said. "They are in the same or worse shape than the 80 that closed."

Another facet of the access dilemma involves recruiting and retaining enough doctors and other health care workers in rural areas whose economies are recovering at a much slower pace than the rest of the country. "The ACA has not improved access to health care in rural America," she said.

But all is not gloomy.

Because of November's election and the role rural areas played in electing the current administration, there is renewed interest on Capitol Hill about rural health care. "Interest on the Hill is really high about rural health care," she said.

Which brings everyone's attention to the elephant in the room, the fate of the Affordable Care Act in the Trump administration. "There are a lot of unknowns," she said, but offered three things to remember: It's tough to repeal a benefit; it would be expensive, and President Trump has expressed support for some provisions of the act. **CN**



Rural health care is in a fragile state, Diane Calmus from the National Rural Health Association tells Rural Action Caucus members at their conference meeting. Photo by David Hathcox

Economic Shock: Lessons learned from coal and timber counties

By **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The decline of resource-driven economies can be traumatic, but counties can rebound by using crises to inspire creative approaches to diversifying their business bases.

Case studies in southern West Virginia and central Oregon demonstrated different approaches to leading those comebacks.

There's an emotional connection to past successes that can distract communities, Stephanie Tyree, executive director of the West Virginia Hub said. Overcoming economic nostalgia is crucial to moving forward.

As coal demand crumbled, and towns and state revenue from severance taxes cratered, there was a growing recognition that the state was undergoing an economic shift that

is long-term, she said. "Sometimes when we are undergoing an economic shock, we are just focused on getting back to where we were. What we recognized in many communities in West Virginia is that we need to build a new future."

The West Virginia Hub views civic engagement as the key to creating an infrastructure for community planning and a mechanism to support emerging leadership.

"This is not about having town halls or providing space for people to speak at city council meetings," she said. "It's about creating a continuous space for projects to develop and leadership to emerge at a local level without controlling that space."

In Oregon, Deschutes County was a booming lumber town, but in 1950, one of its two large mills sold out and the remaining mill closed in 1994.



Commissioner Tammy Baney, Deschutes County, Ore. discusses her county's economic comeback at the workshop "Economic Shock: Lessons Learned from Coal and Timber Counties."

Photo by Leon Lawrence III

The economy transitioned to construction and the region's beauty drove it to become a community of second homes, but that part-time migration didn't bring a sustainable industry with it.

"Between 2000-2007, if you had a pickup and a hammer, you were in the industry," said Deschutes County Commissioner Tammy Baney. "When the housing bubble burst, our economy went off a cliff."

The county has rebuilt as a tourism destination, and tech startups have capitalized on the high quality of life in Bend.

The county's business loan fund has led to the creating of 1,328 jobs. Loan recipients must pay them back if they do not sustain the new jobs for two years, but in the six years since the program debuted, only \$54,000 of \$845,000 given out has needed to be repaid. **CN**

Congress reboots BLM's Planning 2.0 Rule

By **Chris Marklund**
associate legislative director

The Senate passed H.J. Res. 44, a resolution disapproving of and rolling back the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Planning 2.0 rule, by a vote of 51 to 48, March 7. The legislation previously passed the House, Feb. 8.

Passed under the Congressional Review Act (CRA), H.J. Res. 44 represents a major win for counties. The CRA provides a mechanism for Congress and President Donald Trump to abolish, with a simple majority vote in both chambers, any federal regulation finalized within the last 60 legislative days of the previous administration. It also prohibits federal agencies from reissuing the same regulation or one of a substantially similar nature in the future. H.J. Res. 44

will now be sent to President Trump's desk, where he is expected to sign it into law.

Throughout the rulemaking process, NACo expressed concern that BLM's Planning 2.0 rule, as written, could dilute county input into federal land management decisions and hinder local government consultation and collaboration with BLM. By rescinding the Planning 2.0 rule, H.J. Res. 44 provides another opportunity for BLM, counties and public lands stakeholders to work together to improve BLM planning regulations and ensure robust coordination with local governments.

The original rule was published on Dec. 13, 2016 and went into effect on Jan. 11. It sought to establish new processes under which the BLM

would develop its Resource Management Plans (RMPs). RMPs set parameters to define approved uses and actions across the BLM's 245 million acres of surface land and 700 million acres of subsurface minerals currently under BLM management.

NACo has been engaged throughout the Planning 2.0 process to ensure local government involvement is a key aspect of BLM's resource management planning. After securing an extension of the initial comment period for BLM's Planning 2.0 rule, NACo submitted comments to BLM on the proposed rule on May 19. NACo also hosted numerous webinars and forums with BLM staff and county officials to provide other opportunities for the county voice to be heard. **CN**

CN SPOTLIGHT



TESTIFYING ON THE HILL

NACo advocates for robust Rural Development title as Congress develops the next Farm Bill: Commissioner Bob Fox of Renville County, Minn. (I) testifies before the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy and Credit about the key role the next Farm Bill will play in helping to address development in rural America. Fox's testimony on March 8 emphasized that the upcoming Farm Bill — especially its Rural Development title — is critical not only to ensuring the vitality of underserved communities, but also for positioning rural America to compete in an ever-expanding global economy. Photo by Hugh Clark

PROFILES IN SERVICE

RANDY BURKHARDT
Board Member

Asst. Director, Parks, Trails and Building Grounds
Douglas County, Colo.

Number of years active in NACo: 1

Years in public service: 34

Occupation: Landscape architect-parks director

Education: Bachelor's degree in landscape architecture, University of Idaho

The hardest thing I've ever done: Raise my daughter

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: My father, Crazy Horse and Abraham Lincoln

A dream I have is to: Retire to British Columbia.

You'd be surprised to learn that: For 10 weeks a season, I help coordinate a ski race program at Copper Mountain for Colorado Special Olympics, where we teach Special Olympic Athletes how to ski race. I am also a course setter and referee at an international level for Special Olympics Alpine Skiing.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Skydive.

My favorite way to relax is to: Go bird hunting with my dogs.

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln.

My favorite movie is: *The Outlaw Josey Wales*.

My favorite music is: Red Dirt Country.

My favorite meal is: Elk steak.

My pet peeves are: Decisions driven by emotion, not based on facts.

My motto is: Go 'til ya crash, turnin's for sissies.

The last book I read was: *The Last Stand*.

My favorite movie is: *The Outlaw Josey Wales*.

My favorite music is: Red Dirt Country.

My favorite meal is: Elk steak.

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The last book I read was: *The Last Stand*.

My favorite movie is: *The Outlaw Josey Wales*.

My favorite music is: Red Dirt Country.



I'm most proud of: My daughter.

Every morning I read: *The Denver Post*.

My favorite meal is: Elk steak.

My pet peeves are: Decisions driven by emotion, not based on facts.

My motto is: Go 'til ya crash, turnin's for sissies.

The last book I read was: *The Last Stand*.

