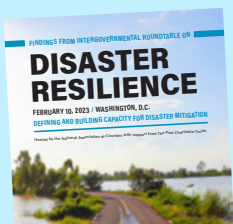


SPOTLIGHT ON: DISASTER MITIGATION



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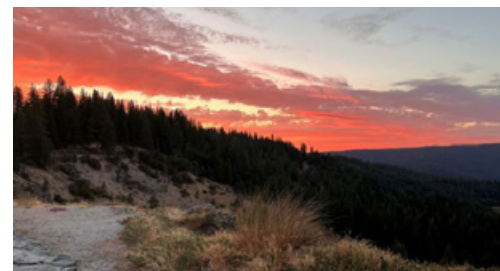


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CountyNews



**COUNTY PROGRAMS
TACKLE VETERAN SUICIDE
PREVENTION. PG. 3**



**MICRO-GRANTS PROGRAM
HELPS FIREPROOF
NEIGHBORHOODS. PG. 13**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

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SEPTEMBER 25, 2023

PILT champions visit Capitol Hill



PILT Fly-In participants pause Sept. 14 for a “class photo” at the NACo conference center in Washington, D.C. before visiting Capitol Hill. See Page 2 for full caption. Photo by Chris Ferenzi

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

County officials from across the country traveled to Washington, D.C. to advocate for federal public land policies, sharing stories with members of Congress of how the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) programs help counties fund essential

services, including search and rescue operations, infrastructure and education.

This year, \$578.8 million in PILT funding was distributed.

Nearly one-third of the land in the United States is owned by the federal government — the majority of which is in the West. Because counties can’t tax federally owned land, they’re left to provide services including law

enforcement, emergency medical services, solid waste disposal and fire and forest management, regardless of funding sources. In some counties, more than 90% of the land is public, including in Gila County, Ariz., where a mere 3.5% of land is privately owned.

“I don’t think any of the people we met with [on Capitol Hill] needed convincing that we

need to maintain PILT, but one thing that I think we did was speak to the diversity of each county’s need for it,” said Gila County Supervisor Steve Christensen.

“And also debunking the idea that it’s just some kind of a bonus at the end of the year or just some kind of a refund. ‘Hey,

See *PILT* page 2

Facing labor shortages, counties get creative to attract workforce

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Facing disproportionate labor shortages due to an aging workforce and high burnout rates, counties are getting cre-

ative with incentives to recruit and retain staff.

Even with federal support like the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, local government is one of only two sectors — the other being mining and logging — yet to return to pre-pandemic levels of employment, as all other major industry sector employment continues to grow.

Counties of all sizes across the country, including suburban Fairfax County, Va., urban

Harris County, Texas and rural San Juan County, Wash., have gotten creative to attract and keep employees in a competitive job market, where the average local government annual wages are nearly 16% lower than in the private sector.

A 32-hour work week in San Juan County

“There’s been no other time in history that employees have had this much power — it’s an incredible shift and it’s taking

See *JOBS PLAN* page 4

Iowa IT managers help to hire

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Joel Rohne is part country doctor, part posse leader. He just happens to work in information technology.

Rohne coordinates a team of county IT leaders through the Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC), where he is program manager for the year-old technology service bureau.

See *TECHNOLOGY* page 5

'I can hardly think of anything we fund that gets such widespread support'

From PILT page 1

here's your birthday present.' This is something that we need absolutely to function — without it, our county would be in serious financial issues," Christensen said.

Both the House and Senate Interior Appropriations Committee bills for the upcoming fiscal year fully fund PILT. Melissa Zimmerman, clerk for the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations, told county officials that despite what she referred to as the U.S. government's "very uncertain budget environment," it's guaranteed that PILT will be fully funded in the final full year bill in "such sum as may be necessary," regardless of if PILT costs are over the president's or congressional budget estimates.

"We get letters from both sides of the aisle," Zimmerman said. "This is a bipartisan, bicameral program. I can hardly think of anything else that we

fund that gets such widespread support and that's because the members hear from you about how important PILT is to your community.

"So how does this work in the Appropriations Committee? We actually consider this a must-pay bill. When I sit down to my spreadsheet to figure out how we're going to fund our subcommittee, I look at PILT and one or two other things and I say, 'Well, we must pay for these and then what money do we have left?' It is simply something that we lock in."

Rep. Harriet Hageman (R-Wyo.) said that she thinks the government needs to "be putting power back where it belongs, which is with our state legislators and our county commissioners," and spoke to the importance of having longer term solutions surrounding funding of PILT and SRS.

"I think that it is absolutely a failed business model that we have our counties and our com-



(L-r): Commissioners Sherry Maupin and Brent Reinke, Idaho Association of Counties Executive Director Seth Grigg, U.S. Rep. Russ Fulcher and Commissioners Tim Bertling and Jeff Hough.

munities having to come, hat in hand, to Congress every year, every other year, every third year for funding because of the fact that we have such vast areas of federal lands, primarily in the interior West," Hageman said. "I think counties need to be at the forefront of this discussion."

"And I think that you are the ones that need to start pushing your legislators and your members of Congress to talk about whether we can start doing some different kinds of pilot projects that would allow you, would allow our states, would allow our state agencies, would allow our local communities more input and involvement with the management of these resources, if not outright ownership."

Along with funding educa-

tion and infrastructure such as roads and bridges, SRS payments help rural counties and school districts affected by the decline in revenue from timber harvests on federal land fund conservation projects and wildfire prevention programs. More than 720 counties and 4,000 school districts in 41 states rely on SRS funding.

Prairie County, Mont. Commissioner Todd Devlin, chairman of NACo's Public Lands Steering Committee; Nevada County, Calif. Supervisor Heidi Hall; Valley County, Idaho Commissioner Sherry Maupin; Stevens County, Wash. Commissioner Wes McCart; Greenbrier County, W. Va. Commissioner Tammy Tincher and Humboldt County, Nev. Com-

missioner Ken Tipton all spoke to the group of county officials who came to D.C. about the importance of fully funding PILT and SRS and how it's used in their respective counties.

Counties devote the federal funding to everything from wildfire education and training in Nevada County, Calif. to staffing schools in Valley County, Idaho. Other examples include emergency and homeland security in Greenbrier County, W. Va. and road maintenance in Humboldt County, Nev..

"Without the PILT funding, without the SRS funding, we would not be able to provide these things that are required and that create the communi-

See PILT page 16

SNAP/STATS

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

STAT	NUMBERS
Hispanic population in U.S.:	63.7 million
Percent of population:	19.1 %
One million population states	13 states
County with largest gain:	Harris County, Texas
Median age of Hispanics in U.S.:	30.7

Source: U.S. Census

PAGE 1 PHOTO CAPTION

PILT Fly-In participants pause Sept. 14 for a "class photo" in the conference center at NACo headquarters in Washington, D.C. **First Row:** Joe Jackson, NACo; Jerry Taylor, Garfield County, Utah; Jeff Hough, Bannock County, Idaho; Darin Bushman, Piute County, Utah; Jonathan Shuffield, NACo; Tammy Tincher, Greenbrier County, W.Va.; Brent Reinke, Twin Falls County, Idaho; Sherry Maupin, Valley County, Idaho; Seth Grigg, Idaho Association of Counties; Jack Lytle, Daggett County, Utah. **Second Row:** Ned Coe, Modoc County, Calif.; Joe Briggs, Cascade County, Mont.; Greg Miles, Duchesne County, Utah; Barry Shullanberger, Lake County, Ore.; Cassie Hall, Mineral County, Nev.; Heidi Hall, Nevada County, Calif.; Shantil Siaperas, Montana Association of Counties **Third Row:** Dennis Blackburn, Wayne County, Utah; Eric Bryson, Montana Association of Counties; Greg Chilcott, Raval-li County, Mont.; Varlin Higbee, Lincoln County, Nev.; John Espy, Carbon County, Wyo.; Todd Devlin, Prairie County, Mont.; Wes McCart, Stevens County, Wash.; John Peters, Mono County, Calif.; Zeke Lee, Utah Association of Counties; Steve Christensen, Gila County, Ariz. **Fourth row:** Ken Tipton, Humboldt County, Nev.; Dwayne McFall, Fremont County, Colo.; Clay Kiesling, Union County, N.M. and Tim Bertling, Boundary County, Idaho Photo by Chris Ferenzi

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County programs tackle veteran suicide prevention

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Harris County, Texas and Oneida County, N.Y. are creating and expanding existing suicide prevention resources for veterans through U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs grant funding.

The funding is helping to broaden access to resources in rural communities and areas with limited medical services.

Suicides in the active-duty military increased in the first three months of 2023 compared to the same time last year, according to a newly released Pentagon report.

The Defense Suicide Prevention Office revealed in its quarterly report that the overall number of active-duty suicides — 94 — from January through March was up 25% compared to the number of troops — 75 — who took their own lives in the first three months of 2022.

Harris County, which has the largest veteran population in Texas, is extending its suicide prevention programming to the neighboring rural counties of Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Liberty, Montgomery and Waller through the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention (SSG Fox SPGP) grant.

