

House-passed budget bill includes key Medicaid reforms affecting counties

by **Blaire Bryant**

On May 22, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025 (OBBA) (H.R. 1), by a narrow vote of 215–214. This FY 2025 budget reconciliation bill includes major Medicaid reforms with significant implications for counties, which help finance and administer the program.

Medicaid and counties: A key partnership

Medicaid is a joint federal, state, and local program providing coverage to approximately 80 million low-income individuals, including children, pregnant women, older adults, and people with disabilities. While the federal government sets minimum benefits and eligibility standards, states customize the program based on local needs. Counties play a vital role, particularly in financing and administration.

Counties may cover up to 60% of the non-federal Medicaid share, depending on state policy. In 25 states and D.C., counties help fund Medicaid, with 19 requiring contributions for administrative,

physical health, or behavioral health costs. In nine states — California, Colorado, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, North Dakota, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia — counties also manage Medicaid eligibility, enrollment, and renewals.

Medicaid helps counties improve health outcomes, reduce uncompensated care at local hospitals, and ease pressure on local budgets. Reforms to Medicaid financing and administration directly threaten counties’ ability to deliver essential, locally tailored health services and maintain stable, balanced budgets.

While some Medicaid provisions of the OBBA offer relief from administrative burdens and funding cuts for county health facilities—such as the delay in Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payment cuts until 2029 and the postponement of the federal nursing home staffing rule until 2035—others raise serious concerns.

Cost shifts to counties

One provision of concern for

MEDICAID page 2



The Western Interstate Region Executive Committee meets for the first time in 2025 during the WIR Conference, held May 20-23 in Pennington County, S.D. (From left): Immediate Past President John Espy, Carbon County, Wyo.; President John Peters, Mono County, Calif.; Dwayne McFall, Fremont County, Colo. and Second Vice President Derrick DeGroot, Klamath County, Ore. Photo by Rebecca DeWitt

WIR grows membership, and its offerings, in South Dakota

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Taking inspiration from the presidents chiseled into Mount Rushmore, the Western Interstate Region restored its executive team to four members during its 2025 conference held May 20-23 in Pennington

County, S.D.

After filling the last five months of Stevens County, Wash. Commissioner Wes McCart’s term, Mono County,

Calif. Supervisor John Peters was sworn into his own term as WIR president, with Fremont County, Colo. Commissioner Dwayne McFall as first vice president and Klamath County, Ore. Commissioner Derrick DeGroot added to the team

See WIR page 3

Arkansas county expands its future by preserving 19th-century bridge

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Saline County, Ark. is finishing up its restoration of a 134-year-old bridge — the oldest in the state remaining in its original location — that will connect a 65-mile pedestrian and bike trail spanning from Little Rock to Hot Springs the

county is also working to build.

The Old River Bridge, which was featured in Arkansas native Billy Bob Thornton’s 1996 thriller “Sling Blade,” was deemed unsafe in 1974 due to its deterioration. It -at relatively abandoned for nearly 45 years, until the county secured a series of grants to begin its restoration process, which is

now coming to a close, as it’s set to open at the end of this month.

The process started with disassembling the bridge, which was sent off to a historic bridge specialist in Michigan, who refurbished as much of the original structure as possible and

See BRIDGE page 7

Work requirements for some beneficiaries could mean extra work for counties

From MEDICAID page 1

counties is the introduction of cost-sharing requirements for adults in the Medicaid expansion population with incomes between 100 and 138 percent of the federal poverty level.

States would set the cost-sharing amount, capped at \$35 per service, with exemptions originally for primary, prenatal, pediatric, and emergency care expanded to also include mental health and substance use disorder services. This addition represents a modest but important win for counties that serve as front-line providers of behavioral health care.

However, while states can already impose cost-sharing for most Medicaid services, this provision mandates it for a specific population and could raise uncompensated care costs for county hospitals



if low-income families can't afford their share—leaving counties to cover the gap.

One other provision of concern is the reduction of the

Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) from 90% to 80% for states that use their own funds to provide Medicaid coverage to undocumented immigrants. This policy is currently in place in 14 states and the District of Columbia, including California, New York, Illinois, Washington, New Jersey, Oregon, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Colorado, Connecticut, Utah, Rhode Island, Maine, and Vermont.

Originally, the bill exempted states covering “otherwise lawfully residing” immigrants from the FMAP penalty. This exemption was removed before the bill reached the House floor, potentially expanding the penalty to 19 additional states that use federal options in Medicaid and CHIP to cover lawfully residing children and pregnant individuals.

While the final version of the bill included language that limited the penalty to states providing coverage to immigrants who are not a “qualified alien” or a “child or pregnant woman who is lawfully residing in the United States,” states that cover lawfully residing im-

migrants beyond the 14 could be impacted pending the interpretation of the final bill language. Assessed penalties will reduce the federal funding available to administer Medicaid, straining county budgets and potentially leading to coverage losses or service cuts for eligible beneficiaries.

Potential for administrative burden

Another major provision of note for counties in an accelerated timeline for the implementation of work or community engagement requirements for able-bodied adult Medicaid beneficiaries.

In the House-passed OBBA, the effective date was moved up by two years, from 2029 to 2026, and the bill eliminates the ability of future administrations to waive these requirements. County officials in states where counties are responsible for Medicaid eligibility and enrollment could see their workloads grow substantially.

The legislation provides \$100 million in grants to help

states with implementation, but concerns remain about administrative burdens, implementation costs, and potential coverage losses.

Next steps

The Senate will now take up the legislation, with significant revisions expected. Because the bill is advancing through reconciliation, it must comply with the Byrd Rule, which bars the inclusion of non-budgetary provisions.

Senate Republicans may introduce a substitute amendment to overhaul the House bill, while Senate Democrats are expected to challenge provisions they see as violating the Byrd Rule — including those that impact Medicaid. Speaker of the House Mike Johnson has expressed hope that the bill will reach President Trump's desk by July 4 but much depends on how the Senate proceeds over the next few weeks. **CN**

Blair Bryant is the NACo legislative director for health policy. Naomi Freel, a NACo legislative associate, contributed to this story.

SNAP/STATS

SUMMER TRAVEL 2025

TOP 5 NATIONAL PARKS	VISITORS IN 2024
Great Smoky Mountains National Park	12 million
Zion National Park	4,946,592
Grand Canyon National Park	4,919,163
Yellowstone National Park	4.7 million
Rocky Mountain National Park	4.2 million

Source: National Geographic

Wyoming Commissioner Terry Wolf accepts Dale Sowards Award at WIR Conference

From WIR page 1

after being elected second vice president. Carbon County, Wyo. Commissioner John Espy will serve another term as immediate past president.

The conference draws Western state counties that contain significant portions of federally owned land, for which they mostly provide services but cannot levy a fair-market property tax. WIR counties often include significant acres owned by the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service. Many serve as gateway communities, which swell in population in-season, and face challenges like a dearth of attainable housing. Others were once home to large-scale resource extraction, including timber and minerals, and are searching for economic development strategies to replace good-paying jobs and an economic base. Others are exploring the potential for energy generation and export.

WIR continued work on a monument of its own, the National Center for Public Lands Counties, now in its second year of operation. The center held a panel discussion on intergovernmental cooperation in forest management — featuring a nine-speaker lineup — and two training sessions for county officials navigating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The NEPA training sessions will be available on the center's Knowledge Hub.

"Just in this conference alone, I think we've had a lot of people open their eyes and see the work that's being done," McFall said. "This center is the only entity in the country that focuses solely on public lands issues. That's their mission to talk about, to create a think tank for public lands counties. NACo does focus on public lands, but there wasn't the capacity to put that emphasis on it like the National Center can."

Along with workshops, speakers like South Dakota State Investment Officer Matt Clark and networking opportunities, the conference offered tours and insight into Badlands National Park, Custer State Park, South Dakota State Uni-



Washakie County, Wyo. Commissioner Terry Wolf accepts the Dale Sowards Award while WIR President John Peters (left) and WIR Immediate Past President John Espy look on. Photo by Rebecca DeWitt

versity's West River Research Farm and Pennington County's Care Campus, which offers culturally informed behavioral health solutions.