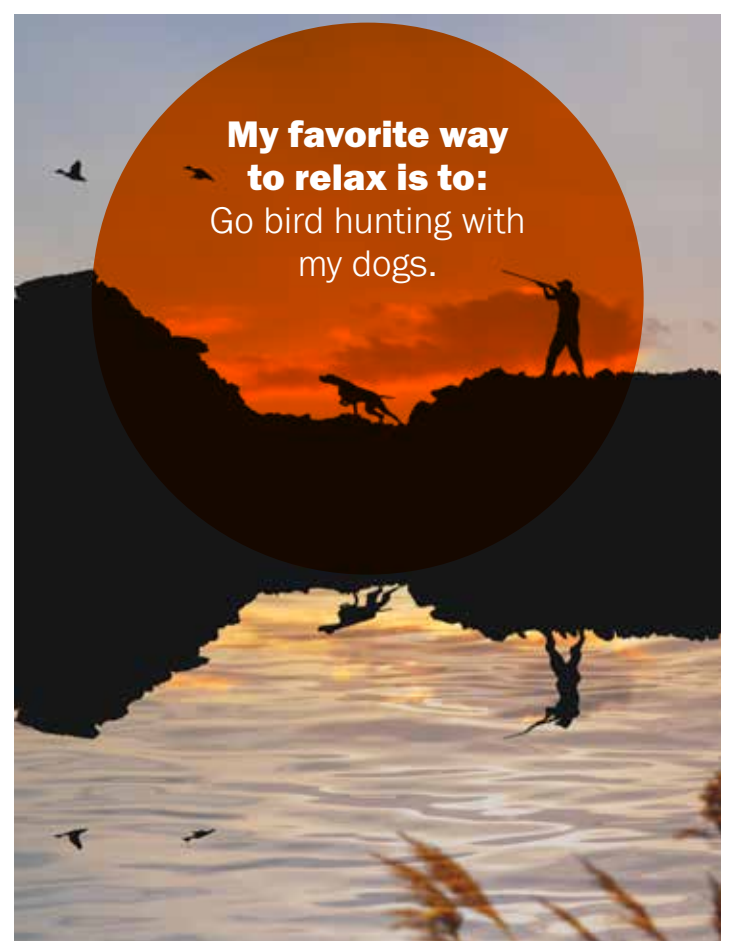
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THE CONFERENCE IN PICTURES

ALL PHOTOS BY
DAVID HATHCOX
UNLESS NOTED



Rocaille Roberts, Harris County, Texas Public Health Department, asks a question about mapping county data in “The Role of Modern Technology in the Opioid Fight.”
Photos by David Hathcox



Tom Dale, Canyon County, Idaho and Jim Hart, Madison County, Mont. listen to Jim VandeHei at the Opening General Session.



Tim McCormick, Ohio County, W.Va. officiates at NACo’s Membership Committee meeting.



Lunch Discussion: “Addressing Homelessness in Your County” — Matthew Doherty, executive director, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness and Nan Roman, president/CEO, National Alliance to End Homelessness take turns presenting a national view of homelessness. Photo by Leon Lawrence III.



NACo officers (from left) Greg Cox, Bryan Desloge and Roy Brooks present Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) with the County Alumni Award, after she addressed the General Session Feb. 28. Klobuchar was the Hennepin County, Minn. Attorney from 1999-2007. Photos by David Hathcox



Veronica Klinefelt, Macomb County, Mich., asks a question during "Supporting a Health County in a Changing Health Environment"



Rep. John Carter (R-Texas), left, receives a NACo County Alumni Award from National Conference of Republican County Officials President Jon Burrows, Bell County, Texas. Carter served as a district court judge for 17 years in Williamson County, Texas.



Leslie Nicole Smith gives a moving speech to members of the Veterans and Military Services Committee. She recounted her injuries while serving in Bosnia that resulted in her blindness and the amputation of her left leg and emphasized the potential that county-led events for veterans can have for that community. Photo by Leon Lawrence III



Laura Morales and Dennis Gutierrez, both from Riverside County, Calif., stop by one of the several "Counties Matter" signs that dotted the conference site.



NACo President Bryan Desloge and Executive Director Matt Chase listen to a discussion during the NACo Board Forum.



Members of the Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee review a proposed resolution. Photo by Leon Lawrence III



Receiving the SolSmart Award, from left to right: Inyo County, Calif. Supervisor Jeff Griffiths; Summit County, Utah Sustainability Manager Lisa Yoder and Maricopa County, Ariz. Supervisor Steve Gallardo. SolSmart designations recognize communities for taking key steps to remove local barriers and advance solar energy development in their counties. Photos by David Hathcox



Vice President Mike Pence and NACo President Bryan Desloge take a moment at the WOTUS decision.



Alisha Bell, Women of NACo president, Wayne County, Mich. introduces the speaker at WON's traditional Legislative Conference event.



Roderick Miles, Tarrant County, Texas, listens to Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.) during the Opening General Session.



The prospect of improving jail mental health services drew a crowd to "Reinvesting Justice Dollars to Reduce Mental Illness in Jails."



Kay Cashion, chair, Guilford County, N.C., presides over the NACo Arts and Culture Commission meeting. Also pictured (l) is Jenna Moran, NACo staff.

Bishop praises Ryan's plan

From **SPEAKERS** page 6

Paul Ryan's "Better Way" plan would ultimately mean more responsive federal policy making. "In the horizontal division of powers ... if the executive bureaucratic agencies make a decision ... and you don't like it, what recourse do you have?" he said. "If you want a system so that people's voices are heard, you have to go through that nasty thing called politics."

Ryan's A Better Way plan, Bishop said, has nothing to do with an "inter-branch" power struggle, he said. "It's based on the principle that people are better heard through their elected representatives."

He emphasized his case for de-centralized government power. "If the government was about making stuff, then there's an economy of scale that is significant," he said. "But we're not creating a product, we're delivering a service," and in that case, more local control is appropriate. "This concept is not Republican or Democrat, it's not even conservative or liberal," he said. "There are some areas of the country that may want robust government and indeed if they want it and are willing to pay for it and not impose it on anybody else, let them do it ... That's the way it's supposed to work."

To illustrate his point, he related a story of an East German child who marveled at the many flavors of ice cream offered in a West German store, and while his own preference was vanilla, he liked that he had his choice of 31 flavors.

"The choice is the important part," he said. "And that is what we need to be doing to make sure that power and ability and regulations are moved back to state and local governments where they are closer to the people and can be done in a better way." **CN**

Charlie Ban, senior staff writer, and Ariel Cohen, special correspondent, contributed to this report.

Counties to Trump: don't eliminate CDBG, 'backbone' of local communities

Eliminating Community Development Block Grant funds would "wound the places where the majority of Americans live, work and play," NACo said in response to the possibility of the Trump administration defunding the program in FY18.

The Washington Post reported that the program could be slashed as part of \$6 billion in cuts to the federal department of Housing and Urban Development. Trump's proposed budget eliminates CDBG funding.