Dave Lewis, director of Harris County's Veterans Services Department, emphasized the importance of investing in outreach.

"It's easy for veterans to 'slip through the cracks' even if programming is made available, if they're not aware it exists or it's not easily accessible," he said. The department's outreach team works with local partners, including law enforcement and mental health care providers, to identify veterans who could benefit the most from suicide prevention services.

"Waller County is one of the counties that touches Harris County, but it's a very tiny community and it does have a relatively sizable veteran population, but not a lot of resources to be able to serve the needs," Lewis said. "So, it's us being able to [act as a] 'hub-and-spoke' out to these other counties and es-

tablish what I refer to as 'centers of influence.'

"Somebody in that county — it might be a VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], it might be the local church, it could be the Dairy Queen — somebody, somewhere they've got the pulse of what's going on with the veteran community. So, we try to connect with those centers of influence to try to understand what the veterans' needs are, who's struggling and what we can do to provide services."

The grant is helping fund Harris County Veteran Services Department's baseline mental health screening, outreach, case management, peer support services and assistance with transportation and benefits.

"What makes us innovative and a little unique is that [outreach] 'find' piece and staying with them throughout the pro-

cess," said Jason Williams, deputy director of Harris County Veteran Services Department. "A lot of organizations, if [veterans] go to treatment, they get a pat on the back, and 'Hey, good luck to you.' We want to catch them on the other end of that and continue that continuum of care to follow through with them through the whole process to get them out on the other side to be more successful."

Harris County Veteran Services Department has a team that goes into the jails twice a week and works on re-entry strategies with the thousands of veterans that go through the county's justice system. They determine where the highest needs are, including food and housing insecurity, and ensure the veterans are connected to the needed resources, Williams said.

Making veterans aware of the services offered is the first key step, but the biggest challenge is then getting them to take advantage of them, Lewis said.

"If I just give somebody a card and say, 'Give this person a call, chances are about .00001% that they will actually call that provider," Lewis said. "But if we meet them where they are, build that trust and then accompany them to a place it's really wonderful ... We like to bill ourselves as a 'one-start shop.'

We can't solve everything, but we want people to start with us, because we've probably seen those challenges before."

Oneida County Mental Health Director Emily Ofalt echoed Lewis' sentiment and said one of the biggest barriers identified by SSG Fox SPGP grantees in discussions has been breaking down the stigma in the veteran community of reaching out for help. Oneida County contracted with the local mental health clinical and crisis services organization The Neighborhood Center as the lead service agency and the Utica Center for Development as a subcontractor to handle outreach, case management and veteran peer services.

Mike Pracht, a social worker at The Neighborhood Center, is the program director for Oneida County's SSG Fox SPGP programming. Pracht is a veteran himself and said his background helps him connect with the people the center serves through the grant.

"I retired out of the Army after 20 years and I had my own issues with mental health, and I understand the kind of reluctance for veterans to really seek mental health assistance," Pracht said. "It's very difficult for us to admit that we need help from somebody — that's really kind of the big first bar-

rier, and then to actually go out and seek the mental health treatment.

"There's a very negative stigma about mental health when it comes to active duty and veterans in general, so having that knowledge and knowing kind of firsthand a lot of what these folks are struggling through is definitely advantageous in trying to work with them."

Lewis, also a veteran, said having the shared experience of serving and building a sense of trust, "veteran-to-veteran," has been a huge part of the success of the Harris County Veteran Services Department. He shared a story of a Texan veteran he was able to get through to who was experiencing significant legal issues and a mental health crisis.

"I picked up the phone, figured out who his defense attorney was and said, 'Hey, can I make an appointment with your veteran?' He said, 'You certainly can, but he doesn't really talk much and he doesn't talk much to me, so I think it's a lost cause to even try.' And I said, 'Let me try.'

"In 15 minutes after meeting this guy, I had his whole life story. And his attorney's jaw dropped, because it was just one of those things. I didn't

'I understand the kind of reluctance for veterans to really seek mental health assistance.'

- *Mike Pracht*

See VETERANS page 16



Counties offer shorter work weeks, low-cost daycare and they 'ban the box'

From *JOBS PLAN* page 1

place all across the nation,” said Angie Baird, San Juan County, Wash.’s director of human resources.

“Employees have more choices today of where they’re going to work and how they’re going to work than at any time in history,” she noted.

“There are a lot of remote options available, there are a lot of benefits that private employers can offer that government just can’t ... so we have to think of other ways of, ‘How can we remain competitive and entice people to want to do public service?’”

Last week, San Juan County implemented a 32-hour work week in an effort to fill its 10-15% job vacancy rate and better cater to its current employees.

While the work week is shortening, the pay isn’t. So any county government employees who were previously working a 32-hour work week will now see a bump up in pay as well.

For Stephane Stookey, who was already working a 32-hour work week, that pay increase was incentive enough to stay in her position as lead public health nurse in the county’s Health and Community Services department.

Feeling like she was being priced out of living on the island due to inflation and wanting to raise her daughter closer to her family in Michigan, Stookey said she was heavily debating leaving her county job, but abandoned those plans when she heard that she will receive a pay increase.

“Because the cost of living has skyrocketed so much, what had been a really decent, for

public health, job had become me going back to kind of living paycheck to paycheck again,” Stookey said.

“... As my husband and I are searching real estate listings, I heard about the idea ... When I realized how much more my income would be — I would essentially be paid to work 40 hours while being able to remain at the 32 hours — that income leap ... it just completely like blew all of that out of the water.”

Baird said the weekly schedule structure varies by department, but Stookey said she’s had a lot of flexibility in determining her hours, which she spaces out over three days. Stookey said the ability to have that flexibility is something she thinks will attract younger families to the county, which has an

aging population, with about 35% of its residents over the age of 65. The average across the country is about 16.8%.

“Now that everybody is aware of this, I have heard so much talk about like, ‘Oooh, I think I want a county job now,’” Stookey said.

“For younger families too, like myself, who have young kids, most of our preschool options are limited to three or four hours a day ... so the ability to kind of tailor our work schedule around the hours that our kids are in school and be able to be more effective in some work that we do and not be parenting and working at the same time is extremely attractive to a lot of people.”

According to Baird, the average amount of county job applications has increased from

one to two a week to 20-26 a week since news of the shortened work week was released.

Low-cost daycare in Fairfax County

In Fairfax County, Va., the county is also lending a hand to employees with young children with its Employees’ Child Care Center, which offers activities and curriculum surrounding the creative arts, math and sciences for the children of county employees.

The cost of lost earnings, productivity and revenue related to a lack of childcare resources adds up to an estimated \$122 billion each year, according to a report by ReadyNation, a coalition of business leaders. That amount is more than double the amount of \$57 billion reported in 2018.

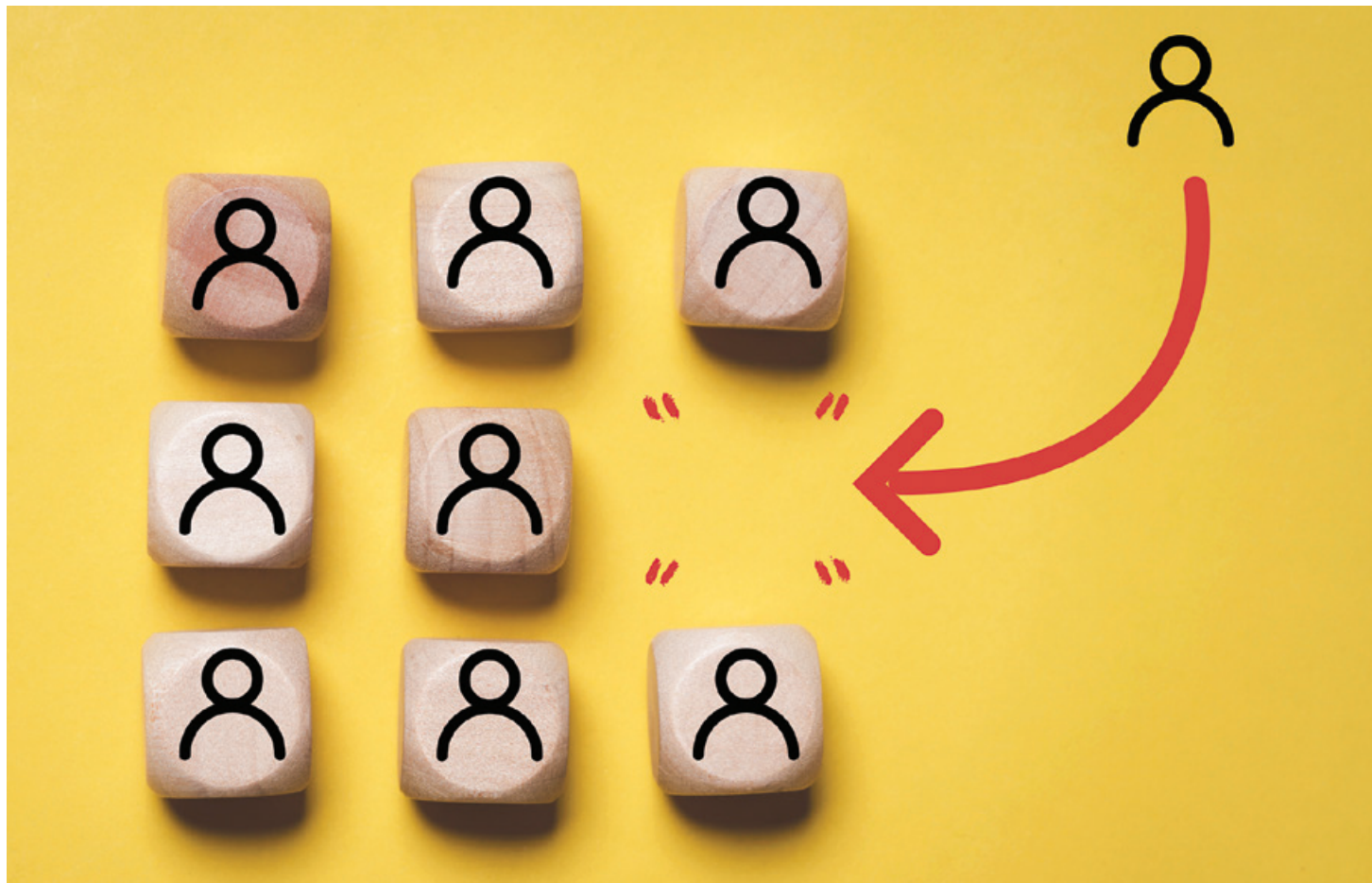
“More people needed it [the Employees’ Child Care Center] during COVID because the daycare systems weren’t around or did not open up — so many of them decided just to close because they couldn’t find teachers to work,” said Fairfax County, Va. Executive Bryan Hill. “And we were able to retain our staff and we grew it going forward, so it was just something that we knew we had to do.”