New member

Is the Western Interstate Region primed for growth?

You betcha.

Having passed its three-year probationary period, Minnesota was accepted into WIR as an associate member. With roughly 7% percent of its land managed by the federal government, the Gopher State's counties, particularly those in the north, are finding kindred spirits among WIR members. Nebraska, also a new recruit, is in its second year as a probationary associate member.

Recognizing a public lands leader

Terry Wolf was taking a work call away from the area during a General Session when his colleagues tried to get him back in the room. Upon arrival, he learned he was being honored as winner of the Dale Sowards Award as the region's outstanding public lands official.

A 22-year veteran of the Washakie County, Wyo. Board of Commissioners, Wolf has been a participant in the Big Horn Mountain Country Coalition for the Bighorn National Forest.

"In Wyoming, when we talk



Randy Deibert shares his experiences as both a member of the South Dakota state Senate and a former Lawrence County commissioner. Photo by Rebecca DeWitt

about elected officials, we have outriders, we have show horses, and we have work horses," Espy said. "He has worked to bring industry and federal agencies together in local working groups."

In a letter to the WIR membership, past WIR President Joel Bousman, a former Sublette County, Wyo. commissioner, credited Wolf with recruiting him into both WIR and NACo's Public Lands and Energy, Environment and Land Use policy steering committees.

"Getting together, the camaraderie that you have when you come in here and what you've learned from others is a really neat thing and you can take that back home to your counties and just, it's a benefit to everyone across the board," Wolf said. "I tell people as I go around the state of Wyoming, you don't realize what's out there until you get involved and the things that you can learn

from others, what you can do for your local cities and towns in your county and your county and then just at a statewide level, just really an amazing thing"

Federal wildfire changes loom

Wildfires remain a constant threat in public lands counties, but changes in the Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service, with a new administration in place, may offer new potential for more aggressive firefighting.

Mike Zupko, executive director of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council, gave WIR members some insight into potential reforms.

The council is a 24-person intergovernmental committee that supports the implementation of the Federal Fire Management Policy. It includes two county officials — Duchesne County, Utah Commissioner Greg Miles and Yakima

2025 NACo Western Interstate Region Conference

County, Wash. Commissioner Amanda McKinney.

Zupko said that although promising technological improvements in firefighting were on the horizon, including in aviation, federal short-term priorities would likely focus on finding and creating efficiencies.

The Forest Service announced plans in early May to reorganize the agency in the coming months, and Zupko said he saw an opportunity for states and counties to step up into the changes, particularly with more openings for good neighbor authority and shared stewardship agreements, through which counties are contracted to do work on behalf of the federal government.

"Step in and help manage your forest more aggressively or look at different ways to extract their resources and create some industry or some different opportunities in your county," Zupko said.

He noted the possibility of a singular federal fire response agency in some proposed legislation and the president's budget request.

"If I read my tea leaves, I would say it's probably going to move in some form or fashion," Zupko said. "The speed at which it moves when they're trying to have a new agency set up, what that looks like — is it just suppression? Is it just interface? does it include prescribed fire mitigation? those are all part of the conversations."

He noted that it's important for counties to consider what has and hasn't worked for them, so that not everything is reorganized at the loss of effective programming.

"I think some of the resource ordering that we have actually works more efficient than some folks give it credit," he said.

Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins and Interior Secretary Doug Burgum released a memo May 20 stressing the need for the federal government to partner with state, tribal and local

See WIR page 4

His county background comes in handy at statehouse, South Dakota lawmaker says

From WIR page 3

partners to coordinate wildfire response.

The lone county vet

Randy Deibert is one of a kind.

The state senator is the only former county commissioner in the South Dakota Legislature, which usually boasts at least three or four at a time. The boundaries of his district match the lines for Lawrence County, where he served for seven years.

“When you become a legislator, if you go in as a county commissioner, you’re very well

prepared,” he said.

The legislative session lasts 40 days, and in 2025, 560 pieces of legislation moved through the capitol, 210 of which became law.

“We are truly citizen legislators, because we do that in 40 days, and we go back to regular jobs,” Deibert said.

“And those of us, like in this room, that dedicate a lot of our time to our jobs, as commissioners or supervisors, or whatever elected role you have, we know that we’re not doing it for the pay. I estimate I spend about 50% of my time being a legislature, and that’s about 5% of my income. You’re not in it



for the money and it’s certainly not the glory.”

Deibert argued that a background in county government was particularly valuable for legislators from rural states.

“It’s not unusual, as a county commissioner, to have a conditional use permit hearing with 200 people in the room,” he said.

“And in a small county, you learn very quickly how to deal with those people, and that pays dividends when you move

up in the legislature, because you’re used to dealing with people that aren’t really happy.”

He credited former commission colleague Daryl Johnson for teaching him how to manage crowds.

“He was chairman, and we’d have a very informed (and lively) crowd, and he could put them in their place, gracefully and with no disrespect. There’s real talent to that. Not everybody has that.”

Deibert said that a little bit of research about fellow legislators’ districts offer the opportunity to bond over an issue their constituents are facing, particularly if that conversation can be seasoned with the local gov-

ernment experience that lends some insight.

“It’s a way to find common ground and build relationships,” he said.

He recently pointed out to a colleague who represented Perkins County that their town of Lemmon was the same size as Lawrence County’s Deadwood.

“Once you say that to that person, you have their attention, and then you can talk about your district,” Deibert said.

“You have the experience, you know how to deal with other government agencies. You know how to coordinate, collaborate, cooperate with the government communities.” **CN**

WORD SEARCH

SUMMIT COUNTY, UTAH
Created by Mary Ann Barton

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

ARCHITECTURE:

The county is home to more than 100 properties and districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

COALVILLE:

The county seat is named for the coal that was discovered there.

DINER:

The oldest restaurant in the county is the Oakley Diner, situated in a 1939 diner car.

DISTILLERY:

The only ski-in, ski-out distillery is located in the county.

FILM:

The county is home to the Sundance Film Festival, attracting more than 50,000 attendees each year.

GILBERT:

The highest peak in Summit County is Gilbert Peak, 13,448 feet above sea level. The peak is named for geologist Grove Karl Gilbert.

HISTORY:

The county was organized in January 1854.

MINING:

The county has a rich mining history in areas where silver, gold, lead and zinc were mined for more than 50 years. There are still more than 1,000 miles of mining tunnels beneath Park City’s mountains.

NEWSPAPER:

The oldest continuously published newspaper in the county is *The Park Record*, which was started in 1880 and continues to publish two issues each week.

OLYMPICS:

The county hosted the 2002 Winter Olympics.

RIVERS:

Four of Utah’s major rivers start in the county: Duchesne, Provo, Weber and Bear rivers.

SKIING:

The county is a popular spot for snow skiing. Park City has the largest ski resort in the country with 7,300 skiable acres.

SUMMIT:

The county got its name from the high mountain summits that surround the county.

TOURISM:

Tourists spent about \$1.65 billion in the county in 2024.

TRIBES:

The county was home to Native American tribes Shoshone and Ute, who visited the area mainly for hunting and fishing.

BEHIND THE SEAL

HERKIMER COUNTY, N.Y.

Herkimer County’s seal features the county’s namesake, Gen. Nicholas Herkimer, an American military officer who fought during the French and Indian War and Revolutionary War. He died in 1777 from wounds suffered during the Battle of Oriskany. Herkimer’s home, in what is now Little Falls, N. Y., is preserved as the Herkimer Home State Historic Site.

In 1791, Herkimer County was created as one of three counties split off from Montgomery County (the other two being Otsego and Tioga counties) as New York State was developed after the American Revolutionary War. Its area was much larger than the present county, however, and was reduced subsequently as more counties were organized.

Contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org to feature your seal.

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BLM, HUD target public lands for housing



Bureau of Land Management Acting Director Jon Raby speaks to the WIR Board of Directors during the 2025 NACo Legislative Conference in March. He addressed a workshop remotely during the 2025 WIR Conference in Pennington County, S.D. in May. Photo by Denny Henry

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Eyeing opportunities to spur development of affordable housing, the Trump administration sees low-hanging fruit in the country's federal land inventory.