NACo issued a strongly worded statement, along with the National Conference of Mayors and the National League of Cities, about the new

administration's possible plan to eliminate the program:

"Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds are the heart, lungs and backbone of cities and counties, small, medium and large. By eliminating or cutting them, the Administration mortally wounds the places where the majority of Americans live, work and play. Such a move risks ending or harming programs that keep Americans safe, help them find better-paying jobs, improve their health and keep public facilities in good shape. It is an attack on places the President said he wanted to help.

"On behalf of the elected officials of America's cities and counties across this nation,

we urgently request a meeting with HUD Secretary Ben Carson to discuss our utmost concern before any proposal is sent to Congress.

"The National Association of Counties and The United States Conference of Mayors visited Congress last week and solidified support for CDBG. The National League of Cities will follow next week. Together, strongly united with the full force of our organizations, we will demand from Congress, representing the people that sent them to Washington, that they take action to speak and vote against any proposal to cut or eliminate this vital and successful federal program." **CN**

Forest counties brace for cuts due to congressional inaction

By **Chris Markland**
associate legislative director

Forest counties are bracing for drastic budget cuts, as revenue-sharing payments derived from federal forest lands currently being distributed are reduced by more than 80 percent over last year. Because Congress failed to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program for FY16, forest revenue-sharing to counties reverts to a century-old law that entitles them to 25 percent of revenues from national forests.

Federal policies reducing revenue-generating activities on federal forests have made "25 percent payments" unequal, with counties paying for essential infrastructure and services for federal public lands. The federal funding cuts will have a direct impact on local services provided to millions of residents and public lands visitors alike.

NACo has urged lawmakers to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools program and fulfill the federal government's responsi-

"Without critical SRS funds, counties and school districts nationwide are facing dramatic budgetary shortfalls"

—M. Chase

bility to counties with federally owned and managed forests.

"We urge Congress to renew its longstanding commitment to forest counties by reauthorizing Secure Rural Schools payments that support local services and pursuing long-term active forest management reform," said NACo Executive Director Matt Chase. "Counties and school districts require a strong partnership with the federal government to invest in services our residents and visitors to federal public lands rely on every day."

In FY15, the SRS program provided \$278 million to more than 700 rural counties, parishes and boroughs and 4,000 school districts. The program ensures that students receive

essential education services and supports county road maintenance, conservation projects, search and rescue missions and fire prevention programs, among many other essential services.

Since 1908, the Forest Service has shared 25 percent of timber revenues with rural counties whose ability to generate revenue to fund critical local services is limited by the presence of tax-exempt federal forest land. Current 25 percent payments from forest revenues are no longer adequate to support the services forest counties are legally required provide on and around the federal lands.

"Without critical SRS funds, counties and school districts nationwide are facing dramatic budgetary shortfalls, and some have been forced to halt infrastructure projects, terminate employees, cancel teacher contracts and reduce numerous other services," Chase said. "This program is vital to the well-being of our communities, and we call on Congress to act now." **CN**

CDBG eliminated

From **BUDGET** page 1

ing and Urban Development (15 percent), and Transportation (13 percent).

LARGEST PROPOSED INCREASES

Compared to FY16, the Pentagon would see a 10 percent increase under the proposed budget; Homeland Security, a seven percent increase; Veterans Affairs, a 10 percent increase; and nuclear security at the Energy Department an 11 percent increase.

OMB Director Mick Mulvaney said additional budget and revenue details will be released in May and that Cabinet secretaries will be given flexibility in determining how to distribute cuts made to each agency.

Following is a summary of President Trump's proposed changes to federal programs of interest to counties:

- **Eliminates funding for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnerships program:**

President Trump's FY18 budget requests \$40.7 billion for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a \$6.2 billion or 13.2 percent decrease from the FY17 CR level.

CDBG is currently funded at \$3 billion in the FY17 Continuing Resolution (CR) and HOME at \$950 million. The president's budget states that community and economic development activities would be devolved to the state and local level, asserting that these governments are better positioned to serve their communities. The CDBG program provides grants to counties throughout the nation, which leverage private and non-profit investment to fund community, infrastructure and economic development projects.

NACo strongly supports adequate funding for both the CDBG and HOME programs.

See **BUDGET** page 24

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS, COUNTY LEADERS

NACo officers were on the road ... again ... representing the association at the County Supervisors Association of Arizona's Board meeting March 16 (Second Vice President **Greg Cox**); the Iowa State Association of Counties Spring School in Polk County, March 9-10 (President **Bryan Desloge**); and the West Virginia Association of Counties Annual Conference in Kanawha County, March 5-7 (First Vice President **Roy Charles Brooks**). The officers spoke about the importance of NACo membership and gave updates on the federal budget and the opioid epidemic.

NACo STAFF

• **Christina Iskandar** is NACo's new program director at the newly created Counties Futures Lab. Christina has assumed overall responsibility for management, quality

control and on-time delivery of forums and other types of knowledge management projects. Before joining NACo, she served as the director of scheduling and advance for the office of the secretary of the Department of Agriculture.

• **Erin Knight** is the new affiliate services manager. Erin will serve as primary point of contact for the several organizations to which NACo subleases space and provides association management services. Before joining NACo, she held several positions with the U.S. Green Building Council, including exhibition manager, education delivery services manager and education program planner.

• **Kyle Cline** is the new regional development manager

for U.S. Communities. Kyle will be based in Indianapolis and will serve as a liaison with

state association sponsors, support U.S. Communities sales and support team assist in the assessment, structure and roll out of new programs. Prior to NACo, Kyle served as policy advisor for the Indiana Farm Bureau and general manager for the Richard G. Lugar Center for Renewable Energy.

• **Daria Daniel** was a featured speaker at the "Outlook on Our Federal Programs" session during the 2017 Council of State Community Development Agencies (COSDA) Program Managers Conference March 14 in Washington, D.C. 



Iskandar



Knight



Daniel



IRON COUNTY, MICH.



The Iron County, Michigan, seal depicts the 1890 Iron County Courthouse over an outline map of Michigan's Upper Peninsula with Iron County's contrasting outline.

The Iron County Courthouse, designed by J.C. Clancy, was built in 1890. Characteristic of the Romanesque revival period, it features a high pitched roof, high windows, deeply arched doorways and exterior ornamentation. It commands a scenic view of the city of Crystal Falls and its surroundings, and is listed on the State and National Register of Historical Places and is located on the Western Upper Peninsula of Michigan Heritage Trail.

The severance of the Upper Peninsula from the territory of Wisconsin was important to the border county of Iron. Early boundary surveys found outcroppings of iron ore and dense forests, both of which would become essential elements to the economy of the county.

Iron County was organized in 1885 from territory taken from Marquette and Menominee counties.

County Administrator Gene Smith assisted.

Would you like to see your county's seal featured? Contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org.

NACo's WESTERN INTERSTATE REGION 2017 CONFERENCE

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DESCHUTES COUNTY / SUNRIVER, OREGON

MONEYMATTERS

A Best Practice from the Government Finance Officers Association

Electronic Payments

Moving funds electronically is efficient, effective and common within local government; however, many governments still rely on producing paper checks to distribute funds. This method is not only costly, but it includes additional risk for fraud, requires additional handling and processing time, and is more difficult to track than electronic payments. While electronic payments are not immune from fraud, and criminals are becoming more sophisticated, governments can put safeguards in place to help prevent fraudulent activity.