Fairfax County, which has a 14% vacancy rate in its county positions, also raised wages in July for county employees, averaging about 8%, but at higher rates (13%-20%) for police officers.

“Fair Chance Policy”

Harris County, Texas adopt-

See *JOBS PLAN* page 5



Looking to hire county staff?
**Post your job listing on
 NACo's new career site!**



jobs.naco.org



Fair Chance Policy can also help reduce recidivism

From **JOBS PLAN** page 4

ed a Fair Chance Policy last year, removing questions about criminal history from its county job applications.

It was the sixth city or county in the state to adopt the “ban the box” policy.

National Law Review reports that 37 states and more than 150 cities and counties have some form of a ban the box policy.

The policies are designed to ensure that potential employers consider a job candidate's skills and qualifications first, thereby eliminating any implicit bias or negative implication to his/her application due to a criminal conviction or arrest record.

As the name suggests, these

policies typically eliminate the box (or question) on an employer's employment application where the applicant must check off whether or not they have a criminal record, according to *National Law Review*.

The policy also aims to reduce recidivism, giving people with a criminal background a better chance at jobs and helping to fill government positions with qualified candidates.

“At its core, our Fair Chance Policy aims to remove unnecessary barriers to employment for individuals who have made efforts to turn their lives around after involvement with the criminal justice system,” said Pernell Davis, Harris County deputy chief of staff in public safety and organizational development, in a statement to

County News.

“It represents a commitment to second chances and recognizes that the mistakes of the past should not define a person's future,” he noted.

“The mere appearance of a checkbox asking whether someone has ever been arrested can keep strong candidates from completing an application,” he said.

“Even charges resulting in not-guilty verdicts stay on people's records, causing them to be hesitant about pursuing a job with an organization. Harris County is proud to be a leader in ‘banning the box.’

It's hard enough to get a good job, so we should not let additional barriers get in the way of people being eligible to work in public service.” **CN**



Iowa county IT managers work together, assist counties without in-house staff

From **TECHNOLOGY** page 1

When a county asks for help, he rounds up a bunch of county IT personnel and takes them on a house call.

“It's really fun, too, because we get to interact a little bit more and help counties who mostly have no idea what exactly they need,” he said.

“A lot of the times they don't have the expertise to suss out exactly what they need or should be looking for,” in terms of IT support.

The bulk of Iowa's 99 counties tend to be smaller, and most had contracted out their IT work, at least until Rohne and company got to work. In the past few years, mainly while he was the IT and GIS director for Worth County, he led assessments for 40 counties and has helped 13 counties hire in-house IT staff.

A two-day visit allows the team to review all the county departments' needs and talk to all department heads to determine the scope of the county's needs.

And to determine a personality profile to match IT personnel with the county.

“The thing we stress with the counties is to hire somebody who fits your county,” Rohne

said.

“There was one county where we interviewed a candidate and he was amazing. He was off the chart technology-skills-wise, but was just an arrogant person, and we knew it wouldn't work.

They hired an applicant who didn't have much server experience but did have great communication skills and would fit

“The thing we stress with the counties is to hire somebody who fits your county.”

—Joel Rohne



in with the community and the organization.”

The process also brings newer IT professionals into the ISAC network, which benefits the entire organization.

“The assessment is also a way of developing a mentoring relationship,” Rohne said. “We'll bring some of those younger IT directors into the assessment process, they get to work with the old dogs and we end up networking a good bit.”

Shelby County benefited from an assessment.

“We were falling behind in terms of technology,” said Steve Kenkel, chairman of the Shelby County Board of Supervisors.

“We were just being reactive to get through the days and not being proactive, building for the future.”

Kenkel was a skeptic early on, though. He figured the amount of responsibility related to IT management wouldn't add up to a workload worthy of adding another full-time employee to the county's 90-strong workforce, and an outside contract for the county would be the best division of labor.

“I wanted to make sure

an IT director would be kept busy, but we also knew we needed performance to improve,” he said.

The assessment also threaded a needle, with the contract renewal coming soon.

If the county moved ahead hiring in-house, it would have to be fast to ensure the continuity of services.

The bulk of Shelby County's IT work comes from supporting the emergency management department, but the growing needs in other departments put the assessment over the top, and the Board of Supervisors decided to hire an IT director.

“They helped write the job description just the way we needed it, they helped with the interview process, and the audit report helped us set priorities and a road map for the next three-to-five years,” Kenkel said.

“The best part was, they found someone who was living locally, he was married to a woman from Shelby County, so it's someone we feel confident wants to stay in the community and be a part of what we're building here,” he said.

“He's got a great personality, he doesn't get rattled and he reads people well.” **CN**

SPOTLIGHT ON:
**DISASTER
MITIGATION**



SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS MONTH

National Preparedness Month is an observance each September to raise awareness about the importance of preparing for disasters and emergencies that could happen at any time.

Counties from across the nation recently joined a meeting of NACo's Resilient Counties Advisory Board in which FEMA Director of External Affairs Justin Knighten highlighted the importance of intergovernmental partnerships in preparing for and responding to disasters.

Other counties have joined in recognizing National Preparedness Month, including by issuing proclamations, engaging with local media, hosting events and rolling out creative public awareness campaigns:

- Boone County, Mo. hosted the Boone County Ready Festival on September 14 and Anne Arundel County, Md. held an

Emergency Preparedness Fair on Sept. 16.

- Erie County, Pa. organized an educational "Be Ready for Emergencies" bingo activity.

- Tompkins County, N.Y. hosted a training for its Citizen Preparedness Corps.

- Counties from Yavapai County, Ariz., to Brunswick County, N.C., to La Moure County, N.D. issued proclamations declaring National Preparedness Month.

"County officials and emergency responders play a critical role in disaster planning, immediate response, and longer-term efforts to help communities and residents recover," said NACo President Mary Jo McGuire. "National Preparedness Month is an opportunity for counties to highlight our essential responsibilities on the ground and exchange best practices in mitigation, public safety and resilience."

National Preparedness Month, led by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, aims to recognize all those who work on the ground to prepare for and respond to disasters and restore communities in challenging times. The initiative is in its third year, and NACo plans to participate in future years.


2023 Theme: Take Control in 1, 2, 3

The Ready Campaign's 2023 National Preparedness Month theme is "Take Control in 1, 2, 3." The campaign focuses on preparing older adults for disasters, specifically older adults from communities that are disproportionately impacted by the all-hazard events,

which continue to threaten the nation.

Older adults can face greater risks when it comes to the multitude of extreme weather events and emergencies we now face, especially if they are living alone, are low-income, have a disability, or live in rural areas.

Emergency managers and all those who work with and support older adult communities to access the new

webpage available in English and Spanish languages at [Ready.gov/older-adults](https://ready.gov/older-adults) and [Ready.gov/es/adultos-mayores](https://ready.gov/es/adultos-mayores). For more information on preparing with disabilities visit [Ready.gov/disability](https://ready.gov/disability) or [Ready.gov/es/disapacidad](https://ready.gov/es/disapacidad) in Spanish. 