A memorandum of understanding between the departments of Interior and Housing and Urban Development has spurred progress toward identifying and streamlining the transfer of that land to state and local governments and nonprofit housing developers.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has identified 535,000 acres that it manages within four miles of the municipal limits of towns with at least 5,000 residents. Those acres would be eligible for transfer.

"Working together, our agencies can inventory underused federal properties, transfer or lease them to states and localities to address housing needs, ... and ensure that affordability remains the core of the mission," said Jon Raby, acting BLM director. Raby spoke remotely to Western Interstate Region Conference attendees May 22 in Pennington County, S.D.

Raby stressed that the tight parameters for identifying relevant BLM land added up to two one-thousandths of a percent of available BLM land.

"It's very small in context for the rest of what we are responsible for, but it can have a big

2025 NACo Western Interstate Region Conference

impact locally" for communities experiencing growth against a barrier of public land, he said.

The bureau will soon release a map of eligible parcels.

"Before we take any disposal actions, we have to undertake an expedited review and go through clearance processes so that we're all in accordance with federal laws, regulations, agency policy, which includes, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and as always, public input," he said.

That detail concerns Washington County, Utah Commissioner Adam Snow, who said he feels that the NEPA process is too often weaponized against development.

"As long as NEPA is involved, whether it's the sale of lands or anything where the public gets involved, it's been weaponized against us in so many different ways," he said. "It will be weaponized against us until the system has changed and how we can deal with the disposal, construction of infrastructure, and therefore the attainable housing that we all need in the West. If NEPA is involved in the disposal at all, if we still have to go through public comment; I know that sounds bad, but when the public gets engaged, somebody is going to think that this is

the most pristine, amazing land in the world and will block and sue."

Snow said the public's perception of public lands is somewhat warped, which may slow the property transfer process, using an example from road improvements on a public right-of-way.

"Some of the groups made this sound like I was trying to sell off Zion National Park," he said. "With the disposal of any of these

'Our agencies can inventory underused federal properties.'

lands, as long as somebody's going to be able to join it, because you didn't go through some meticulous process, will mean that this sounds really good and in a year or five years, we'll all be in the same room having the same discussion, because nothing actually changes if we can't remove some of those barriers for selfish interest groups to come in and stop all that."

Whether the public lands effort will include federal subsidies for construction, permitting or other ancillary processes is not yet apparent. NACo Legislative Director Zeke Lee said that although HUD's role in the process is still unclear, NACo has submitted a letter to Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and HUD Secretary Scott Turner asking for counties to be represented on their housing task force.

Mono County, Calif. Supervisor Jennifer Kreitz would like to see the U.S. Forest Service, part of the Department of Agriculture, join the effort.

"We have a lot of Forest Service land that's adjacent to our communities, and it would be great to have them be willing to play like the BLM," she said.

There is certainly a constituency for workforce housing in public lands counties.

"We've had quite a bit of interest in looking at opportunities for housing in and around Carlsbad [in Eddy County, N.M.] because we have so much oil and gas activity, we have a need for housing not only the oil and gas workers and other support industry, supporting staff, but also our federal workers as well," Raby said.

Snow pointed out that although public lands counties often see seasonal population swells, the people who work there need year-round housing.

"How are you able to live and enjoy the area if nobody can serve you and at the restaurant, at the store? If you can't afford the basic inputs of the society from that more attainable housing level, than having access to the conservation lands or the other things are really irrelevant," he said.

"It's hard to go visit a national park," he noted. "There are no services when you get there, right? It's hard to go recreate in other places if we don't have the

industry that can support that year-round."

The plan still faces practical obstacles, as illustrated by Humboldt County, Nev. Commissioner Ken Tipton. His county's seat, Winnemucca, is more than two hours from Reno, the closest metropolitan area.

"We don't have the builders to build the moderate-income houses in the first place, because we are a very rapidly growing community, but the builders that are there, they would rather build \$500,000, \$600,000 or \$1 million homes," he said. "We don't have the builders, and we don't have housing for builders, if we can find the builder to come in."

Humboldt County is home to the Thacker Pass, primed to become the world's largest lithium mine, and the high-paying jobs associated with the mine will cut the legs out from most subsidy opportunities.

"We don't have a lot of low-income housing, and we don't qualify because our economy is basically gold mining," and soon lithium mining, Tipton said.

"I'm hopeful, with a lot of reservations," he said.

Nevada has a history of federal land sales through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, which has transferred 64 acres to Clark County, an area that could support 1,300 housing units.

Kurt Preszler, president of the South Dakota Home Builders Association, said time is of the essence with any housing development.

"You've got to get these houses up fast, so these people that are coming in can move to them fast," he said. "Building materials are always going to go up, so we need to start looking for alternatives. Maybe it's time to build houses smaller, like in the 1970s."

Infrastructure costs will always be an issue, he noted, so solving the land problem is only the start.

Tipton said that counties could prepare for whatever comes next for this federal effort by ensuring that planning and zoning codes are ready for the land to become available.

"Make sure they're all in place to do what you want to do with this land," he said. **CN**

Energy generation builds in the West to meet new demands

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

While energy demands are increasing nationwide, pushed in some part by the proliferation of data centers and expansion of artificial intelligence, many longtime power plants are due to go offline in the coming years. At the same time, new sources of energy production are finding their footing.

Many will find that footing in Western public lands counties.

“Your role in that, at least in South Dakota, comes down to zoning and permitting,” said Chris Nelson, South Dakota’s

public utilities commissioner. Nelson spoke on a panel with other energy development and management experts during the 2025 Western Interstate Region Conference in Pennington County, S.D.

“And I can look across South Dakota, where there are counties that literally have no zoning regulations as relates to new generation sources. You can go out there, you can build wind farming, and they don’t have to really do much. Then, there are places in South Dakota where the county ordinances essentially have precluded any type of new generation source.



Greg Brophy, Colorado director of the Western Way, addresses the WIR Board of Directors. Photo by Charlie Ban

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“When you talk about the cost, there’s a trade-off between costs and the level of your ordinances in what they allow.”

Nelson said that a carbon dioxide pipeline developer requested that the Public Utilities Commission completely preempt county ordinances related to the pipeline.

“And our commission unanimously said no, we are not going to preempt what the counties have done,” he said.

Counties will continue to play a role in regulating energy infrastructure development.

“There’s an infinite amount of interest in electricity and a finite amount to go around,” said Steve Barnett, general manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association.

Although costs and regulations have driven a disinvestment in coal-fired power plants, they likely will remain a part of the energy mix because reliability and capacity are backstops of the industry, driving many states to take an “all of the above” approach to energy

“The reality is, to keep the lights on, we do need to continue to utilize fossil fuels moving forward, you know, it’s technology advances,” Barnett said.

“I don’t know how that pendulum is going to swing, but

our goal, when we wake up every morning and we go to bed every night, is to ensure that the lights stay on.”

Some of that complication, according to Matt Brunner, chief marketing officer for Rushmore Electric Power Co-

‘There’s this infinite amount of interest in electricity and a finite amount to go around.’

- Steve Barnett

operative, is that energy producers have to overbuild to meet capacity needs to allow for reserve margins, driving up construction costs.

“If you build a thousand-megawatt plant, you can only run that at 70% or 64% capacity during the winter months because you have to hold off and keep that 36% in case of [storms],” he said.

Michael Pogany, general manager of Electric Operations for South Dakota for Black Hills Energy, said that counties can best encourage energy development by being predictable — having prescribed planning processes and open public meetings about their

rulemaking processes.

“Everybody wants to keep rates low and how we can do that is through clear and transparent communication,” he said.

Greg Brophy, Colorado director of the Western Way, boasted to the WIR Board meeting attendees about the outcomes from renewable energy generation in Eastern Colorado — 6.1 gigawatts with \$10 million in annual tax revenue.

“Roughly 40% or 45% of Kit Carson County’s general fund budget comes from property taxes from wind power,” he said.