Many types of electronic payments exist, and banks may offer specific products or services as the market evolves. The most popular types of electronic payments include:

Automated clearing house (ACH) — movement of funds in a batch process, which is best for high volume, low dollar transactions such as payroll, expense reimbursement and routine vendor payments, as the cost per transaction is low relative to other forms of electronic payment.

Wire transfer — immediate movement of funds between bank accounts with guaranteed settlement, which is most suitable for high-dollar transactions because the cost per transaction is high relative to other forms of electronic payment.

Purchasing (procurement) cards — a credit card transaction designed to reduce the volume of purchase orders issued or to eliminate petty cash. Purchasing cards are used at

the point of sale, which is convenient for the customer, and payments are made in aggregate. Vendors that accept the payment will pay a processing fee. There is usually no cost to the government, and the issuing bank usually provides a rebate based on transaction volume.

Electronic accounts payable — a credit card transaction, often without physical cards, that allows governments to pay invoices electronically. These transactions are similar to purchasing cards but occur after the point of sale and thus do not provide the processing benefits of purchasing cards. As with purchasing cards, the vendor pays a processing fee, and the government usually receives a rebate.

Stored value cards — gener-

ally used for payroll to unbanked employees or for rebate/incentive programs. The card is tied to a bank account and is loaded via an ACH transaction. There are costs associated with activation and use of the card.


Recommendation:

GFOA recommends that governments use electronic payments for all payments. Use of electronic payments will:

- eliminate the storage, handling, and processing of paper checks.
- reduce the time spent on reconciliation
- eliminate the occurrence of lost or stolen checks and the cost of check reissuance
- reduce security risks, including reducing the visibility of information used in check pay-

ment fraud, and

- improve the tracking of payments through enterprise resource planning systems and integration with banking technologies.

Before implementing electronic payments, GFOA recommends that governments review and make necessary changes to business processes, safeguards, and applicable internal controls. 

The Government Finance Officers Association (or GFOA) is a professional association of approximately 18,500 state, provincial and local government finance officers in the United States and Canada. GFOA is headquartered in Chicago. Its Washington, D.C. office is co-located with NACO.

Industries offer extra eyes on trafficking

From **TRAFFICKING** page 2

spot signs of human trafficking. Groups that provide training include Airline Ambassadors International, the American Hotel and Lodging Association and Truckers Against Trafficking.

Panelist Wagner said she planned to attend an anti-trafficking event back in her home state with Truckers Against Trafficking, who distribute educational materials about trafficking to truckers.

Seeing victims as victims

In Washington County, Minn., county hotel inspectors work with hotel employees to help identify possible traffickers. The county's director of public health told KARE-TV that "we're all in this together, so we think it's a nice role since we're already present in those facilities, to be doing our part to stop trafficking."

An observation such as seeing very little luggage can be a tip-

off. "If they're there for a week, it shows that they're probably not staying there for the week or there is something else there."

In Detroit, a non-profit called Alternatives for Girls offers help for victims in the form of crisis counseling, hygiene supplies, clothing, drug treatment referrals and transportation to safe lodging.

Before her work on Capitol Hill, panelist Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) said felony and juvenile cases were a part of her workload as a county attorney for eight years. "The Internet was new and at first, it was just a bunch of photos on someone's computer."

In Congress, Klobuchar introduced the Safe Harbor bill, based on a model from her home state, to see victims as victims and not as criminal "child prostitutes." A provision in the law encourages all states to have a safe harbor provision to help ensure minors who are sold for sex aren't prosecuted as defendants but instead are treated as victims. It was


signed into law in 2015.

Separating victims from traffickers

Fellow panelist Ramsey County, Minn. Commissioner Jim McDonough, said that shelter is offered to trafficking victims and attempts are made to relocate them away from their former traffickers.

"Traffickers could pull up in the parking lot...we're trying to put some distance between them [the victims] and their traffickers."

Minnesota's safe harbor law was not easy to get approved, he said. It was first approved for victims up to age 16, then for victims up to age 18 and is now approved for victims up to age 24.

Under the law, signed in 2011, victims are to be treated with dignity and respect, and directed to support services, and shelter and housing that meet their needs and recognize their right to make their own choices. 

Retains Cadillac tax on benefits

From **REPEAL** page 3

Medicaid providers, helping to support 961 hospitals, 883 skilled nursing facilities, 750 behavioral health authorities and 1,943 public health departments — all of which typically serve a disproportionate share of low-income populations and would be greatly impacted by federal reductions in Medicaid spending.


In addition to its indirect effects, AHCA would also directly impact the nation's 2,800 local public health departments, two-thirds of which are county-based, by eventually eliminating the Prevention and Public Health Fund.

• **The proposed legislation retains the 40 percent excise tax on employer health benefits included in the ACA.**

Counties' role in health care extends beyond that of a health payer, provider and administrator; counties also provide health insurance to our workforce. Counties employ 3.6

million people and invest approximately \$25 billion annually to provide quality health benefits to our workforce. The proposed legislation merely delays — rather than permanently repeals — the 40-percent tax on certain employer health benefits instituted under the ACA, or the so-called "Cadillac Tax."

Because county governments are generally not able to compete with private sector wages and salaries, healthcare coverage is the primary benefit used to attract and retain a quality workforce.

"We look forward to working with Congress and the administration to ensure that counties can continue to serve our residents in partnership with states and the federal government," said Chase. "We stand ready to identify strategies to strengthen our nation's health system by improving health outcomes and access to care while being responsible stewards of local taxpayer dollars." 

BRIGHT IDEAS | JOHNSON COUNTY, KAN.

Former Bowling Alley, Ice Rink Resurrected as New County Museum

By **Mary Ann Barton**
senior staff writer

A former bowling alley and ice rink that had seen better days sat dormant for years in Johnson County, Kan. The spot had previously served as the hub of a once-vibrant neighborhood. At the same time, the county was looking for a new home for the county museum that had outgrown its space and was hoping to also expand arts and recreational activities for county residents.

It took a few years, and now this spring, Johnson County will celebrate the opening of the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center in the iconic 1960s-era bowling alley that the county purchased in 2011 and renovated. A grand opening is slated for June 10, with tours of the building, free admission to the museum, a chance to sample dance and art classes and more.

The new center will bring a new life to the former King Louie West Lanes and Ice Chateau ice skating rink, that was popular in the '60s but closed in 2009.

"Johnson County has never had a facility like Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center," said Jill Geller, executive director of Johnson County Park and Recreation District, which will provide all the programming in the new center. Previously, arts programs were conducted at facilities throughout the county including community centers, churches and park buildings and "wherever we could find space," Geller noted.

The 79,300 square-foot renovated building, funded by a \$20.7 million bond issue, will feature a 12,500 square-foot exhibition space for the Johnson County Museum. The county's Triple-A credit rating helped achieve a better-than-market

PROBLEM: How to find a new home for a county museum, and expand county parks and recreation activities?