Access more information including the National Preparedness Month toolkit from NACo with the QR code.



2023
National
Preparedness
Month



NACo REPORT OFFERS BLUEPRINT ON DISASTER MITIGATION

by **Danny Tomares**

When emergency managers brainstormed this spring in Mecosta County, Mich., they didn't focus on threats within their own borders. They looked up the Muskegon River.

If Newaygo County's Hardy Dam collapsed, it could cause 2,000 fatalities, displace 5,000 people, destroy 2,000 homes and leave many without power or signal, all without respect to county boundaries.

Disparities in local revenue cause disparities in counties' capacity to fund positions and local restoration and recovery projects, a common theme during NACo's 2023 Intergovernmental Roundtable on Disaster Resilience. The report on the roundtable's discussions, *Defining and Building Capacity for Disaster Mitigation*, is available now.

The report examines six key elements of capacity for disaster resilience and offered solutions for how to build and sustain lo-

cal capacity:

- Funding for mitigation planning and project implementation
- Staffing and, in some instances, dedicated agencies
- Authority to enact policy and practice that support mitigation efforts
- Effective strategic partnerships
- Ability to collect, analyze and interpret data for decision making
- Education and improved perception of risk.

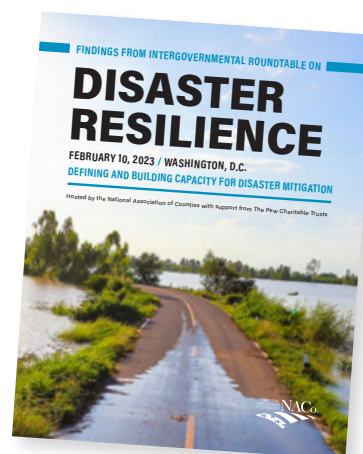
When limited time and funds meet competing priorities, disaster preparedness may not have its day until an emergency forces it. The challenge only grows when weighing the economic costs of recovery.

It is easy to focus inward, but disaster's ability to cross county lines creates shared interest in mitigation and opportunity for collaboration. Local forces in partnership can collectively punch above the sum of their individual weights.

This is truest of all in the context of shared vulnerabilities. Sometimes vulnerabilities are tangible, tied to natural features or infrastructure. Erosion erasing storm-weakening barrier islands and wetlands are bad for all of Louisiana, not just coastal parishes. The I-95 bridge collapse caused disruption beyond Philadelphia and Pennsylvania.

Coordination is crucial to mutual success. That type of coordination could be seen as leaders met in Mecosta County, to game out a worst-case scenario. Should Hardy Dam collapse, local experts are prepared to coordinate with the Oakland County Incident Management Team. A network of Oakland County grant-funded first responders and experts, the team offers capacity to less-resourced counties in need.

This coordination pre-determines staging areas, effectively utilizes local leadership and greatly expands potential personnel in a crisis. Where specific vulnerabilities exist, these



efforts are a model for cooperation toward the common good.

Other disaster vulnerabilities are economic. Food access is one such concern.

Disasters can create new insecurity or exacerbate what already exists. By making food systems resilient, local leaders are making their communities more resilient.

The California North Coast Emergency Food System Partnership is being built to do just that for six coastal counties in Northern California: Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, Sonoma, Napa and Marin.

Their three-year grant-funded partnership is with the University of California Cooperative Extension and actors across local food systems.

Academic partners can study capabilities and past difficulties in a way present-day responsibilities rarely allow. By collecting and studying data, we can learn what actions will achieve the most for our communities.

The involvement of food producers, food policy experts and food banks promises a network that can identify systemic weaknesses in the food system and best utilize local capacity to overcome them.

Partnerships can magnify capacity to prepare, respond and rebuild. This National Preparedness Month and beyond, we encourage you to look to the community of counties, academic institutions and others to help build a resilient future. **CN**

Danny Tomares is a program associate in the NACo Counties Futures Lab.

COMMUNITIES OFFER IDEAS, LABOR AFTER DISASTERS

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The most important position for county leaders during and after a disaster is often not where they'd expect: Out of the way.

That goes as much for the community-rebuilding effort as it does for ceding control and decision-making to professional emergency management personnel.

"It's not the elected official who has all the knowledge," said Linda Langston, a former NACo president and Linn County, Iowa supervisor whose county weathered catastrophic floods in 2008.

"The knowledge resides in your community, if you're good enough to get to it."

Langston and Jane Cage, a volunteer who helped her hometown of Joplin, Mo. recover from devastating tornadoes in 2011, shared personal experiences with disaster management that filled in spaces among instruction from several representatives from FEMA — the Federal Emergency Management Agency.



Chris Simone, program specialist, Procurement Disaster Assistance, FEMA, discusses procurement procedures and competition considerations. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Cage put to rest a misconception the agency sometimes evokes.

"FEMA is not there to make you whole, it's there to get you back to the point where you can get recovered," she said.

For Joplin, which is located in Jasper and Newton counties, the loss of one-third of the city presented a question to the community — do they want to regain what they had or did they want to build something new?

"People want it back quickly and people want it back better,"

Cage said. "You have to figure out what kind of community you are."

Langston said those directions would only be illustrated with comprehensive community input, particularly from marginalized communities that are often located in vulnerable areas.

"Recovery is about communication and decision-making," Langston said. "If the people affected aren't at the table, the decision will fail."

That doesn't mean letting community meetings become

free-for-alls.

"Never have an open mic meeting," Cage said. "The first speaker sets the tone and hijacks the meeting," she noted, stressing that organizers should never lose control of the microphone.

She also emphasized the importance of acknowledging input, even if it wasn't considered or even reasonable.

"We weren't going to open a restaurant just for tall people," she said, noting that community members in a crisis need to be and feel heard.

But they may have something to offer beyond opinions, and confusion and pain in the community can be catalysts for the hard work that needs to be done across the board.

"Ask for volunteers — you'll be surprised by who comes forward," she said.

"Capture the goodwill while it's there and channel it."

Langston said that once the general recovery plan comes together, more detailed work is necessary.

"When you have only a wish list and you don't have a plan, it's a lot harder to get what you want," she said.

They noted the extended emotional recovery rollercoaster communities experience, as the solidarity gained in response to adversity and the resulting optimism give way to fatigue a year later.

Langston said paying attention to staff members' emotional needs was crucial, and 18 months of stressful work without an extended break was about as hard as any professional could expect to push themselves. **CN**



FEMA Deputy Administrator Erik Hooks discusses disaster mitigation with *County News*. Photo by Denny Henry

FEMA EXECUTIVE STRESSES MITIGATION AND PREVENTION

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

As the calendar for disaster seasons grows — for hurricanes, wildfires and more — the need for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's aid grows. Chief among the consequences: A stressed FEMA workforce.

"What it has forced us basically to do is to really look at innovative ways and how we address the entire issue," said Erik Hooks, FEMA's deputy administrator. "We have to pivot toward mitigation and involve ourselves more in investing in communities so that they can build resiliency, so that they can withstand the pernicious threat from climate change."

Hooks noted earlier while addressing a summit on disaster resiliency that investments in systemic resiliency through zoning and building code changes yielded 11 times as

much in savings compared to recovery funding.

"It's good business sense to pivot toward mitigation," he said. "It also requires us to understand the unique needs of the community, because every disaster is different, and it impacts every community differently because of whatever infrastructure or lack thereof in a community. We really want to assess those needs on 'blue sky' days so that we have a plan.

"I say 'we,' I'm not just saying FEMA, so that collectively — state, local and federal levels have a plan for not just withstanding whatever Mother Nature or whatever the threat environment throws at us, but to also recover and recover expediently, because the real win comes not when we are constantly bringing commodities like water and food into an organization, but when we get that economy jump-started

and they can get back to some sense of normalcy."

Counties can best help FEMA do its job by understanding the authorities granted to each part of the intergovernmental partnership. For example, when the public clamored for FEMA assistance following the chemical spill from a derailed train in East Palestine, Ohio, most didn't know the governor first had to declare a disaster.

"FEMA didn't have that traditional role like we would in a storm for East Palestine, but we were able to participate and support EPA and other federal entities under the authorities of the economies action," Hooks said. "We can help with

some planning and coordination. FEMA does an excellent job as a convener and a planner and a supplement to other agencies as well, even though we may not be our leading role in a disaster."

Counties should understand that the amount of FEMA aid can be contingent on thresholds for the amount of damage suffered.

"The event has to outstrip the ability of both the local government and the state government to address that issue," Hooks said. "That doesn't mean that we're not partnering with them, but we do have very limited authorities with finite amount of dollars that are appropriated to us."

With rural areas making up a larger target for disasters, Hooks recommended FEMA's BRIC program — Building Resilient Infrastructure and Com-

munities — to assist with infrastructure needs assessments and offer direct technical assistance.

"We can go in and learn about those communities, help those communities, also build capacity to apply for the type of hazard mitigation grants that would make them more resilient in times of disaster," he said.