“Lincoln County is well over 50%. There are 50 jobs in Lincoln County alone from renewable energy.”

He addressed the conflict between solar field development and the agricultural sector, noting that production has doubled on agricultural land since 1950 and that the amount of agricultural land lost to solar fields is less than the total acreage of golf courses.

“At the end of the life of the solar facility, you can very easily convert it straight back to agriculture,” he said.

“Good luck trying to convert a suburb back to agriculture after it’s been used in that manner for 40 years.” **CN**

Built in 1891, Old River Bridge sees new life connecting county and its residents

From **BRIDGE** page 1

replaced deteriorated sections with newly cast steel.

The pieces were then returned to Saline County to be reassembled in its original location.

The county has faced a series of obstacles throughout the restoration process, including a historic flood in the middle of construction that left the county scrambling to secure the delicate bridge, with flood waters rising above 27 feet, according to Saline County Judge Matt Brumley.

"There are hurdles, so now let's figure out how [to get over them]," Brumley said.

"Whether it be an easement that is hard to obtain, whether it be working with Union Pacific, whether it be literally 'How are we going to get this old rivet to work on this old bridge?'

"... A number of challenges are thrown at us all the time, but we're people that welcome challenges, because we know that we'll be able to resolve them."

The bridge will connect to the 65-mile Southwest Trail, a broader project Saline County is working on with its neighbors, Garland and Pulaski counties, as it will span across the three counties.

The first phase of the trail, a four-mile-stretch (running from the Saline County line), opened in April, and once it's completed, the bike and pedestrian trail will eventually connect Little Rock to Hot Springs.

"This is not just a recreational project," said Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde at the phase one ribbon-cutting ceremony. "It's about connecting communities, promoting health and creating new opportunities for economic development."

Garland, Pulaski and Saline counties all working together on the trail project has made it a much smoother process, and helped to secure state and federal funding, according to Brumley.

"We have worked hand in hand," Brumley said.

"We understand that working independently, we can be productive, but that we can just be really powerful through the

synergies of working together and planning together. As late as last week, we gathered together to say, 'What are each other's next steps?' so that we know that we're working in complement and not against productivity, on what the other partner is doing in these areas.

"And when we go out and look for funds, to say, 'Hey, all three of us are in,' has been very significant."

All said and done, it's roughly \$6 million to restore the Old River Bridge, which includes costs such as new decking, landscaping around the bridge, building barges in the river and implementing updated safety regulations (as one can imagine, there weren't many back in the 19th century,

Brumley noted), such as hand-rails.

The majority of the funding for the bridge restoration is coming from state and federal grants, including \$1 million through the U.S. Economic Development Administration, and Saline County is supplementing the rest, although the county hasn't matched more than 20% of any grant it's received, Brumley noted.

The Arkansas Department of Transportation, Central Arkansas Planning and Development and the local Metropolitan Planning Organization have also helped support the project, and moving forward, the county is looking to leverage public-private philanthropic partnerships to main-

tain the Old River Bridge and trailhead, he said.

"We are looking forward to people knowing this is an opportunity to be a part of something great for generations to come, and we're optimistic that will happen," Brumley said.

"Because once this is done, it doesn't take care of itself — we've got to maintain it, and we want to think and imagine great things that we can do to continue to bring people to it."

With its position over the Saline River, the bridge will also enhance visitors' access to boating, canoeing, kayaking and fishing, Brumley added.

"We have seen people say it has revitalized people's enthusiasm for a jewel of a resource that we have in a river — keeping it clean, stabilizing our banks and being able to use that," Brumley said.

"To just go in that area and see how beautiful it is, I think it's got some people really excited to take ownership and to take care of this area."

Throughout the restoration process, Saline County has posted updates on its social media accounts, which has generated a lot of excitement in the community, particu-

larly among its aging population who remember when the original bridge was active, according to Trevor Villines, the county's communications director and a city council member in the county's seat, Benton.

"When you go through and look at all the comments, it's just tons and tons of people that've got story after story of, 'I used to go down there and fish,' or 'That's where I had my first date,' or, 'That was how I got to so and so's house,'" Villines said.

More than 300 people attended the bridge's renovation groundbreaking, and the county expects to have even more at its official unveiling on June 24.

"People have longed for this project for a long time, and to see it come to fruition after so many years and the countless individuals who've helped make it possible — everybody's excited, they're passionate," Villines said.

"It seems like everywhere I go, somebody wants to know, 'How is the Old River Bridge project? How are things going down there? Man, we're so excited about that.' So, there's excitement everywhere." **CN**



Old River Bridge, built in 1891, pictured here in 1899. Photo courtesy of Trevor Villines



Workers reassemble restored pieces of the Old River Bridge May 14 in Saline County, Ark. Photo courtesy of Trevor Villines

2025 NACo

Western Interstate Region IN PHOTOS Conference

All images by Rebecca DeWitt, unless noted.



Kendra and Dwayne McFall, WIR's second vice president and a Fremont County, Colo. commissioner, head to the bus taking them to Mount Rushmore.



The main event: A visit to Mount Rushmore.



Marion County, Ore. Commissioner Danielle Bethell shows a photo to Modoc County, Calif. Supervisor Ned Coe, Association of Oregon Counties Executive Director Gina Firman Nikkel and Merced County, Calif. Supervisor Lloyd Pareira, Jr.



Prairie County, Mont. Commissioner Todd Devlin dresses for the occasion during a mobile tour to Custer State Park.



Badlands National Park Ranger Wayne Thompson shows off fossils found in the park to Lyon County, Nev. Commissioner Tammy Hendrix.



The Fat Trio entertains attendees at the NACo Board of Directors reception.



Although a drizzle greeted conference attendees at Badlands National Park, it cleared dust from the rocks, treating visitors to even more brilliant colors than usual.



Mohave County, Ariz. Assessor Jeanne Kentch settles in for the General Session.



Matt Clark, the state investment officer for South Dakota, addresses the General Session audience.



Conference attendees descend into Badlands National Park.



Mary Styndl, her husband Blue Earth County, Minn. Commissioner Vance Stuehrenberg, McPherson County, Kan. Commissioner Keith Becker and his wife Esther Becker prepare to board a bus bound for Badlands National Park.



While county officials gazed in wonder at Badlands National Park, a rabbit paused for a photo.



Holt County, Neb. Commissioner Bill Tielke (left) and Beaufort County, N.C. Commissioner Ed Booth examine equipment at South Dakota State University’s West River Research Farm. Photo by Kyle Zvejnieks



Bernalillo County, N.M. Assessor Damian Lara and Maui County, Hawaii Councilmember Shane Sinenci pose in a 360-degree photo booth.



2025 NACo
**Western Interstate
Region** IN PHOTOS CONTINUED
Conference

The National Center for Public Lands Counties convened one of the largest panels in NACo history to discuss forest management. From left: Jay Wickham, director, S.D. Department of Public Safety - Wildland Fire Division; Ben Wudtke, executive director of the Intermountain Forest Association and the Black Hills Forest Resource Association; Jeremy Dedic, Forestry Partnership coordinator, Wyoming State Forestry Division; S.D. State Forester Marcus Warnke; S.D. Sen. Randy Deibert; Mitch Iverson, natural resource planner and consultant for the five Black Hills counties; Pennington County, S.D. Natural Resources Director Scott Guffey, US Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region Forester Troy Heithecker.

Joan Martin, Pennington County, S.D.'s commission coordinator, lets General Session audience members know she's ready to answer any questions.



Skagit County, Wash. Commissioner Lisa Janicki asks about Pennington Cares Campus programming.



Kauai County, Hawaii Councilmember Arryl Kaneshiro and Maui County, Hawaii Councilmember Keani Rawlins-Fernandez drum up some excitement for WIR's 2026 conference in Maui County.



Pennington County, S.D. Commissioner Gary Drewes, who wore many hats during the WIR Conference, relaxes wearing simply the host hat at the Mount Rushmore cafeteria.

Triston Rice and Micah Christensen, both Wyoming County Commissioners Association staffers, chat during the conference.