SOLUTION: Purchase and renovate a dormant, historic building for multiple community uses.

interest rate on the bonds issued to fund the new center. The Public Building Commission issued a series of lease purchase revenue bonds.

It didn't hurt that the building would be used for not only a museum, but also for arts and recreational classes, a theater and even election training. "It's important to give a lot of thought to the intended use of the building," said Ed Eilert, Johnson County board chair, when asked what advice he would give other county officials contemplating a similar challenge.

Ongoing programs at the center will be paid for with fees and space rental as well as fundraisers for the museum. Other funding came (and will continue to come) from donations, in-kind service donations, the sale of the

former museum and the county general fund.

The idea for the new center started when the original museum outgrew its space in a former 1927 schoolhouse in nearby Shawnee. "Some additions had been made through the years, but the basement was flooding," said Eilert.

The first museum exhibition slated to make its debut in June at the new center is called "Becoming Johnson County." Inside the museum, you'll find the 1950s All-Electric House, built by the local power company in 1953, that was moved nine miles from Shawnee to the new center.

The new center will also feature offices for the County Parks and Recreation District, a 3,500 square-foot space for a children's "history experience,"

a 350-seat black box theater, space for art classes for children and adults and a program for emerging artists. The county's Theater in the Park program, in existence since 1970, is now able to hold year-round productions in the theater and will kick off with a production of *Grease* on June 9.

The interesting architectural style of the building was preserved in the reimagined space. Dubbed "Googie," the architectural design was made popular mainly from the 1940s to 1960s, especially in California, and was often used in the design of diners and coffee shops. It got its name from a coffee shop in West Hollywood called Googies, designed by architect John Lautner.

The former bowling alley, King Louie West Lanes, opened with much fanfare on Feb. 28, 1959. The *Johnson County Herald* called it "one of the largest and most elaborate in the Greater Kansas City area." *The King Louie Show* TV program aired live from the bowling alley every

Saturday night. The Ice Chateau ice rink opened as an addition to the bowling alley in 1966.

Eilert, a former mayor of Overland Park, said he and a fellow mayor used to roll the first ball at pro tournaments at the bowling alley before it closed its doors. The county purchased it in 2011 and is now preparing for the grand opening.

"We had some criticism, but I would say with everything we went through, it's been worth it, and we were able to save some interesting architecture," said Eilert, referring to some critics who said the county spent too much money on the project.

The repurposed historic building will once again become a gathering place for Overland Park when it opens this spring. County leaders also hope it will serve as a catalyst to revitalize the surrounding community. **CN**

Bright Ideas features noteworthy and award-winning programs.



A rendering of the Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center in Johnson County, Kan. (above)

Rendering courtesy of Johnson County

The King Louie West Lanes bowling alley opened in 1959 in Johnson County Kan. (right)

Photo courtesy of Johnson County

Welcome New Member Counties*

District of Columbia	Erie County, N.Y.
Elk County, Kan.	Nassau County, N.Y.
Stanton County, Kan.	Miami County, Ohio
Barry County, Mo.	Fayette County, Pa.
Logan County, Neb.	Hyde County, S.D.*

* South Dakota is now a 100% NACo membership state, bringing the total number of 100% membership states to 23.



Overdoses taxing medical examiners

From TOWN HALL page 5

Williams and Randall both addressed elected officials' obligation to lead and face the skepticism and anger liable to come from minority communities that suffered through opioid addiction when it was more of a street drug.

"To move forward, we have to take ownership for the sins of the past," Williams said. "It's natural to get defensive when someone says 'where were you back then?' and respond 'I'm here now!' You have to acknowledge that 'yes, I wasn't there then, but I daggone will be sure that we're owning it going forward.'"

Randall and Dahlkemper likewise said that the framing of the epidemic and removing stigma would help start addressing the problem.

Families are starting to acknowledge when their children

die of overdoses," she said.

Randall seconded, "If people are ashamed to talk about (addiction), they will never get help."

Jorgensen, who himself prescribed opioid painkillers as a surgeon, initially drew rebukes from other county officials when he noticed, as coroner, how many people were dying of overdoses.

"Nobody would talk about it," he said. "I was told I was embarrassing my county by talking about it. Well, embarrassing is a 15-year-old with a needle in her arm, dead."

Tracking statistics has been difficult, according to Christopher Jones, acting associate deputy assistant secretary, science and data policy at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Though the lag for national-level numbers on overdoses is roughly 12 months, it is down from a pre-

vious 18-24-month lag.

But challenges remain in testing and funding.

"Anything we see, heroin deaths, opioid deaths, fentanyl deaths, they're all underestimates," he said. "It's just the floor of the problem."

On one hand, the number of cases has gone up while budgets for public health offices have gone down, he said, and as drugs are chemically altered, testing for them during autopsies hasn't caught up.

"Heroin deaths may be down, but in reality fentanyl deaths, or something like it, are up, but we don't know," he said. "It's \$300 to test for heroin, \$200 more to test for something on top of that; when you have more overdoses it's really taxing the medical examiners, especially for small counties."

You can watch the video recording of the town hall on NACo's website. **CN**

Seven people killed in deadly fires

From WILDFIRES page 3

Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin declared a state of emergency in 22 counties. A woman who died in Oklahoma, a resident of Harper County, was evacuating cattle with her husband when she died of a heart attack, according to news reports. In all, at least 465 square miles burned in Beaver, Harper and Woodward counties in Oklahoma.

Kansas

Large grass fires were reported in 23 Kansas counties March 4, according to KMBC. Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback declared a state of emergency in his state the next night. Several days later, officials reported 502,000 acres destroyed by fire in Kansas' Clark and Comanche counties alone, reportedly the largest fire in the state's history.

Of those 502,000 acres burned, officials say that 350,000 to 400,000 acres or 85 percent of that was in Clark County, where a trucker died

from smoke inhalation. Thousands of cattle died in fires in the county and other parts of southwest Kansas. Residents were busy trying to dispose of dead livestock or find cattle that had wandered off, after they got loose when fences burned in the fire.

The Clark County Extension Office offered property damage forms on its Facebook page for residents to fill out and the Kansas Division of Emergency Management provided live updates about the latest firefighting efforts in various counties on its Facebook page using Facebook Live and archived the video on the page.

Clark County officials asked its citizens to be cautious of the emergency traffic assisting in fighting the fires and asked residents to be sure to thank volunteers, which included fire crews from neighboring counties as well as from Colorado and Oklahoma. The county also had assistance from Blackhawk and Chinook helicopters as well as a couple of crop duster planes

that were dropping water on areas that firefighters could not get to.

At least a dozen homes were destroyed in Englewood, a city in Clark County where residents were also under orders to boil water because required chlorine levels could not be maintained due to a power outage. The City of Ashland was also evacuated.

Colorado

In Logan County, Colo., no deaths were reported but several homes were destroyed, three schools were evacuated and more than 1,000 residents received pre-evacuation notices. The fire there was first reported March 6 and closed several roads for a time, including Interstate 76.