The Biden-Harris administration has prioritized racial equity and environmental justice in federal policy execution, and that goes for disaster mitigation and response.

"All communities are different, and they're impacted differently by storms and it may be the same storm, but it may impact the communities differently because of a lack of investment in that community, so we need to look at building capacity in those communities," Hooks said.

"It's often those under-resourced communities that suffer worse, so those are some of the priorities that the administration has placed, that we need to build capacity, so that they can withstand the nature of some of the storms and threats that they face." **CN**



**SPOTLIGHT ON:
DISASTER
MITIGATION**



DISASTER LEGISLATION TAKES CENTER STAGE IN 118TH CONGRESS

by Brett Mattson

As counties, we know that all disasters start and end local. But we rely on critical federal programs and partnerships to assist in the recovery process.

In 2022 alone, 622 counties experienced at least one federally declared major disaster — a designation that opens up a suite of federal funding opportunities for impacted communities and our residents.

One of the most important programs available to counties following a declaration is the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance (PA) Program.

The PA program is funded through FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) and reimburses counties for recovery activities ranging from debris removal, emergency sheltering, infrastructure repair and a host of others.

However, FEMA has recently announced that the DRF is almost entirely out of available funds — roughly \$3 billion left — and as a result, the Agency is switching to Immediate Needs Funding, which will limit the activities that FEMA

will reimburse for to only "life saving measures."

This will dramatically limit the ability for counties to continue long-term recovery efforts that may be already underway until such a time that Congress provides additional funding.

NACo in conjunction with a host of state and local organizations have implored House and Senate leadership to quickly pass a supplemental funding package for the DRF to ensure FEMA can continue to support our recovery efforts.

The Biden Administration has proposed a \$16 billion supplemental for the DRF which could be attached to a Continuing Resolution to keep the government funded as we rapidly approach the Sept. 30 deadline to fund the government.

Another critical program for counties that has not received a long-term reauthorization since 2012 is the National Flood Insurance Program

(NFIP).

NFIP has operated under a series of more than 30 short-term extensions since the Biggert-Waters Act expired in 2017 and recently implemented a new risk methodology — dubbed Risk Rating 2.0

— which has caused premium rates for some homeowners to skyrocket.

NACo has been successful in partnering with congressional champions in both the House and Senate to introduce legislation to reauthorize and reform NFIP.

In the 118th Congress, the bipartisan, bicameral National Flood Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (NFIP-RE) (S.2142/H.R.4349) would provide a five-year reauthorization for the program and make critical reforms including capping premium rate increases at 9%, increasing funding for flood mapping capabilities and enhancing transparency on Risk Rating 2.0.

We anticipate a Senate Banking Committee hearing on NFIP during the September work period.

One final piece of legislation that would provide critical relief to our residents following a disaster is the Disaster Assistance Simplification Act

(DASA) (S.1528).

Once federal assistance becomes available, county residents often find themselves having to complete multiple complex applications that require similar information.

This process is arduous, redundant and confusing for individuals during one of the most stressful times of their lives.

The bipartisan DASA would create a universal disaster application for survivors to ensure they are able to access vital funding more efficiently. The DASA passed the Senate with overwhelming support before the August recess and now heads over to the House where NACo is working to socialize the importance of this legislation.

NACo will continue to advocate for these critical pieces of legislation and countless others that would ensure counties and our residents have the resources necessary to quickly recover from disasters. **CN**

Brett Mattson is the legislative director for Justice and Public Safety in NACo's Government Affairs Department.

**'In 2022,
622 counties
experienced
at least one
federally
declared major
disaster.'**

**SPOTLIGHT ON:
DISASTER
MITIGATION**



SPONSORED CONTENT

Nationwide's Financial Wellness Virtual Adventure Center

The call for virtual education and enrollment has been answered with a Financial Wellness 3-D Virtual experience. The innovative technology solution creates a realistic engaging environment to use our resources, tools and education more easily. Eye-catching lights, interactive videos, inviting 3-D greeter, mobility to visit three locations to drive engagement, education and actions. Nationwide decided to make the resource available to everyone, not just those who have a Nationwide retirement plan through their employer and empower America's workforce to take control of their retirement.

The 2023 design begins with an inspirational video to emotionally connect and inspire you to achieve your dream retirement, understand retirement plan benefits and explore the full virtual experience. The adventure center shows examples and takeaways for everyone from young savers to those getting ready to retire. Then, you can walk to the investment smoothie food truck to grab a virtual smoothie which includes a video explaining different investment options, common approaches and a quiz to test your knowledge. The videos include easy to understand examples and make complicated concepts simple with relatable comparisons to things employees can understand, like making a smoothie.



Here's what you will see online when you visit Nationwide's Financial Wellness Virtual Adventure Center.

ing a smoothie.

From there, employees can learn more about key retirement milestones, register for live or on-demand webinars, use financial tools and calculators and find other helpful resources. Employees can even schedule a one-on-one meeting with their rep if they are part of a Nationwide plan.

Challenge

When the pandemic sent workers home, counties and other employers needed a new way to engage with their workers. With the new digital educational experience, employees

could be equipped with retirement education, tools and resources to help them save for retirement. They got the best of both worlds by being able to explore this new and fun virtual interactive space all while being in the safety of their own home.

Impact

With more than 65,000 unique visitors, 300,000 unique engagements and 12,000 educational videos watched, it's easy to say the Financial Wellness 3-D Virtual experience was just the engaging resource that workers are craving. This also led to many employees

enrolling in their retirement plans and taking charge of their retirement as well as many scheduling in-person or virtual one-on-one appointments with their rep for more personalized retirement planning guidance.

How-To

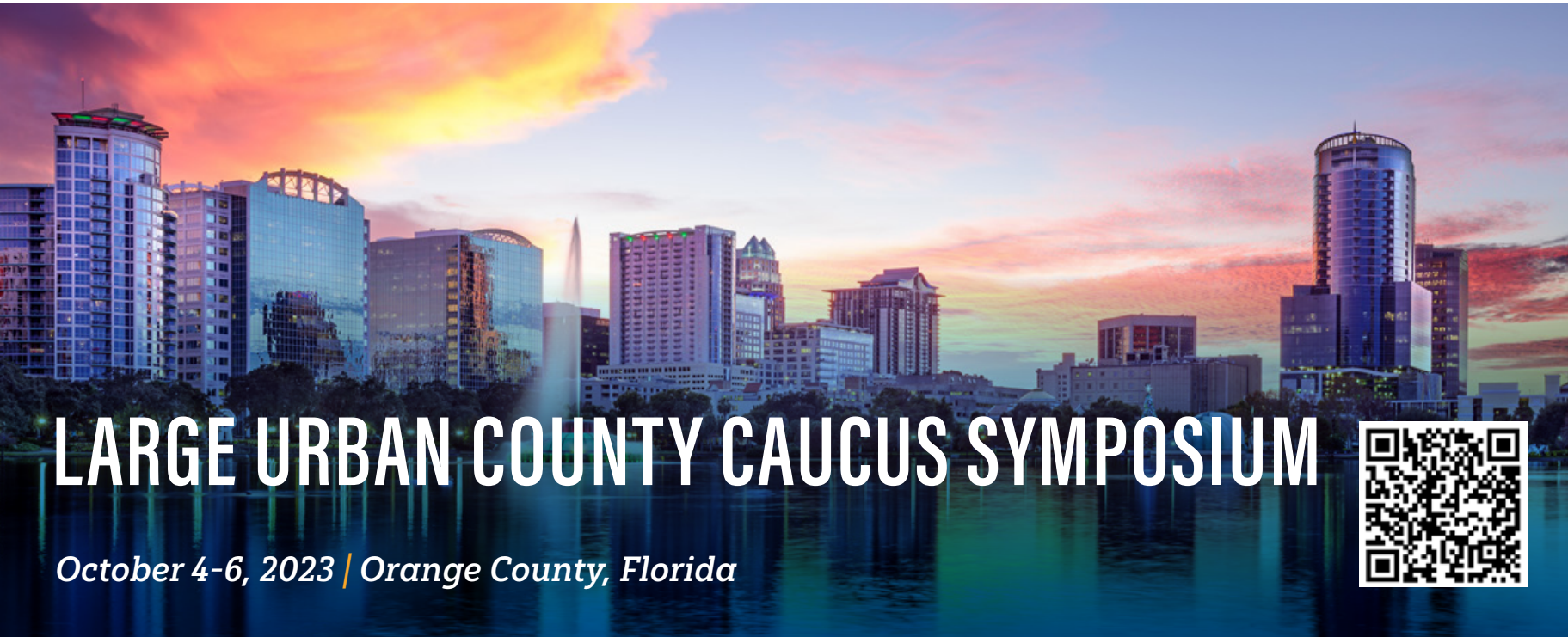
The work is already done for you and completely free to the public.

You can share this QR code with your HR department and employees as a resource for their retirement readiness.




GENERAL TIPS

- Share this resource with your new employees as part of your onboarding process or as they become eligible for your retirement plan benefits.
- Consider sending out to your employees periodically and incorporating retirement readiness into your employee acquisition and retention strategy if it isn't already!



