



J.D. Clark takes office as NACo president

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Just blocks from Independence Hall in Philadelphia — where the Second Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence — a former high school history teacher rose July 14 to lead an organization representing a form of government that preceded the United States by more than 100 years.

J.D. Clark, 39, judge of the Wise County, Texas Commissioners Court, took office as president of the National As-

will serve as immediate past president.

The timing, less than 250 years since the founding of the United States, was not lost on Clark.

“Why do we share history? To teach, to spark something new, to shape the future,” he said during the Annual Business Meeting. “Our stories — the wins, the struggles, the growth — those stories where people remember. They’re how we pass things on. How we lead.”

The four officers are joined on the executive committee by NACo’s four regional representatives, including Johnson County, Wyo. Commissioner Bill Novotny (who will succeed Cascade County, Mont. Commissioner Joe Briggs after six years as West Regional Representative); South Regional Representative Ron Berry, a Roane County, Tenn. commissioner; Tammy Tinch-er, a Greenbrier County, W.Va. commissioner and Kurt Gibbs, a Marathon County, Wis. supervisor.

Clark recognized his wife, Leah, and daughters Claire, Maggie and Zelda for the sacrifices they make as he takes on added responsibility.

“You have grown up around NACo and the county courthouse. Girls, I thank you so much for sharing your daddy



Meet NACo’s new leadership team for 2025-2026. They are (l-r): Immediate Past President James Gore of Sonoma County, Calif.; President J.D. Clark of Wise County, Texas; First Vice President George Dunlap of Mecklenburg County, N.C. and Second Vice President Alisha Bell of Wayne County, Mich. Photo by Denny Henry

‘Our stories — the wins, the struggles — they’re how we pass things on. How we lead.’

sociation of Counties, which in the 17th century, long before there was a Texas, would have been an organization of shires.

Clark will be joined by NACo officers including First Vice President George Dunlap, a Mecklenburg County, N.C. commissioner, and Second Vice President Alisha Bell, a Wayne County, Mich. commissioner who prevailed in an election over Greene County, Mo. Presiding Commissioner Bob Dixon. Sonoma County, Calif. Supervisor James Gore

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Presidential historians’ message: ‘Lead with empathy, optimism, resiliency’

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

The best leaders exhibit empathy, optimism and resilience — those traits are why pivotal U.S. presidents, such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, were as successful as they were, and are now more im-

portant than ever in public service, as America approaches its 250th anniversary, according to historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Doug Bradburn.

As CEO and president of George Washington’s Mount Vernon, Bradburn often gives a speech on why the “father of the country” matters now

more than ever, regardless of the audience’s political party — whether it’s in San Francisco with “a bunch of Nancy Pelosi’s friends” or in Texas “with a bunch of Governor Abbott’s friends,” he told county officials July 12 at NACo’s Opening Gen-

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Wise County judge is up to a Texas-sized challenge

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Last month at the Annual Conference, NACo President J.D. Clark played his guitar and sang a song he had written in front of 3,000 people—the largest audience he had ever performed for. But it wasn’t the most intimidating.

In 2017, as chair of the Rural Action Caucus, he welcomed the caucus’ meeting to Wise County, Texas, where he serves as county judge. And he was called upon to toss a lasso over a practice dummy at the Wise County Fairgrounds. His audience there? The NACo executive committee.

And while Wise County was

surely rural compared to neighboring Tarrant County, home of then-president Roy Charles Brooks, the county was firmly on a growth curve and Clark was a leader focused on where his community was headed. And yet, he was called upon to prove his bona fides to celebrate

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J.D. Clark to focus on theme of ‘County Storytellers’ during his term as president

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with so many people,” he said. “Public servants in the room, we all know that our service is often hardest on, and on the shoulders of our spouses. Thank you for doing this with me.”

In his speech to attendees, Clark emphasized the importance of telling the county story to help the rest of the country better understand the challenges counties face in serving the American public. It’s a focus he will carry through during his year as NACo president — “County Storytellers.”

“Long before words were written, stories were made and shared,” he said. “They were spoken around fires, whispered under the stars, painted on cave walls. And these weren’t just tales for entertainment. These stories were lifelines, passing down lessons of how to survive, and how to dream far



New NACo President J.D. Clark pauses for a photo with his family after being sworn in July 14 in Philadelphia. Photo by Denny Henry

beyond the horizon.”