Florida

Florida's Collier County was also dealing with a wildfire, burning more than 6,000 acres and issued mandatory evacuations for several neighborhoods. **CN**

WORD SEARCH

IRON COUNTY, Mich.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS FEATURED COUNTY IN 'BEHIND THE SEAL'

Created By: Mary Ann Barton

Y T C P I T D Z U U G F N M P E Y P N D
H C I M F W I Y P L A D R B V I U D V O
W M G M F Q R K T L T N K J I R P A Y J
K T D X O T K F T M V V S M H O P R E P
I C R Y S T A L F A L L S L Y N E O S W
D B I E S J H J Q U Q M O P O C R W H E
O Y R J A I I Y U J B I G R O O P M E S
O O H D B K S K M Q Q H I R B U E U A C
F J V W R W E E P U R Y G D I N N K I Y
E R H D U X K M V I R S R C U T I E L G
N G X P O G X E E T I P I K T Y N P E D
I B R F Y C B P F C R F H N Y R S V E J
F C D V N W I K C I O Y V Y S E U V N C
S U G N U F S U O G N O M U H P L S F C
B Y H X R Q L I M I O J K X Q O A G I U
O U Z K L A K E S S R Y C S H R U H S D
F J F X C D C Y Z N E L Q G A T B S H R
U R Q S M R D A K I C N A L B E L E E L
J D V T I Y T G D U M R E V I R N O R I
I K U M U U S T C U W A F W Q T E V O W

UPPER PENINSULA Location of Iron County

CRYSTAL FALLS County seat named for nearby icy waterfall on the Paint River

IRON RIVER Largest city

RUN YOUR BASS OFF Part of the 30-year old Crystal Falls Lions Club Bass Festival

FOBS FINE FOOD Top-rated restaurant in Crystal Falls by TripAdvisor

IRON ORE European settlers began to arrive in 1875 to prospect for iron

AILEEN FISHER Children's book author from Iron County

TIMOTHY MURPHY HOUSE Also known as Harbor House, Queen Anne/Colonial Revival home now serves as museum for Crystal Falls Museum Society

SCALUCCIS GROCERY Was raided during Prohibition in 1920 touching off the "Rum Rebellion"

IRON COUNTY REPORTER Local newspaper

LEE LEBLANC Late wildlife artist was a resident of Iron River

HUMONGOUS FUNGUS Nickname for *Armillaria Gallica*, fungus estimated to be up to 10,000 years old, covering 38 acres and weighing 100 tons

LAKES There are more than 300 lakes in Iron County

TRY IRON Local visitor information is available at 888-TRY-IRON

FORESTRY Connor Sport Court's mill is largest employer in Iron County

CAPITAL LOOP

Congress revokes BLM Planning Rule in win for counties

The Senate voted to strike down a Bureau of Land Management rule (BLM Planning 2.0 rule) that county officials say would have diluted county input into federal land management and hinder local government consultation and collaboration with BLM. Previously passed by the House, the measure now goes to President Trump, who is expected to sign it into law. NACo joined with more than 60 other groups of public lands stakeholders to strike down the Planning 2.0 rule.

NACo testifies on county role in disasters

Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee member

Nick Crossley testified before a House subcommittee on the role of counties in protecting the nation from natural and manmade disasters and the importance of federal support for local emergency management agencies. Crossley, director of emergency management and homeland security in Hamilton County, Ohio testified March 16 on behalf of NACo and the International Association of Emergency Managers, a NACo affiliate.



Crossley



Cruickshank

NACo supports PILT, SRS in House testimony

Valley County, Idaho Commissioner Gordon Cruickshank testified before the House Natural Resources Committee's Federal Lands Subcommittee to discuss innovative infrastructure ideas for the National Park Service and Forest Service. Cruickshank's remarks, March 16, focused on the key role of counties in

building and maintaining the nation's infrastructure and the importance of the Payments in Lieu of Taxes and Secure Rural Schools programs in supporting county infrastructure priorities, particularly for public lands counties.

NACo advocates strengthening USDA rural programs in next farm bill

It is imperative that the Department of Agriculture strengthen its Rural Development programs in the next Farm Bill, Commissioner Bob Fox of Renville County, Minn. recently told the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Commodity Exchanges, Energy and Credit. Fox emphasized that the upcoming farm bill is critical

to the vitality of underserved communities and to the positioning of rural America to compete in a global economy.

Labor Department announces \$12 million to transition homeless vets into jobs

The Labor Department recently announced it has \$12 million available for the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program. Housing and Urban Development estimates there are nearly 40,000 homeless veterans across the country. The new funding is available to counties for efforts that help transition vets back into the workforce. Grant amounts are capped at \$500,000 and do not require matching funds.

2017
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- NOTIFICATIONS OF COUNTIES MATTER CHALLENGE: WEEK OF MAY 29, 2017
- NACo ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXPOSITION: JULY 21 - 24, 2017

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COUNTIES MATTER CHALLENGE:
1 2016-2017
BRILLIANT IDEAS AT WORK

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ARIZONA

The Department of Defense (DoD) Office of Economic Adjustment has awarded a \$532,700 grant to **COCONINO COUNTY** for a Joint Land Use Study, which provides recommendations for **land uses compatible with missions of military installations** while supporting economic development and community values.

"We appreciate that the DoD Office of Economic Adjustment saw the value in this project and awarded this grant," said Supervisor Art Ryan. "This grant will allow the Policy Committee to study the best uses for this land and determine what is in the best interest of our community while fulfilling the missions of our military installations."

FLORIDA

Tenants of **PALM BEACH COUNTY** Park Airport in Lantana are losing money when President Trump visits, according to a report by CBS News. The Secret Service has determined that the **airport must close down** due to security concerns whenever Trump is in town due to its proximity to Mar-a-Lago. Trump has visited his luxury country club four out of seven weekends of his presidency.

Twenty-eight businesses in all, including a flight school and a banner ad company, are trying to beef up business during the week, when the president isn't visiting. So far, the county has also paid \$1.7 million in extra security costs when the president comes to town, according to several reports.

The county is conducting a study to determine the extent of the costs and benefits to Trump's presence in the county, the *Palm Beach Daily News* reported. County Administrator Verdenia Baker said that he could attract tourists. Baker said the county would need a few months to measure the tourism revenue impact.



ILLINOIS

● OnStar to the rescue: Earlier this month, **LAKE COUNTY** sheriff's deputies were in pursuit of a stolen Buick, but the suspects would not pull over. The owner of the car told police the vehicle was equipped with OnStar, the security subscription service, so the sheriff's office got in touch with the company and **OnStar disabled the vehicle**. Police were able to nab all three suspects.

"I can't say it's the first time we used it, but it is very unusual," Sgt. Christopher Covelli, a spokesman for the sheriff's office, told the *Lake County News-Sun*. In 2012, the same service shut down a car that led police on a high-speed 40-mile chase in the Chicago area.