LARGE URBAN COUNTY CAUCUS SYMPOSIUM

October 4-6, 2023 | Orange County, Florida



NOW I KNOW

How to Develop Consensus

by Ben Wehmeier
Jefferson County, Wis.
administrator

When I was the acting community development director in Lemont, Ill., I had my first “ah ha!” moment figuring out administration and policy.

We were looking at a mixed-use, multimodal development, right near a rail station. We had a developer coming in and we started talking about creating new zoning ordinances in a historic park in the downtown area.

Being the new kid on the block, I was trying to figure out, ‘How do we make this all happen?’ I immediately tried to understand the public engagement process. So, I asked what it all meant in terms of the conversations with different groups, what did that mean in terms of giving out information out to multiple forums, how do you make sure there are opportunities for folks to come to feel they’ve been heard? What I learned was how to have those conversations as you develop policy and new ideas.

That meant creating plenty of opportunities for public sessions, educational meetings

and chances for the public to be heard. We held surveys, accepted comments, entertained small groups, held one-on-ones with myself, other senior staff or sometimes with the developers themselves.

We tried to answer their questions about what the expectations were. We tried to help them understand the vision behind it, the risk and opportunities.

A lot of the challenge was just really trying to figure out to develop consensus when you have very dynamic, different viewpoints of how things should change. And you need to be prepared for stakeholders to feel as though they aren’t getting everything they want, even if their input was indeed heard.

Sometimes you wonder, is there a chance to even have that consensus? It was important, as we developed our compromises, to show that the stakeholders are still honoring that past, the things that are historic, but also offering the opportunity for something that fits the current community as it grows in the future. And it gave downtown businesses hope that they had a future.

There was some resistance to



Jefferson County, Wis. Administrator Ben Wehmeier. Photo by Hector Emanuel

adding apartments and condos, but that was also a chance to reach out to a new group. In this case, we had parents who wanted to keep their kids in the area as they reached adulthood, and their best bet was to frame it for the kids to live in those condos.

The new ordinance governed downtown development. How do we recognize the challenges of building to conform to standards from a different time, with smaller setbacks, different sidewalks, with an eye towards density? We wanted to encourage development when it would otherwise be easier to do it somewhere else.

We had to recognize that we

were establishing a new public space. It’s been rewarding to look back after more than a decade and see how it’s a centerpiece to the community, that it’s a place where the town centers its anniversary celebrations and it’s accepted by those people who, at the time, worried they weren’t part of the process. That’s a lot of validation.

“Now I Know...” is a new feature offering words of wisdom from county officials who share what they have learned after facing challenging aspects of their position. The feature is written from interviews by Charlie Ban, digital editor and senior writer.

WORD SEARCH

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLA.
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

AIRPORT: The county owns Miami International Airport, which generates \$33.7 billion annual revenue and welcomes 70% of all international visitors to the state.

COURTHOUSE: The 28-floor Miami-Dade County Courthouse was completed in 1928.

DADE: The county was previously known as Dade County until voters changed the name to Miami-Dade County in 1997. Established in 1837, Dade County was named for Maj. Francis Langhorne Dade, a Virginian stationed in Florida after the First Seminole War.

EDUCATION: The county is home to at least 13 public and private colleges and universities.

EVERGLADES: One-third of the county is located in Everglades National Park.

FLORIDA: The county is located in the southern end of Florida; the original Spanish name for the state was La Florida or “place of flowers.”

GEOGRAPHY: The county is located about 6.1 feet above sea level.

HISPANIC: The county Hispanic population represents 72% of the total population.

HISTORY: The county was created Jan. 18, 1836 from Monroe County.

HURRICANES: The worst hurricane to hit the county was Hurricane Andrew, a Category 5 that hit Aug. 24, 1992. It caused 23 deaths and \$27 billion in damages in 1992 dollars.

MAYOR: In addition to the county board of commissioners, the county is also governed by a mayor who can serve for two terms.

POPULATION: The county is the most populous in the state with 2.7 million people, according to the 2020 census.

RIVER: The Miami River bisects the county and is connected by canal with Lake Okeechobee.

SEAT: The county seat of Miami is the City of Miami.

WATER: The county is surrounded by water, including Biscayne Bay, the Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico.



SARATOGA COUNTY, N.Y.

Saratoga County, founded in 1791, received its name from the Iroquoian name Se-rach-ta-gue, meaning “the hillside country of the quiet river,” in reference to the Hudson River.

Its county seal features what is known as the “turning point” of the American Revolution — the first time a British army had ever surrendered — which took place in Saratoga County.



The seal showcases the sword surrender of British Gen. John Burgoyne to American Gen. Horatio Gates, with a color guard in the background flying an American flag, soldiers marching and mountains in the distance.

Cannon balls and a rope circle the seal.

The colors were chosen intentionally, with blue representing trust, stability and confidence and gold representing positivity, hope and prosperity.

The seal was updated in 2023 ahead of the 250th anniversary of the Battles of Saratoga and the American Revolution.

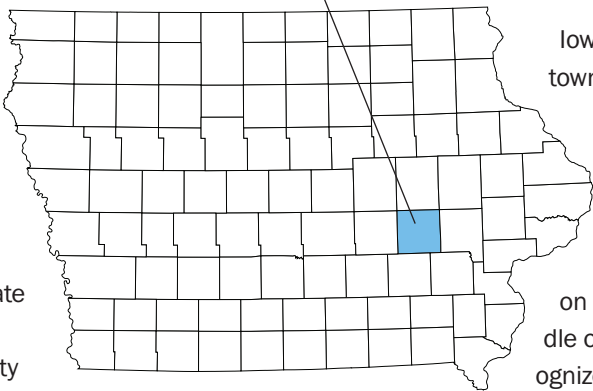
Would you like to see your county seal featured in Behind the Seal? Email Meredith Moran at: mmoran@naco.org.

GET TO KNOW...

Iowa County, Iowa

Welcome, Iowa County, Iowa!

Iowa County, Iowa, established in 1843, is one of the seven counties in the country to share the same name as the state it's located in. Located in the county is the Germanic community of Amana Colonies, one of America's longest-lived communal societies, which consists of seven villages on 26,000 acres. German members of the religious movement Community of True Inspiration emigrated to the United States following persecution and an economic depression, ultimately setting down roots in Iowa



Iowa County's seat is the town of Marengo, which is home to Gateway Park and Preserve. The park includes a 41-acre lake, 12-acre pond and sits on 131 acres in the middle of the nationally recognized wetland preserve

Iowa River Corridor, which includes more than 18,000 riparian areas. Visitors come to Gateway Park and Preserve to fish, hike, bike, kayak, bird watch and boat.

The Pioneer Heritage Museum, which features military gear from the Spanish American War through the Gulf War, is located in Marengo. The site also has a resource library to help people conduct research on the area and their ancestors.

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.

County in 1855. The seven villages have a population of around 1,600, but attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to experience their culture and attend their festivals, including Maifest and Tannenbaum Forest. **Author Mildred Wirt Benson, best known for writing the Nancy Drew series, was an Iowa County native and the first student at the University of Iowa to earn a master's in journalism.**



Image courtesy of University of Iowa Press

PROFILES IN SERVICE

BILL TRUEX

NACo Board Member
Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners
Charlotte County, Fla.



TRUEX

Number of years active in NACo: Seven

Years in public service: 13

Occupation: Business owner, Truex Preferred Construction. We build new homes, do renovations, structural repairs, restaurants, warehouse buildings and are certified in carbon fiber structural repair methods.

Education: BA in Economics, Indiana University

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Queen Elizabeth, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan.

A dream I have is to: Leave a legacy of positivity and action in assisting others to achieve their dreams.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Really wanted to go to Indiana University's School of Music. I was a piano player, a saxophonist and singer and had a desire to study, perform and teach music. After looking at the potential for longevity and success in a highly competitive industry, I chose to enjoy music but to take a different path for my education.

My favorite way to relax is: Read, work in the garden or workout.

I'm most proud of: My wife, Andrea, has always been my rock. She has always been so supportive of me and the endeavors I chase, including my run for office.

She is the Chief Nursing Officer at a local hospital, has served on Boards for the YMCA, she is a Certified Critical Care Nurse, Certified Legal Nurse Consultant and the love of my life.

Every morning, I read: Scripture, prayers and inspirational messages.

My favorite meal is: A grilled ribeye, asparagus and a nice salad.