New Castle County, Del. Councilmember David Carter photographs scenes at Custer State Park.

Measles on the rise: What county officials need to know

by **Julia Haskins**

The resurgence of measles across the U.S. has raised alarm among county leaders and their communities. As of May 15, 2025, more than 1,000 measles cases were reported in 31 states, with three deaths.

Why is measles so dangerous?

Measles is an extremely contagious viral infection that is especially dangerous to children, infants too young to be vaccinated, and other vulnerable populations like pregnant women and people with compromised immune systems. The disease can lead to serious complications like pneumonia and brain swelling, which can cause life-long disability or death.

What can be done to prevent measles?

The good news is that there is a proven and powerful line of defense: the Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR) vaccine. Two doses of the vaccine are 97% effective in preventing measles. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that the first dose be administered between 12 and 15 months of age and the second between ages 4 through 6. It is also recommended for some adults to get a booster vaccine.

‘County leaders can use their voices to encourage uptake of the MMR vaccine.’

Why are we seeing more measles cases?

Measles was eliminated in the U.S. in 2000, largely due to uptake of the MMR vaccine and other public health interventions. However, vaccination rates have been declining in the U.S., which has contributed to the rise in measles cases. An increase in false and misleading health information is another barrier to vaccination because it feeds into concerns about the safety and efficacy of vaccines, which can be a deterrent to uptake.

Travel is another common means of viral transmission. While traveling, people are often in close quarters with one another on planes, trains, and buses. Measles can stay in the air up to two hours after an infected person has left a space, which makes it easy to spread to people nearby.

Through international travel, you may also be crossing paths with people who are less likely to be vaccinated,

especially if they are from countries with low rates of vaccination.

How can county leaders protect communities against measles?

Vaccination is the most effective defense against measles, and county leaders can use their voices to encourage uptake of the MMR vaccine. County leaders can partner with trusted community messengers to promote vaccination, being sensitive to people’s fears and concerns.

Empathy goes a long way toward helping people feel more comfortable about a decision that will affect them and their families.

The Public Health Communications Collaborative (PHCC) offers measles messaging resources that can be adapted to local contexts. PHCC also has vaccine-focused messaging resources developed with the public research opinion firm PerryUndem.

In addition to vaccination, the basic hygiene and infection mitigation practices that we know well thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic apply to measles prevention. Washing your hands frequently, sanitizing high-touch surfaces, and staying home when ill are all easy but effective ways to prevent measles from spreading. County leaders can work with health departments and partners on public information

campaigns with simple ways to reduce the risk of measles infection.

The more that county leaders can equip people with research-backed information that speaks to their needs, the more successful they will be in reducing measles rates in their communities.

Haskins is a senior editorial associate at the de Beaumont Foundation.


..... **ON THE MOVE**>

NACo OFFICERS


- West Region Representative **Joe Briggs** and CIO **Rita Reynolds** attended the Colorado Counties Inc.’s Annual Conference in Summit County.

NACo STAFF


- Executive Director **Matt Chase** and Intergovernmental Affairs and Partner Engagement Director **Rick Hart** attended the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in Ottawa.
- Program Director **Shalini Wickramatilake** earned a doctorate in health policy and management from Johns Hopkins University.
- Program Manager **Destiny Boston** earned a master’s degree in forensic and legal psychology from Marymount University.
- Cloud Administrator **Christopher Nwachukwu** earned a bachelor’s degree in information technology from George Mason University.
- Rick Hart and Managing Director of Retirement Services **Carlos Greene** attended the NOBCO Conference in Jefferson County, Ala. Greene was given the NOBCO Chairman’s Award for his dedication to the NACo-NOBCO and Nationwide-NOBCO partnerships and was presented with an original George Hunt “I AM A MAN” serigraph.
- Program Manager **Kimberly Ransom** attended the National Association of State Chief Information Officers Mid-year Conference in Philadelphia County, Pa.
- Legislative Director **Owen Hart** attended the Idaho Association of Counties Annual Conference in Kootenai County.
- Associate Legislative Director **Julia Cortina** attended the American Public Human Services Association National Human Services Summit in Philadelphia County, Pa.




Wickramatilake



Boston



Nwachukwu



Owen Hart



NACo Second Vice Presidential Candidates

CANDIDATE PLATFORM



Alisha Bell

Wayne County, Mich.
chair

Dear Colleagues,

It has been my honor to serve on the Wayne County Commission and as a member of NACo for the last 21 years. Service, commitment, and passion have been my guiding principles for both Wayne County and NACo as I continuously demonstrate my dedication to county government. In 2002 when I became the youngest African American woman to be elected to a county commission board in the country, I made it my mission to make county government accessible and relevant to all residents. Being an active member of NACo has certainly assisted me in bringing that mission to fruition.

My dedication to NACo has been demonstrated by my positions in the following:

- Current LUCC Vice Chair
- Current Vice Chair of Justice and Public Safety Committee
- Former Chair of Justice and Public Safety Committee
- Former President of Women of NACo

- Former President of NABCO
- Former Credentials Chair
- Former Tally Clerk
- Founding Member of NextGen NACo
- CLI Class of 2016
- Presidential Appointee to the NACo Board by 5 NACo Presidents

Serving in my seventh year as Commission Chair for the largest county in Michigan, I am keenly aware of the challenges and successes of county government. I can honestly say that many of the successes that counties have achieved throughout the country stem from the work that NACo has engaged in with our federal partners and the membership of this esteemed organization. Now, more than ever, we need leaders who can unify this nation and I believe I am the right person at the right time to lead this organization as we operate as one NACo, working together with one voice for the betterment of all. County government has always been and will remain a government for the people and I would love the opportunity to share my experiences and vision to further the mission and goals of NACo as your next 2nd Vice President.

Whether you're in a large, rural, suburban county or tribal community, we all have similar successes and challenges. Similarly, NACo has challenges that our leadership must address so that we maintain our status as the leading voice in county government. We must continue to provide resources, technical assistance and best

practices to remain relevant to our members. Remaining relevant and responsive while simultaneously adapting to change will be paramount over the next few years. I firmly believe that in **NACo: Together We R.I.S.E.**

Resiliency - We must ensure that our legislative priorities emphasize resiliency in our mandated functions as county officials. We must always be in the mode of preparing, responding and recovering from natural and man-made disasters, economic downturns and public health emergencies. Over the last five years, the United States has experienced more than 100 weather disasters each causing losses of \$1 billion or more! Additionally, our public health departments continue to do an extraordinary job in addressing the myriad of health issues that our counties face. It's a stark reminder of the importance of preparedness, the capacity to withstand and recover from difficulties, and how counties remain on the front line of resiliency with NACo providing important resources and tools for effective management of these occurrences.

Infrastructure and Innovation - Many of our communities are burdened with aging bridges, roads, sewer systems and the like. Supporting the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will greatly assist counties in making the much-needed updates and repairs to our infrastructure that our residents desperately rely on us to provide as counties operate 44 percent of the

nation's public roads and 38 percent of bridges. NACo's role in advocacy to Congress played a pivotal role in developing this comprehensive bill. Our NACo leadership must continue engaging our membership and Congress by telling our story and continuing to advocate for investments in our transportation, stormwater systems, bridges, roads and airports.

Innovation - Artificial Intelligence (AI) is here to stay and counties need to understand the implications of this emerging technology. NACo leadership must continuously inform members of the pros and cons and guide them on how to best use AI for greater efficiencies in government without jeopardizing our workforce. AI can assist in preventing cyber-attacks and enhancing infrastructure monitoring, just to name a few of its capabilities. Staying informed on the newest and greatest innovations in technology must remain a top priority for NACo leadership and for members as technology becomes an increasingly integral part of the operations of county government.

Sustainability - Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is the essence of sustainability. It is important that counties create policies that balance economic development with environmental protections. Being mindful of the importance of clean air and fresh water and how it

impacts the health of our residents should be a top priority. We can achieve that by encouraging communities to reduce waste, reuse materials and recycle when appropriate. NACo's commitment to providing resources and tools for more sustainable counties will certainly benefit county efficiencies as well as the health of our residents.