● **MADISON COUNTY** is finding an innovative way to **record its history** by inviting residents to contribute to



"Ernie's Law" beefs up punishment for those who shoot police dogs. K9 Ernie is pictured here. Photo courtesy of Kenton County Commonwealth's Attorney

KENTUCKY

Kentucky lawmakers have passed legislation that will punish anyone who shoots a police dog. Previously in the Bluegrass State, a police dog had to die or become so injured they couldn't return to work for the shooter to be punished, the Associated Press reports. **KENTON COUNTY** Commonwealth's Attorney Rob Sanders, along with police officer Mike Lusardi, teamed up to lobby the state legislature after Lusardi's K9 German shepherd was shot twice during an altercation with a suspect.

Police dogs can cost up to \$8,000 initially and training them runs from \$12,000 to \$15,000, according to the National Police Dog Foundation.

Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Ill. Residents will be able to participate by providing oral history interviews, photos and documents.

The new history site was set to be introduced this month in the Southern Illi-

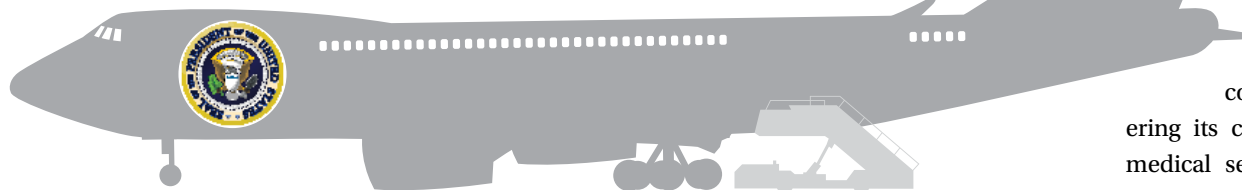
nois University Edwardsville Morris University Center Conference Center. The project is being spearheaded by the local school superintendent and history professors from the university.

MONTANA

A Great Falls medical company has notified **GALLATIN** and **CASCADE** counties that it is severing its contracts to provide medical services at their detention centers, according to

a report by the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*.

The company, Benefits Spectrum Medical, says it is **pulling out of the contracts** because of "litigious behavior of the inmates and the inordinate time and effort it takes to defend the claims, including those that are completely without basis," the newspaper reported. The counties are weighing their options; Cascade County is considering bids, including one from Planned Parenthood of Montana, according to the *Great Falls Tribune*.





NEVADA

Limited cellphone reception is helping news of what happens in Vegas stay in Vegas.

But **CLARK COUNTY** would like to **improve service on the Strip**, where visitors' smartphones are overloading wireless networks with social media postings, live video streaming and requests for GPS directions.

"At a convention center, when there's a big show like [the Consumer Electronics Show] ... some of the wireless carriers will bring in a mobile wireless communications system to handle the increased need for data and bandwidth," said Mike Harwell, the county's assistant manager of business license operations.

Fixes may include assisting wireless communications companies in placing more small cells, low-powered nodes located close to the ground, on and around the Strip to improve coverage and connectivity speed. There is capacity to more than double the number of small-cell sites on streetlight poles on one section of Las Vegas Boulevard, the *Review-Journal* reported. The county is also considering placing cell sites on bus stop shelters and casino properties.

NEW MEXICO

An audit in progress has shown that so far, oil and gas companies owe almost half a million dollars in back taxes to **EDDY COUNTY**.

While identifying, mapping and finding the valuation of oil and gas properties within the county, auditors found 111 omitted drilling rigs and 101 miles of omitted pipeline that hadn't been claimed, along

with more than \$460,000 in unpaid back taxes, the Associated Press reported.

NORTH DAKOTA

The state Supreme Court told **DUNN COUNTY** it cannot **veto the location of an oil and gas waste treating plant** approved by the state industrial commission.

The opinion upholds a district judge's ruling that sole authority for zoning rests with the state commission, which regulates energy development in the state.

In 2013, Dunn County officials said a treatment site was zoned as "rural preservation," which does not allow for salt water storage tanks. Three other oil-producing counties had filed documents supporting Dunn County, the Associated Press reported.

PENNSYLVANIA

- Vaping in **ALLEGHENY COUNTY**'s public indoor places isn't just passé, it's illegal. The County Council put **e-cigarettes and handheld vaporizers** on the same standard as tobacco products, forbidding them in locations such as schools, government buildings, sports stadiums, restaurants and similar spaces, according to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

- The auditor general's office will examine the child protection system in 13 counties, evaluating the impact of high turnover rates and minimal training. The Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators Association (PCYA), an affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, praised the decision, adding that current state law includes a 2.5-year difference between when county children and youth agencies submit their proposed budgets and when money is delivered.

"This process does not allow counties to take into consideration new mandates

that are adopted in the intervening time, and unless the legislature would approve a supplemental appropriation, the counties' only options are to cut spending in other areas, to request to move existing funds, or to increase property taxes," PCYA Executive Director Brian Bornman said.

The auditor general's report hopes to offer recommendations to improve stressors so that children and youth agencies can improve the quality of care at-risk children receive.

TEXAS

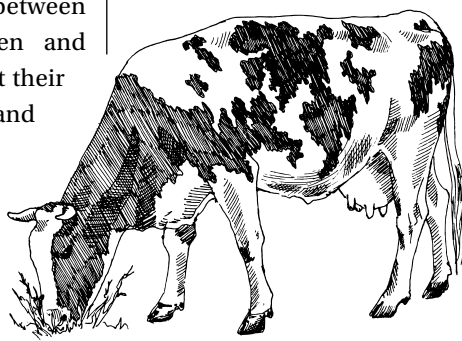
- **DALLAS COUNTY**'s first-ever **expunction clinic** will help those accused but not convicted of crimes clear their records.

The free Dallas Expunction Expo will educate the public on the importance and the process of clearing criminal arrest records. Participants will be able to speak with volunteer attorneys about their arrest records and connect with community organizations and other social service agencies, CBS-DFW reported.

WISCONSIN

In an effort to cut phosphorus in lakes, **DANE COUNTY** has allocated \$1.1 million to help local dairy farmers apply and build **community manure storage capacity**.

When farmers run out of manure storage space, WISCTV reported, they often spread it on frozen or snowy ground, and University of Wisconsin scientists estimated that 40 percent of manure containing phosphorus ends up in the lakes. In addition to a centrally located storage facility, the count will entertain proposals that describe innovative ideas



and strategies for managing manure such as ultrafiltration or composting.

WYOMING

With up to 50,000 visitors expected to visit Central Wyoming for Aug. 21's total solar eclipse, **NATRONA COUNTY** will offer permits for landowners in the unincorporated areas of the county who plan to **play host to campers**.

There's no charge for the permit, which is limited to the week before and the week after the eclipse. Though Development Director Jason Gutierrez said landowners

don't need permits, roughly 100 landowners have expressed interest, according to K2 Radio. Gutierrez says they present logistical challenges, including traffic, sanitation, food, water, fire, health problems (with people coming from sea level to mile-high elevations) and finding ample space for emergency vehicles to reach campers if necessary.