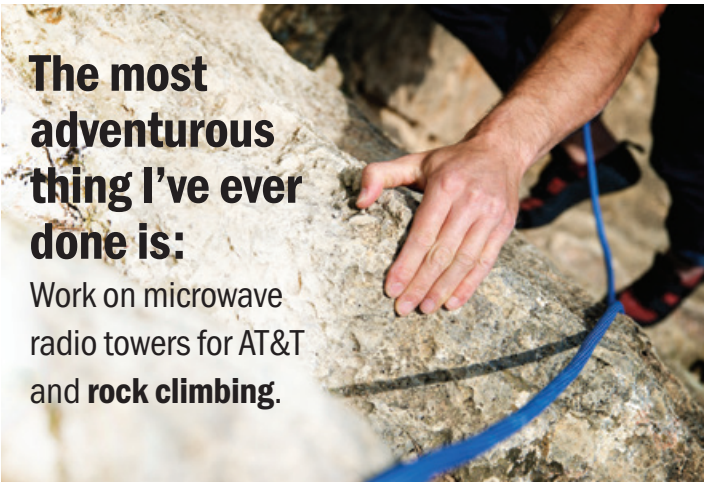
My motto is: "If there is no struggle, there is no progress," Frederick Douglass

The last book I read was: "Discipline Is Destiny" by Ryan Holiday

My favorite music is: Country, Blues and old Rock

My favorite U.S. president is: I can't land on one, so John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan.

My county is a NACo member because: The ability to learn from others across the country is a big motivator for members, but the bottom line is the knowledge of the NACo staff in all things federal is amazing. I have also had the opportunity to serve on the Bi-Partisan Policy Center's Infrastructure Task Force, as well as work directly with them on Legal Immigration Reform in conjunction with NACo's Immigration Reform Task Force — all benefits that would not have been possible without the NACo connection.



The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Work on microwave radio towers for AT&T and rock climbing.

I Love My County Because...

Submit your artwork at NACo.org/ART

ART CONTEST

FINAL WEEK! FINAL WEEK! FINAL WEEK! FINAL WEEK! FINAL WEEK!



Check out the website for more information



BRIGHT IDEAS | NEVADA COUNTY, CALIF.

Micro-Grants Help Fireproof Neighborhood

PROBLEM:

Too much hazardous vegetation in neighborhoods was causing a wildfire hazard.

SOLUTION:

Provide micro-grants to communities for equipment necessary to clear out vegetation.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Nevada County, Calif. created a first-of-its-kind risk and emergency management program to reduce the overabundance of hazardous vegetation in neighborhoods, transforming private property into a more wildfire-resilient landscape and saving lives.

Through a \$100,000 grant from the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, Nevada County distributed \$3,600 to 26 of the county's recognized Firewise Communities to go toward roadside vegetation abatement projects, increasing defensible space around homes, purchasing equipment and removing hazardous vegetation from private lands.

"I think addressing the private property aspect of emergency preparedness, but especially wildfires, has been the biggest challenge for pretty much any rural county or any county on the West Coast," said Craig Griesbach, Nevada County's director of emergency services. "... With this, our strategy was, 'Let's leverage, organize and engage communities that are already established and start there.'"

Nevada County has more Firewise Communities than any other county in the country — growing from around 60 when the program launched to nearly 100, according to Griesbach. Firewise Communities, which are certified through the National Fire Protection Association, each have a designated Firewise coordinator who works with them to update their fire preparedness plan every three years.

Of Nevada County's nearly



A man helps clear debris from a neighborhood to help fireproof it from wildfires in Nevada County, Calif. Photo courtesy of Nevada County

100,000 residents, 92% of them live in high-to-very-high fire hazard severity zones, leaving them and their property vulnerable to wildfires and other natural disasters.

The Firewise Communities Microgrant Program was created after a severe winter storm left behind an overabundance of hazardous vegetation, making the county more susceptible to wildfire during its fire season.

The county distributed grants to communities that outlined how exactly the funding would be spent, examples of which included shaded fuel break treatments and creating bin programs to clear defensible space for homes, according to Griesbach.

"Our main focus was community-based projects that benefited more than just one or two people, so we had a scoring system that we created that was fairly simplistic," Griesbach said. "We had a panel that reviewed the grants of our various community leaders throughout our county, but our focus was the projects that have the biggest bang for the

buck. The ones that stretched across the entire neighborhood were the ones that were awarded and rose to the top."

'Our main focus was community-based projects that benefited more than just one or two people.'

Griesbach said a big part of the success of the microgrant program was that it provided the funding directly to who could use it best — the communities themselves.

Micro-Grants funded collaborative projects providing community-wide benefits, such as renting a chipper for community use, contracting for transportation of downed vegetation to processing sites, renting equipment, or hiring a contractor to clear evacuation routes on private roadways. In sum:

- 10 grants were awarded for roadside vegetation abatement projects
- Seven grants supported defensible space

- Five grants were used to address hazardous vegetation
- Four grants went toward the purchase of equipment

"These communities operate year-round just based on volunteerism, so they have neighborhood workdays, they leverage each other's equipment to get — it could be clearing defensible space of a neighbor in need that's elderly, clearing their ingress and egress routes or working with BLM [Bureau of Land Management] and other partners to clear properties neighboring their neighborhood," Griesbach said.

"We have some more disadvantaged communities, like up in the San Juan Ridge area, that struggle with resources more than some more affluent areas, so it varies.

"But like last year, because they log equivalent costs or hourly rates, they logged over \$14 million just in work that they're doing through volunteerism, so that's no cost to the public, it's just the cost and responsibility they're taking on, so by us giving them \$3,600 for a project, they're going to multiply that 10 times over just

through their volunteerism, because they'll get their whole community together and run equipment through that that they got through the grant."

The concept for the Firewise Communities Microgrant Program, which was adapted from a microgrant program the county created to support local businesses during COVID-19, was around a six-month process from determining logistics with the Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation to the completion of the projects. The county has applied for congressional funding to continue the program, Griesbach said.

"We're building on the success of this just because of how far the funds went," Griesbach said. "As far as wildfire mitigation, \$100,000 is nothing. Most of our projects are millions of dollars, and we made more impacts with this program than we have with many of those."

CN

Nevada County's Firewise Communities Microgrant Program earned NACo's Best in Category Achievement Award in Risk and Emergency Management.

NEWS FROM

ACROSS THE NATION



ARIZONA

The **PIMA COUNTY** Medical Examiner’s Office is enlisting the help of local artists and volunteers to **spruce up Evergreen Cemetery’s columbarium**, where the remains rest of people who were never claimed or whose families couldn’t give them a physical memorial. People paint tiles for the Indigent Interment Program in an effort to bring more dignity to the dead and make the space more inviting for visitors.

ARKANSAS

Rural Arkansas counties are implementing programming to **curb obesity**, addressing issues including food security, safe and accessible opportunities for physical activity and early child education. **BRADLEY, CRITTENDEN, DESHA, DREW, HEMPSTEAD, PHILLIPS, MONROE** and **ST. FRANCIS** counties — all of which have adult obesity rates of at least 40% — will benefit from a \$4 million grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s High Obesity Program. The aim is to not only cut down on obesity

rates, but also create sustainable programming that will benefit overall health in the long-term.

CALIFORNIA

• **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY** Emergency Medical Services is working with **MONTEREY** and **SAN BENITO** counties to expand emergency responders’ distribution of the drug buprenorphine, which **helps reduce opioid withdrawal and cravings**. Buprenorphine has been found to be the most effective treatment for opioid use disorder and can lower the risk of overdose fatalities by 50%.

• **FRESNO COUNTY** has launched the Perinatal Substance Use Disorder Program to provide education, counseling services and other **resources for mothers struggling with addiction**. Dr. Robin Linscheid, with Fresno County Department of Public Health, said the program is being created amid a growing problem in the county with expectant mothers using marijuana and meth.

IOWA

POLK COUNTY is now offering free emergency **contraceptive care to survivors of sexual assault and rape** in response to a recent state decision to pause offering the service. Polk County Crisis & Advocacy Services will continue to pay for morning-after pills, which was previously funded through the Attorney General’s Office, if the current pause becomes permanent.

MINNESOTA

OTTER TAIL COUNTY Solid Waste is promoting sustainability with its Secondhand September initiative to **reduce waste and support local businesses**. The department is highlighting local thrift, consignment and reuse businesses for residents and giving out Bring Your Own Bag decals to retail spaces, encouraging consumers to help the environment and cut down on the thousands of dollars stores spend a year on bags.

NEVADA

With the Super Bowl coming to town in February 2024, **CLARK COUNTY** is contributing to an effort to hang on to



automatic irrigation systems would be required to comply with the law when they are activated, repaired or maintained. The law would prohibit activation of existing systems unless they

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some of the entrepreneurs who will be in town. County commissioners earmarked \$440,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funding for the **Super Bowl Corporate Combine**, a three-day event where companies will be invited to learn about the advantages of doing business in Southern Nevada. The event aims to diversify the regional economy and attract at least eight CEOs from large companies. In addition to the county, the event will also be funded by the cities of Henderson, North Las Vegas and Las Vegas, with private money covering the other half.