Engagement- Membership engagement is paramount to the continued success of NACo. Regular communication with members, especially new members, through webinars and opportunities to share with NACo best practices from their county fosters a sense of belonging and reinforce that every member has valuable contributions to offer. Checking in via phone calls or emails can make a significant difference in making members feel valued. I am proud to be a NACo Ambassador which welcomes new members and first-time attendees to our Legislative and Annual Conference and look forward to continuing with these kinds of events to enhance our new member engagement.

I sincerely thank each of you for your dedication and commitment to county government and humbly ask for your support and vote in my quest to be your next NACo 2nd Vice President!

Please visit my website, **www.Bellfor2ndvp.com**, to learn more about my campaign.

Remember that in NACo: Together We R.I.S.E.!

NACo Second Vice Presidential Candidates

CANDIDATE PLATFORM

Bob Dixon
Greene County, Mo.
commissioner

To my fellow public servants, If there's one thing experience has taught me, it's that county leadership rarely looks like standing at the front of the room to be honored - more often, leadership means opening doors for others to walk through, listening to the voices and wisdom of others, and dedicating time to understanding complex problems so one can act decisively with confidence.

I'm Bob Dixon, and I am asking for your support as the next Second Vice President of the National Association of Counties.

The spirit of leadership I've tried to embody throughout my

career is based upon the idea of bringing people together to get things done. In almost three decades of public service, first in the Missouri House, then in the Missouri Senate, and now serving in a second term as the Presiding Commissioner of Greene County, Missouri, I have learned to listen intently, to consider the voices of many, to think deeply and reflectively, and only then to act with determination and resolve. If one wants to lead and actually get things done, you must first be willing to serve.

So, as you consider placing your complete trust in me now, remember, I know firsthand that serving in public office looks incredibly different depending on where you serve.

Whether you're leading in a rural county with limited broadband or an urban center grappling with infrastructure strain and complex systems, the challenges are real, and it's never a "one-size-fits-all" situation. That's why I value the richness of our NACo organization and its collective perspective—and it's why I'm committed to building bridges and maintaining the strength of our organization.

The elected leaders and members of NACo are not gatekeepers who guard power, but gate attendants—leaders who must look ahead, forge paths, and open doors for others. When we join efforts, and we can walk in agreement, we lead with confidence, and we thrive together. And we create processes where we can lift every voice in our distinctly different communities, regardless of ZIP code or size, with intention and integrity.

And let me assure you, I am not speaking to you only of lofty ideals. Over the past two decades, I've had the privilege of serving in demanding roles, with responsibilities entrusted to me that required both grounded decision-making, and the humility to know when to listen, and how to deeply value the wisdom of others. I have been fortunate to be mentored and befriended, and because of this I have benefitted from the broad wisdom of community leaders, business owners, and nonprofit voices from all walks of life at local, state, and national levels.

Because I have been willing to act decisively and to lead respectfully, I have a proven

and award-winning record of getting things done. For instance, in the Missouri legislature, I was chosen to be Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, serving as the first non-attorney in that post since 1830! And from this position, I shepherded a multi-year process of generational and comprehensive reforms to Missouri's Criminal Code and judicial circuits for the first time in over 35 years.

One vital NACo function is advocacy for our counties at the Federal level. In my decades of service, I have built strong relationships with members of Congress- these types of relationships will prove to be critical in the years ahead as we speak up for essential services, programs, and funding. As your Second Vice President, I will continue to lead at the National level to assure our voices are heard, and respected.

None of this happens in a vacuum. It happens when we trust one another - when we come to the table not with egos but with shared purpose - when we recognize that being temperamentally grounded and open to diverse perspectives is not a weakness

but a strength that leads to real, sustained outcomes. That's the kind of collaboration I'm offering today.

I welcome your support, your ideas, and your guidance. Whether we've served side by side before or you're just getting familiar with the work we are committed to doing, know this: my door is always open.

My record is one of building consensus, honoring trust, and working toward practical solutions that serve real people. I am eager to continue our work—with you at NACo. Together, we can model a kind of leadership that is less about control and more about empowerment. Less about titles and more about transformation.

Thank you for your service. Thank you for the trust you place in one another. And thank you for considering how we will move forward together in agreement with shared purpose. I would appreciate your support, and I'll guard your trust.

With respect and appreciation,
Bob Dixon
Presiding Commissioner
Greene County, Missouri



Build healthier counties with NACo

NACo's **Live Healthy Discount program**

delivers health savings to county residents at **NO COST** to the county.

Live Healthy has saved residents **more than \$720 million** on their prescriptions.



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*The Live Healthy program is not insurance. Prescription savings may vary by drug and pharmacy; discounts are only available at participating pharmacies. MinuteClinic discounts are available in 33 states and the District of Columbia

GET TO KNOW...

Greene County, Ill.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Greene County, Ill., established in 1821, is named for the American Revolutionary War Gen. Nathanael Greene. Notable natives of its county seat, Carrollton, include “Indiana Jones” actress Karen Allen and U.S. politician Henry Thomas Rainey, who served as speaker of the House during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s presidency.

The Koster Site, a prehistoric archaeological site that provides a well-preserved record of human occupation spanning nearly 9,000 years, is located in the county. Its deeply stratified cultural deposits, or “horizons,” each represent a distinct period of habitation and are separated by soil layers. They were discovered in archaeological excavations from 1969 to 1978, and have allowed researchers to study the technologies, food sources and societal changes of people who lived in the lower Illinois River Valley from the Early Archaic period (around 6000 BCE) to the Mississippian period (1000 CE).

The Koster Site is one of the earliest cemeteries in

eastern North America, and provided evidence that people in the Early Archaic period had special rituals for burying the dead, including putting them in prepared oval pits.

The Illinois River flows along Greene County’s western border and the Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge, a popular destination for bald eagles in the winter months, is also partially located in the county.

Greene County Days, an annual Carrollton festival, features live music, a parade and talent show. Other towns in the county also host their own smaller version of the celebration.



Greene County attracts bald eagles during the winter. Photo courtesy of Rivers and Routes of Southwest Illinois

PROFILES IN SERVICE

TOYIA TUCKER

NACo Board Member
Columbus-Muscogee County, Ga.
Councilmember

Number of years active in NACo: Four years

Years in public service: Five years

Occupation: Retired United States Air Force

Education: Currently enrolled at Columbus State University for a master’s in public administration.

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Serving as an elected official!

Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: General Colin Powell, my grandmother Julia Simmons and my uncle Harold Lewis, who both recently passed.

A dream I have is to: Become ambassador to Luxembourg.



TUCKER

My favorite movie is: “It’s a Wonderful Life”



You’d be surprised to learn that I: I prefer to be in the comfort of my home rather than being the social butterfly that I am.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done is: Join the Air Force

My favorite way to relax is: Vacationing!

I’m most proud of: Being a mother.

Every morning, I read: My Bible

My favorite meal is: The Seafood Platter at Pappadeaux Seafood Kitchen

My pet peeve is: People who don’t put tops back on containers and toothpaste.

My motto is: Trust but verify!

The last book I read was: “When Everyone Leads: How the Toughest Challenges are Seen and Solved,” by Ed O’Malley and Julia Fabris McBride

My favorite music is: R&B

My favorite U.S. president is: Barack Obama

My county is a NACo member because: We recognize the value NACo brings to our county for all our citizens.



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



jobs.naco.org



SPONSORED CONTENT

BUILDING RESILIENT RURAL AREAS: INSIGHTS AND ACTION PLANS

Financial planning considerations will be unique to your region and individual needs. Equipped with insightful statistics, you might be better prepared.

For Nationwide® surveys, we let respondents self-select as rural or urban, and did not do mathematical breakdowns of ZIP codes or counties. If the respondents self-identified as rural, we counted them as rural rather than using the U.S. Census Bureau definition of “rural” being populations under 2,500.

Social Security

Insight: According to our survey, about two-thirds of rural adults say they are either not at all or only somewhat confident in their knowledge of Social Security (62% vs. 54% for the general population).