Clark’s first act of storytelling as NACo president was to pick

up his guitar and perform a song he wrote for the occasion, recounting the nature of public service in county government – “Hold That County Line.”

There’s a courthouse that’s carved out of stone

Standing proud, standing strong.

We finally put a new roof on

The whole town came to see it.

But somebody’s dumped a load of tires

Somebody cut fiber optic wires

We’ll build a bridge, put out a fire and every way you can mean it.

And we don’t ask a lot, just give it all we got.

We show up rain or shine

And it’s a breed apart, a public servant’s heart.

As for me and mine, we’ll hold that county line.

In 1634, they called us shires, Do the work that the law requires

Balance all that with folks’

desires and the details find the devil.

From the mountains high, from plains to coast

Counties do what matters most

Let’s raise our voice, let’s raise a toast, to life at the local level.

And we don’t ask a lot, just give it all you got.

We show up rain or shine

And it’s a breed apart, a public servant’s heart.

As for me and mine, we’ll hold that county line

3,069 hold that county line.

Before Clark tuned his guitar, the membership tuned its bylaws to meet changing times, and attendees also celebrated Nebraska becoming a 100% NACo member state. **CN**

COMMITTEE LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS

POLICY STEERING COMMITTEES

- **Agriculture and Rural Affairs** Joshua Pedrozo - Merced County, Calif. supervisor
- **Community, Economic and Workforce Development** Angela Conley - Hennepin County, Minn. commissioner
- **Environment, Energy and Land Use** Michael Turner - Loudoun County, Va. supervisor
- **Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs** Jennifer Henderson - Schleicher County, Texas treasurer
- **Health** Bruno Sabatier - Lake County, Calif. supervisor
- **Human Services and Education** James Kuhl - Steuben County, N.Y. legislator
- **Justice and Public Safety** Jennifer Tharp - Comal County, Texas, criminal district attorney
- **Public Lands** Jerry Taylor - Garfield County, Utah commissioner
- **Telecommunications and Technology** Shinica Thomas - Wake County, N.C. commissioner
- **Transportation** Jim Willox - Converse County, Wyo. commissioner

STANDING COMMITTEES

- **Finance** George Dunlap - Mecklenburg County, N.C. commissioner
- **Information Technology** Gregg Weiss - Palm Beach County, Fla. commissioner
- **Membership** Renee Couch - Comal County, Texas treasurer
- **Programs and Services** Tarryl Clark - Stearns County, Minn. commissioner

INNOVATION COUNCILS

- **Arts and Culture** Susan Rodriguez-McDowell - Mecklenburg County, N.C. commissioner
- **Healthy Counties** Janet Thompson - Boone County, Mo. commissioner
- **International Economic Development** Ryan McMahon - Onondaga County, N.Y. executive
- **Resilient Counties** Anne Cottrell - Napa County, Calif. supervisor
- **Retirement Readiness** Todd Bonlarron - Palm Beach County, Fla. deputy county administrator

ADVISORY COUNCILS

- **Immigration and Intergovernmental Affairs** Jerry Demings - Orange County, Fla. mayor
- **Veterans and Military Services** Sid Conklin - Randolph County, Mo. Presiding commissioner

CAUCUSES

- **Large Urban County Caucus** Adrian Garcia - Harris County, Texas commissioner
- **Midsize County Caucus** Christian Leinbach - Berks County, Pa. commissioner
- **Rural Action Caucus** Terry Wilbur - Oswego County, N.Y. clerk



FACTS

Average vacation time:	10 days (1-5 years of employment)
Percent taking summer vacation:	53%
Reason for not traveling:	Cost
Domestic travel:	38%
International:	15%

Source: Shiftbase, Bankrate, Deloitte

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Optimism and hope are critical to resiliency amid adversity, historians say

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eral Session in Philadelphia.

“When I’ve finished the speech, they all say the same thing. ‘I just wish the people in the other party could hear this speech — that they would understand,’” Bradburn said. “And what I want to say to you all, and you know this because you’re on the ground working with people all the time across parties, but we have so much more that we share as a people than what we have against each other.”

“We share fundamental principles. We come from the stories that we tell about what matters to us. We are a country founded by an ideal.”

In today’s divisive political landscape, empathy can feel hard to come by, which makes it that much more important to public service, Goodwin said.