NEW YORK

• A proposed law in **SUFFOLK COUNTY** would require **automatic irrigation systems** to be equipped with smart controllers and water conservation devices. At least one rain sensor or soil moisture device or an on-site weather station would be part of the system. Existing

NEW YORK

• The last time New Yorkers were equipped with machinery like this, a giant marshmallow mascot was threatening to destroy the world. While the danger posed by **spotted lanternflies** doesn’t quite measure up, cinematically, to the plot of the 1984’s “Ghostbusters” film, don’t tell the **WEST-CHESTER COUNTY** parks department that. The department has acquired six vacuum packs to suck up and contain the invasive spotted lanternfly, similar to what worked on Manhattan’s ghost infestation.



ILLINOIS

KANE COUNTY is expanding its **free CPR training program** to train more of its residents to respond to cardiac emergencies. Thanks to Kane County Sheriff’s office merger with Kane County Health Department, CPR programs and a partnership with the Advocate Sherman Training Center, the county can now provide more certified instructors, equipment and training opportunities. The county has trained more than 730 people in CPR this year.





VIRGINIA
PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY residents can take care of various administrative tasks on the road thanks to the circuit court clerk's **Seals on Wheels** mobile service center. The van makes stops on Saturdays at events and at county libraries, allowing residents to file marriage license applications, notary applications, concealed handgun permits and more. Photo courtesy of Prince William County

OHIO

A **WARREN COUNTY** judge is **replacing ankle monitors** with smartwatches, a move intended to save money and reduce the stigma of being on electronic monitoring. The "Veriwatch" notifies an offender of court dates and allows supervising officers to track their location with GPS. Ankle monitors also pose health risks for people whose legs swell from diabetes. The watch costs roughly \$5 per day.

TEXAS

• **EL PASO COUNTY** commissioners have approved funds to start a **gun buyback program**, with \$300,000 of American Rescue Plan Act money, which will be split between marketing efforts and the purchase of gift cards to offer in exchange for the guns.

• Three years after **HARRIS COUNTY** formed its **Election Administrator's Office**, that responsibility fell back to the county clerk, after implementation of Senate Bill 1750, which abolished the administrator's office. The Texas Supreme Court denied Harris County's request to temporarily block the new law, which the county argued was unconstitutional because it singled out one county.

The majority of Texas' 254 counties have appointed non-partisan elections administrators, *The Texas Tribune* reported, and Shannon Lackey, vice president of the Texas Association of Election Administrators, said transferring the election over to elected officials would put an unfair burden on already overworked officials.

VIRGINIA

• **FAIRFAX COUNTY** will launch a **guaranteed income pilot program** that will provide 180 families with monthly payments of \$750 for 15 months. Participants will also have access to optional finance coaching and the opportunity to increase their social networks through virtual or in-person events. The pilot will target families that are income constrained but make too much money to receive typical federal or local assistance.

A similar program in **DURHAM COUNTY, N.C.** will provide \$750 a month to 125 families, along with an additional \$100 monthly for completing surveys about the program as part of a study. Participants must have children under the age of 18 and be at or below 30% of the county's area median income. A control group will receive a \$100 monthly stipend.

WASHINGTON

More than \$81 million will be awarded to 29 counties in 150 grants to **improve salmon**

on habitat and conserve shorelines. Funding for the grants came from the salmon recovery account and the Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration fund. The funding will be used to remove barriers for migrating salmon, to plant trees for shading rivers and to improve stream habitat.

News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Meredith Moran. Does your county have news we should see? Contact cban@naco.org and mmoran@naco.org.

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

- President **Mary Jo McGuire** and Executive Director **Matt Chase** attended the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Annual Conference in Wake County.
- McGuire, Chase and Membership Director **Kim Hall** attended the Texas Association of Counties Legislative Conference in Travis County.
- McGuire, Chase and First Vice President **James Gore** attended the Hawai'i State Association of Counties Annual Conference in Kaua'i County.
- McGuire and Legislative Director **Mike Matthews** attended the Association of Minnesota Counties Fall Policy Conference in Douglas County.
- Immediate Past President **Denise Winfrey** and Digital Editor **Charlie Ban** attended the Iowa State Association of Counties Annual Conference.

NACo STAFF

• **Naomi Freel** has joined NACo as a legislative assistant. She previously worked as a research assistant at O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs. She earned a bachelor's degree in public policy from Indiana University.



Freel



Jennings

- Chase and Legislative Director **Jessica Jennings** attended the South Dakota Association of County Officials Annual Conference in Minnehaha County.
- Legislative Affairs Director **Eryn Hurley** and Legislative Director **Brett Mattson** attended the Conference of Southern County Associations in Orleans Parish, La.

- Associate Program Director **Rashida Brown** attended the Maine County Commissioners Association Annual Conference in Androscoggin County.
- Chief Information Officer **Rita Reynolds** and Legislative Director **Rachel Mackey** attended the New York State Association of Counties Fall Seminar in Oneida County.
- Ban attended the Wisconsin Counties Association Annual Conference in Sauk County.



Elfrieda Francis, division head with the Burlington County Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division, was among the staff who helped organize Camp Cardinal. Photo courtesy of Burlington County

NEW JERSEY

Camp Cardinal, a **BURLINGTON COUNTY** day camp for **children affected by substance use disorder**, recently drew 20 participants its first year. The program featured traditional camping activities such as shelter building, archery, canoeing, crafts and a ropes course. Campers also participated in special group sessions focused on building resiliency to stress, anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses. Staff from the Burlington County Department of Human Services, YMCA of the Pines and the Traumatic Loss Coalition program ran the camp program.

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are equipped with a minimum of one rain sensor device, soil moisture device or an onsite weather station. Approximately 70% of the water pumped by the

Suffolk County Water Authority is used for outdoor purposes like landscape irrigation, and the authority estimates up to 50% of that water is lost because of inefficiencies in irrigation methods and systems.

Veteran outreach extends to nearby rural counties

From VETERANS page 3

serve in the same branch, in the same theater, in the same time, but he trusted me and told me his story and we worked out alternative solutions for him.”

An essential element to Harris County receiving the grant funding was expanding the services to neighboring rural counties, many of which have substantial veteran populations but a significant lack of resources for them.

“Let’s say you’ve got somebody who’s got a substance use disorder or you’ve got somebody who is struggling with mental health — what happens?” Lewis said. “Well, typically the local county sheriff or law enforcement is going to get called, they’ll try to work with their local mental health authority, but the lines are so long there for everything else, it’s hard to get near real time services for people, so that’s been a focus of the VA for a long time.”

Oneida County has been able

to use the funding to create programming specifically for veteran suicide prevention, and enhance its existing services, which were not at the same level as other areas in the state and country, Ofalt said.

Oneida County, home to around 14,000 veterans, applied for the grant after discovering that its Veterans Service Agency received over 10,000 calls within a year. Services through the grant include baseline mental health screening, peer support services and groups, benefits assistance and fiduciary and rep payee services.

“We were like ‘We definitely have a need,’ Ofalt said. “Specifically for veterans in suicide prevention, we don’t have that much compared to some of the Southern states, where they have so much veteran programming. I mean they were where we were at one point, so that was all my faith of, ‘We’ll get there someday,’ but we determined that this opportunity would really grow the services

and our community.”

Oneida County has had more than 200 outreach events to get the word out about the suicide prevention resources, at locations including tattoo conventions, senior wellness fairs and correctional facilities.

The county is applying for a second year of grant funding and hoping to create more services, including equine therapy potentially, and expand to neighboring counties, according to Ofalt.

“Our veterans give everything they have to protect this great nation and its citizens,” said Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente Jr.

“It is our responsibility to make sure they are taken care of in return,” he noted.

“Oneida County is pleased to partner with The Neighborhood Center and the Utica Center for Development to provide our veterans with this suicide prevention program and ensure that they all receive the help they need.” **CN**

‘We need long-term certainty’

From PILT page 2

ties that we have and the services we’re able to offer,” Tinchler said. “I would invite each of you to come to West Virginia, and I would invite you to explore our public lands — I invite you to go to your home state and explore those lands — but keep in mind that whole time, that there’s funding required to take care of those lands and without this funding, that we come and ask for every year, we would not be able to provide that.”

Stevens County, Wash. receives approximately \$830,000 in PILT funding, which is about 5% of the county’s total budget and 13% of its property tax. McCart put into perspective how essential the PILT and SRS payments are to the rural county and advocated for long-term mandatory funding.

“If [those funds] were to go away ... it would take 13 consecutive years of maximum increase [in property taxes] just to simply replace those lost reve-

nues,” McCart said. “And we fare a lot better in Stevens County than a lot of counties that receive PILT ... But let me be a little more nonspecific of how we would replace these revenues if they were gone. I could eliminate my entire Assessor’s Office, or I could eliminate my entire Auditor’s Office or I could eliminate my entire Treasurer’s Office plus other employees. None of those are valid choices. I can’t eliminate by law any of those departments.”

“Yearly appropriations for PILT give us great uncertainty,” McCart noted.

“We appreciate the fact that it is being fully funded and we continue to advocate to keep it funded, but we need some more long-term certainty. How do we plan long-term with one-time money that we have to beg for every year? We shouldn’t have to beg for this money as counties. We should be granted that money without having to come and advocate every single year.” **CN**



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