Strategic approach: Another consideration is for farmers and ranchers, who might report very low income on Schedule F, which could lead to them receiving lower Social Security benefits. It’s particularly important for these clients to have monetary assets beyond their land and operation.

Retirement savings/accumulation

Insight: Formal retirement plan ownership is lower in rural areas.

Strategic approach: Even if they work on a farm or in another agriculture industry, it’s common for many to earn off-farm income. If they have access to a 401(k) or other retirement plan, ensure that they’ve considered



contributing to it. And if they don’t have access, ensure that the individual, especially if self-employed, is aware of alternatives such as simplified employee pensions (SEPs), Savings Incentive Match Plans for Employees (SIMPLEs), Roth IRAs, etc.

Legacy planning

Insight: Those living in rural areas are more likely to have their assets in the form of businesses (33.1% in rural areas compared to 22.3% of the assets of urban individuals). Land, business and other asset handoffs can be complex for larger families.

Strategic approach: Encourage legacy planning is a topic you encourage within your community. Nation-



Nationwide®
is on your side

wide® has a free program called “Land as Your Legacy” that helps farmers and other agricultural business owners leave equitable assets to their beneficiaries and can help preserve the enterprise for the next generation. Small-business owners who might have lower incomes yet higher net worth, plus the parallel issue of lower levels of investment diversification, they might benefit from retirement income conversations in which their unique tax considerations are discussed.

Healthcare and long-term care (LTC)

Insights: 67% of rural adults surveyed are terrified of what health care costs might do to their retirement plans. Providing resources and programs to your community to help them estimate health care and long-term care costs in retirement could empower them to plan appropriately now. Rural Americans face numerous health disparities compared with their urban counterparts. They are more likely to

die from heart disease, cancer, unintentional injury or stroke than their urban counterparts.²

Strategic approach: With LTC in rural areas often provided by family members, there are financial products and payout options that could provide them with more flexibility for in-home and family care—such as indemnity coverage that can be used to pay any caregiver, even family members. Providing educational materials/programs to your community can help them discover options and tools they may not have been aware of.

Reach out to your Nationwide representative for more information.



NACo swag is now
available online!



BRIGHT IDEAS | ORANGE COUNTY, FLA.

Volunteer Program Trains Florida County Staff to Help During Hurricanes, Other Emergencies

PROBLEM: Counties can become short-handed when it comes to responding to emergencies.

SOLUTION: Train, certify and deploy non-essential county staff to help (and receive pay for their efforts).

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

After Hurricane Ian hit Orange County, Fla., three young adults came into an emergency shelter at Apopka High School after getting stuck in a storm surge.

“They had gotten trapped in the water for a long time, and when they came in, they were soaked,” said Marva Davis, who works in Orange County’s human resources division. “Their clothes seemed like oil mixed with water and mud and dirt, and it was heart-breaking to see them in that condition.”

Davis stepped in — giving the girl the clothes off her back and finding two basketball uniforms the school had on hand to give to the two boys. They were able to shower, change into new clothes and were given other basic necessities by the shelter, like a toothbrush and toothpaste.

“When I tell you the look of appreciation on those people’s faces and how much they thanked us — that in itself told us why we do what we do,” Davis said. “Because that could be any one of us at any time.”

Davis has worked to help during a number of emergencies — hurricanes, freezes, floods — which doesn’t traditionally fall under the job description of someone who works in HR, but she also serves as a shelter manager through Orange County’s Volunteer Emergency Responder Program, which provides certification in emergency roles to the county’s non-essential personnel.



The program trains, prepares and deploys non-essential personnel in emergency roles, which include managing shelters, taking calls for people with special needs, managing points of distribution and coordinating emergency operations.

All volunteers must go through FEMA’s NIMS (National Incident Management System) certification process, which includes six online courses, and a final certification class through the county that ranges from three to eight hours, depending on which role the volunteer is taking on.

The volunteer program launched in 2004, not long before the hurricane season hit, which Karen Ross, Emergency Management’s special program manager, described as a “whirlwind.” The aim was to build a larger capacity for emergency response and also provide an opportunity for people in non-emergency

roles to receive additional pay during an emergency. Roughly 1,000 county employees have participated in the program — 25% of its total non-essential staff over the past two decades — many of whom are certified in multiple emergency roles, according to Ross.

The American Red Cross worked alongside county staff for shelter management in the event of an emergency until Hurricane Irma hit Orange County in 2017 — just weeks after Hurricane Harvey had caused widespread damage and destruction in Texas. Red Cross staff had already deployed to Houston, leaving Orange County to staff 21 shelters.

“Because we had so many [volunteers] trained, we staffed all 21 of them with our own resources,” Ross said. “And until then, American Red Cross even gave us shelter kits. Well, they said they couldn’t even do that, so it was 3 a.m.

and we were finishing 21 individual shelter kits for the shelter leads to come get them at 6 a.m. — in the rain with radios, the whole thing.

“So, that was the beginning of our independence, so to speak, and looking at the capacity we have internally.”

The Red Cross is still a “major partner” for emergency response in Orange County, but the county has done its own shelter management since Irma, Ross said. Orange County Sheriff’s Office is also planning to adopt the volunteer emergency responder program.

“They’re our partner, they’re in the field with us every single activation,” Ross said. “So, it was just a really good way to share that incentive and how it works for us, and then they’re going to implement that at some point, hopefully by the [hurricane] season.”

Davis said that she finds it rewarding to work as a shel-

ter manager and emphasized how essential it is to have respect for the people staying in shelters, who are often at their most vulnerable. She said that she hopes in the future that the program can better connect people with ongoing resources when emergency sheltering is over, such as linking them to supportive housing and mental health support.

“A shelter is where there’ll be people who may need some information or help, but as shelter managers, we don’t have all the resources for them,” she said. “... I just wish there were more resources that we could provide to those people who would take the help.” **CN**

Orange County Human Resources’ Volunteer Emergency Responder Program earned the Best in Category Achievement Award last year in the Risk and Emergency Management category.



CALIFORNIA

- **SAN DIEGO COUNTY**'s annual "Summer Movies in the Park" season kicked off recently at the Waterfront Park with a sunset showing of Disney's "Moana 2," and fun activities starting at 6 p.m. In addition to a movie, the series includes lawn games, an inflatable slide, music and opportunities for kids to get their pictures taken with Maui and Moana—characters from the movie "Moana 2." The movie night also includes a food truck, a dessert truck and refreshments at the Waterfront Park's snack bar.

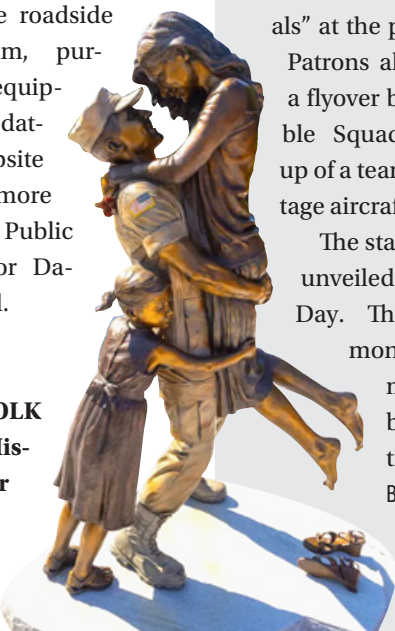
CALIFORNIA

- **NEVADA COUNTY** recently approved a contract to remove vegetation on a swath of roadway stretching 50 miles to reduce the impact and severity of wildfires, YubaNet.com reported. The action will expand county removal of 25 miles of vegetation.

"In addition to this project, our team has been making other improvements to our vegetation management program, including aligning our current work with the 2024 Nevada County Evacuation Study, revamping the roadside spray program, purchasing new equipment, and updating our website to provide more information," Public Works Director David Garcia said.

FLORIDA

- The **POLK COUNTY** History Center recently welcomed the owner of a family his-



FLORIDA

A new life-size bronze statue celebrating **veteran families** is shown May 26 during the Memorial Day: A Legacy of Sacrifice program at the Ocala-MARION COUNTY Veterans Memorial Park in Ocala.