News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Mary Ann Barton, senior staff writers. If you have an item for News From, please email cban@naco.org or mbarton@naco.org.



New NACo Member

GET TO KNOW...

Fayette County, Pa.



Welcome, Fayette County, Pa.

Fayette County is named for the Marquis de Lafayette, a French aristocrat and military officer who fought in the American Revolutionary War. In its early history, Fayette County settlers provided the new United States government with an early test of authority in the 1793 Whiskey Rebellion, when farmers rebelled against tax collectors to protest a new liquor tax. Also of note: **Architect Frank Lloyd Wright's most famous home, Fallingwater, designated the "best all-time work of American architecture" in 1991, is located in this rural county.**



Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Increases water infrastructure funding; cuts FEMA funding

From BUDGET page 16

• Increases water and wastewater infrastructure funding.

The budget provides funding for the EPA's Clean Water (CW) and Drinking Water (DW) State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs to the tune of \$2.3 billion, a \$4 million increase over FY17. Additionally, \$20 million is provided for the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program, the same level as FY17 funding. NACo supports funding for the WIFIA, CWSRF and DWSRF programs.

WIFIA is a financing program that allows EPA to provide direct loans and loan guarantees for the construction of large water infrastructure projects. NACo supports funding WIFIA because it has the potential to significantly lower water infrastructure costs for large projects. The CWSRF program finances municipal wastewater infrastructure construction or upgrade projects and the DWSRF program supports drinking water infrastructure projects.

• Decreases EPA categorical grant funds offered to state and local governments.

The budget recommends \$597 million total for EPA categorical grant programs, a cut of \$482 million below 2017 annualized CR levels. While specific program cuts were not detailed, it would affect numerous grant programs, such as the Clean Water Act's (CWA) Sec. 319 Nonpoint Source grant program, the State and Local Air Quality Management program, the Leaking Underground Storage Tank program and the Beaches Protection and Brownfields program.

• Proposes a \$500 million increase to expand opioid misuse treatment and recovery services.

The budget indicates that the extra funding is intended to help implement the 21st Century Cures Act, which authorized but did not appropriate \$1 billion in funding to help states and localities combat the opioid epidem-

PRESIDENTS AND BUDGETS

Each year, the president submits a comprehensive budget request to Congress in early February which outlines the Administration's policy and funding priorities and the economic outlook for the coming fiscal year. This budget, which estimates spending, revenue and borrowing levels, is compiled by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) from input by the various federal agencies.

However, newly elected presidents typically submit initial proposals with less details than a normal budget request—thus referred to as a “skinny” budget. The “skinny” budget proposal does not include the tax revenue, mandatory spending or economic growth forecasts that make up a normal presidential budget request. OMB Director Mick

Mulvaney said additional budget and revenue details will be released in May and that Cabinet secretaries will be given flexibility in determining how to distribute cuts made to each agency.

President Trump's “skinny” budget represents the first step in the annual appropriations process. Ultimately, Congress is tasked with the “power of the purse” and must decide whether and how to implement the president's budget. For the top-line discretionary spending levels in President Trump's budget to become law, the budget document must pass both the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. Both chambers would then set specific spending levels for programs under the various agencies through the annual appropriations process.

ic. Congress already appropriated \$500 million of this funding in the FY17 CR. The report by NACo and NLC's City-County Task Force on the Opioid Epidemic calls for additional federal funding to help communities expand and improve existing efforts to address the opioid epidemic.

• Creates a new federal emergency response fund for public health outbreaks

The report does not specify funding, but calls for an emergency fund that would be used to help states and localities rapidly respond to public health outbreaks such as Zika. Currently, Congress must appropriate emergency funding for public health outbreaks, which can take time. For instance, it took Congress until Sept. 29 before it approved \$1.1 billion in emergency Zika funding after months of impasse last summer. Through more than 1,900 county public health departments, counties are at the forefront of efforts to prevent and minimize potential and existing

public health outbreaks and emergencies.

• Eliminates the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG).

Most CSBG funding is distributed to states, which must pass through at least 90 percent of funds to eligible local entities, predominantly community action agencies (CAAs). Since local elected officials must make up one-third of a CAA's board of directors, counties play an integral role in determining how the block grant is used throughout the country. In fact, CSBG funds reach 99 percent of the nation's counties. NACo strongly supports CSBG, as it helps counties serve some of the country's most vulnerable populations, including elderly citizens, people with disabilities and children.

• Eliminates the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

LIHEAP delivers critical short-term aid to the nation's most vulnerable populations such as the poor, the disabled and elderly, to help them pay

for heating and cooling their homes. Previously funded at \$3.4 billion in FY16, NACo supports continued LIHEAP funding that aids families during sudden crises, such as significant fluctuations in energy costs, natural disasters and extreme weather conditions.

• Substantial cuts proposed to state and local grants administered under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Although the blueprint does not include details about which FEMA programs would be cut, it targets \$667 million in cuts towards FEMA programs that “are either unauthorized by the Congress,” or “that must provide more measurable results to ensure the Federal Government is not supplanting other stakeholders' responsibilities.” The Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant Program and the Homeland Security Grant Program are mentioned as examples of the above-mentioned program types.

• Eliminates the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP).

SCAAP is a grant program that reimburses states and local governments for the cost of incarcerating undocumented immigrants convicted of crimes and receives \$210 million annually through the appropriations process. Although immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility, counties incur millions of dollars in un-reimbursed expenses each year in housing undocumented individuals who violate state or local laws. Reimbursing these costs through SCAAP formula-funding helps ensure that counties are not forced to divert funds from other important local programs such as healthcare, social services and public safety, to help carry out a federal responsibility.

• Cuts funding for Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT).

The budget proposes to reduce funding for PILT by setting the program at its 10-year

average funding level. Although specific budget amounts are not available and the FY17 PILT appropriation has not yet been enacted, this proposal could amount to a cut of more than 10 percent for the program in FY18. In 2016, Congress fully funded PILT at \$452 million. The program partially offsets the costs over 1,850 counties incur by providing critical services on federal lands.


• Budget remains silent on funding for Secure Rural Schools (SRS).

The budget is silent on the future of the SRS Program. The SRS program provides crucial support to forest counties, schools, transportation infrastructure, law enforcement and other county services in more than 720 counties and 4,000 school districts, impacting nine million students across 41 states. The program's authorization lapsed on Sept. 30, 2015 and has not yet been reauthorized by Congress. SRS was funded at \$278 million in FY15.

• Eliminates funding for the TIGER discretionary grant program.

The TIGER program awards grants to projects that are generally eligible for funding under existing surface transportation formula programs. The program is currently funded at \$499 million through the 2017 annualized CR level. It supports projects such as local safety efforts, including efforts to enhance road safety.

• Eliminates funding for the Essential Air Service (EAS) program.

The EAS program is currently funded at \$175 million. This elimination of funding would hurt rural counties where EAS services provide a crucial economic lifeline to communities with no airport in their region. NACo supports the EAS program, which assists airlines in serving small communities. 

For more information, visit www.naco.org.