Veterans and families saluted the flag during the event and the Vietnam Vets motorcycle club also visited.

Residents placed flags in between "brick memorials" at the park as well. Patrons also watched a flyover by the Humble Squadron, made up of a team flying vintage aircraft.

The statue was first unveiled on Veterans Day. The \$141,000 monument was made possible by donations. Photo by Bruce Ackerman/Ocala Gazette

tory investigative service to its Genealogy Speaker Series. Kate Townsend helped center patrons explore methods for searching court records as a genealogical resource. Her user-friendly approach, the county said, provides a how-to background for exploring courthouses to find a variety of records involving ancestors. The virtual program was presented by the Polk County History Center and Genealogical Library.

- The **SARASOTA COUNTY Sheriff's Office** has launched a YouTube series featuring the rigorous training process recruits go through to join the force. The new YouTube series is titled "Do You Have What It Takes?" and gives viewers an inside look at the challenges faced by recruits training to become Sarasota County Sheriff's deputies. The series takes viewers behind the scenes to follow each recruit's journey — highlighting the physical, mental and emotional demands of law enforcement training.

Created by the Sarasota

County Sheriff's Office, the show aims to give the public a better understanding of what it takes to serve and protect the community. From fitness drills to classroom instruction, the series explores how re-



NEVADA

CLARK COUNTY's new **supportive housing program**, BETtermment Community, recently moved in its first residents. The 90-day bridge housing program also provides on-site case management, workforce services, life skills training, a food pantry and transportation. The county contracted with local homeless services provider U.S. VETS to create the BETtermment Community, which is modeled after a similar program the organization created for homeless veterans that helps 80% of participants transition to permanent housing each year.

cruits are tested on discipline, resilience, and decision-making under pressure.

IOWA

Polk County is launching a program to help low-income seniors stay in their homes by providing free home repairs.

Aimed at homeowners and renters ages 62 and older, the county's **Aging in Place program** will provide home repairs to improve safety and accessibility — a move that county officials hope will reduce the need for them to relocate to nursing homes or assisted living facilities, according to a news release.

Public works staff will coordinate on repairs for the program, which also is being supported with a nearly \$1.3 million grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to cover overtime, training, labor and materials costs, county officials said. The program will work with local occupational therapist, Sydney Marshman, from Happy at Home Consulting Projects.

MARYLAND

By 2030, Baltimore County's population of residents aged 60 and over is projected to ex-

See NEWS FROM page 19

From NEWS FROM page 18

ceed 250,000, accounting for one in four residents. That has prompted the county to create an **“aging roadmap” plan**.

The goals of the plan are divided into five key priorities: Affordable aging;

caregiver support; healthy aging; communication and volunteerism.

MICHIGAN

Three **Peregrine falcon chicks** that recently hatched on top of the **MACOMB COUNTY** building, built in 1933, have been banded and named as part of a local falconry effort, WWJ-TV reported. Macomb County Executive Mark A. Hackel, working with the Michigan Hawking Club, recently made the announcement and provided photos of the birds taken during the weekend during the identification banding efforts.

“For many years, we’ve worked with partners to band and protect these incredible animals here in our community,” Hackel said. “While we’ve seen a recovery across the state, it’s important that we continue to do our part and ensure these chicks have a healthy and happy start here in Mount Clemens. As always, we’re proud they made Macomb their home.”

The species was once listed as endangered in Michigan; but about a year and a half ago, the Peregrine falcon population in the state had recovered enough to be listed instead as threatened. The birds remain federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Adult peregrine falcons can reach speeds of up to 250 mph.

MINNESOTA

The **MCLEOD COUNTY** Sheriff’s Office has added a powerful new tool to its public safety arsenal: A 36-foot **mobile command center** designed to improve emergency response, enhance coordination across agencies and serve as a high-tech hub for both crisis situations and community outreach, the McLeod County Chronicle reported.

Sheriff Casey Stotts de-

scribed the new vehicle as an “observation and operations center” equipped with cutting-edge technology and multipurpose features. The unit functions as a mobile dispatch station, drone launch pad, command hub and even a weatherproof regrouping and rehabilitation center for personnel during extended incidents. “This is about preparedness,” Stotts said. “We make plans for events we hope never happen.”

NEVADA

CLARK COUNTY’s new **supportive housing program**, BETterment Community, recently moved in its first residents. The 90-day bridge housing program also provides on-site case management, workforce services, life skills training, a food pantry and transportation. The county contracted with local homeless services provider U.S. VETS to create the BETterment Community, which is modeled after a similar program the organization created for homeless veterans that helps 80% of participants transition to permanent housing each year.

PENNSYLVANIA

• Towns in **MERCER COUNTY** are offering people \$5,000 to **move to the county**. The initiative, which is funded by a local non-profit, Penn-Northwest Development Corporation, is aiming to address the county’s dwindling population. Participants must live more than 100 miles outside of Mercer County to qualify. More than 100 people have

TENNESSEE

If you’re a fan of the TV show, **“County Rescue,”** the second season currently airing on the Great American Family network was filmed in **BRADLEY COUNTY**. The fictional series highlights the heroism of EMTs and first responders, “focusing on their character development and inspirational stories rather than solely on life-threatening incidents.”

**WISCONSIN**

• **WINNEBAGO COUNTY** is working to address its **mental healthcare worker shortage** by providing financial assistance and educational support to incentivize residents to stay in the county when they become a social worker. The Social Worker Opportunity Tracks program, which is being funded through the county’s half-cent mental health sales tax, will support county residents who are interested in getting an associate degree in human services or a bachelor’s degree or master’s degree in social work — providing two years of free tuition at participating local institutions, with additional funding available for textbooks and wrap-around services.

applied to the program, and two families from Arizona and New Jersey have already made the commitment to move.

• **WYOMING COUNTY** is launching an in-home **maternal mental health** program to better support new mothers who are dealing with perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, such as post-partum depression. It includes group sessions with other new moms, therapy with specialists and family support groups.

• “This will be another addition to the county’s mental health capabilities,” Wyoming County Commissioner Tom Henry said at a county commissioners meeting. “I’m

proud to represent a county that continues to take mental health seriously and put funding toward make sure people who are battling things like depression can continue to find help.”

TEXAS

DALLAS COUNTY’s new **Employer Child Care Match Program** is one of the first of its kind in Texas and across the United States, KTVT-TV reported.

“A lot of people are being kept out of the workforce because it costs more for child care for an infant, per year, than it does for tuition and books at an in-state university here in Texas,” said Dallas

County Judge Clay Jenkins. Dallas County is investing \$1 million into the program. Participating employers can provide up to \$1,500 annually in child-care assistance to their employees. The county will then match that amount dollar-for-dollar, bringing the total potential benefit to \$3,000 per family each year.

“It’s a win-win-win because the employer gets better retention rates, less absenteeism and a happier workforce,” Jenkins said. “The county gets help from the employer to fix a problem that is a growing major problem, the economic vitality here in the county. And, of course, moms and dads get a win because they’ve got two sources other than themselves helping pay for child care.”

VIRGINIA

FAIRFAX COUNTY’s new **recycling program** has diverted over nine tons of textile waste from landfills in just three months — at no cost to the county. The initiative, which is a partnership between Fairfax County and Helpsy (a public benefit corporation with the mission to reduce textile waste), is part of the county’s Zero Waste Plan to minimize waste in county facilities.

Residents can drop off clothing, shoes, accessories, linens and other household fabrics at collection bins across from the county’s recycling center, which is then sorted and sold to thrift stores and other resellers by Helpsy.

WISCONSIN

• **GRANT COUNTY** is helping low-income older adults buy fresh, local produce through its **Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program Checks**. The checks, which can be used to purchase fruits, vegetables and herbs from certified farmers at participating local farmers markets or roadside stands, are usable from now through the end of October.



Actress Julia Reilly plays a county paramedic on **“County Rescue.”**

Photo courtesy of Great American Family

News From was written by editor Mary Ann Barton and staff writer Meredith Moran. Send your news and photos to mbar-ton@naco.org.

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