“The words we all remember, ‘With malice toward none and charity for all, let us bind up the nation’s wounds,’” Goodwin said, quoting Lincoln’s second inaugural address that reflected on the Civil War. “Empathy, I think, is the quality we need in this country, in our beleaguered country, more than any other quality right now. We need to teach it to our kids, we need to teach it in schools, we need our leaders to have that.”

Goodwin won the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for History for her book “No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II.” When Roosevelt took office, one in four people were out of work, they were starving, they were losing their homes — people had lost hope. He was able to revive a sense of hope in Americans, because he had it himself, Goodwin said.

Having optimism and hope is critical to resilience in times of adversity, and while maintaining that might feel increasingly difficult, it’s essential in forging a path forward and building toward the future, Bradburn said.

“I think that optimism, that ability to imagine a time beyond the immediate present that FDR was able to invoke and help people get past their current difficulties, is so crucial — for leaders like you to be that voice,” Bradburn said to a

room full of county officials. “Things are hard now, but we have a purpose that’s longer than this 24-hour news cycle or this election cycle. We’re trying to build something that’s going to last for generations. And I think all survival and adversity comes from that.”

After all, without Washington’s continuous hope as commander in chief throughout the eight years of the Revolutionary War, America wouldn’t exist, he noted.

“Having a vision for why you’re doing what you’re doing helps push you through those times when things feel impossible,” Bradburn said.

Before President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he was advised against ending segregation in the South, Goodwin noted. His adviser told him, “You can’t do that. You’ll never get past the filibuster. You only have so much currency to spend as president, you can’t spend that on this.”

“And what he did is he said, ‘What the hell is the presidency

for then?’” Goodwin said. “So, I just like to say to people for being in public service, [saying] ‘What the hell am I doing?’ It’s so hard, it’s challenging, it’s heartbreaking, and yet it’s for everything that matters in people’s lives.”

‘Having a vision for why you’re doing what you’re doing helps push you through those times when things feel impossible.’

Character is the mark of a good leader — to have “ambition for something larger than oneself,” Goodwin said. So much goes into public service, that it can sometimes be easy to forget how much difference the work makes, she said. Goodwin shared a story of her husband’s reflection back on his life in the weeks leading up to his death.

He had kept 300 boxes of things related to his career in public service in the 1960s — which included writing speeches for President Ken-

nedy and President Johnson — but he was hesitant to go through them. The decade had ended with campus violence over the Vietnam War and the deaths of Robert F. Kennedy (who he worked with) and Martin Luther King, Jr. and it

was heartbreaking for him to think that all of the things he had worked toward and cared about had been lost, she said.

“But as we went through the boxes and relived the ‘60s — with all the heartbreak and all the challenge of the ‘60s, it was a wonderful time, because people believed they could make a difference,” Goodwin said. “... And he remembered in the last weeks of his life, ‘Maybe I did make a difference. Maybe lives were better because of the people I worked with.’ And there was a sense of pride

and fulfillment that I hope you have. I know how challenging it is, how difficult this time is, but you are making a difference.”

In Washington’s farewell address, he emphasized America’s need for unity and said that it’s up to the American people to make decisions — if we’re not free and happy, the fault will be entirely our own. Nearly 295 years later, that sentiment still rings true, Bradburn said.

“That’s the great burden and excitement of self-governance,” Bradburn said. “We are free to choose our future. That’s what we get to do, but the choices we make are going to affect millions, just like all the choices we make in this room, so that’s what’s exciting about it, but that’s also the big responsibility we have.”

“This isn’t about relitigating the past, it’s about what future do you want your children to have? And I know you’re on the front lines doing that all the time, but do know you have allies around the nation? And lots of people think we have a lot more in common than we see on the public stage.” **CN**



Historians Doris Kearns Goodwin and Doug Bradburn discuss leadership July 12 with NACo First Vice President J.D. Clark, Wise County, Texas judge at the Opening General Session. Photo by Denny Henry

‘I thought I brought something that would be a good asset to the executive committee’

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its past on the Texas frontier.

“I can’t embarrass myself in front of all of my out-of-state NACo friends,” he recalled thinking. “But there were a whole lot of rural guys there who could have done it.”

He stepped up, slung his arm out and roped it on the first try.

“I won’t be trying that again in front of anybody,” he said of the upcoming NACo Fall Board of Directors Meeting and County Storytellers Symposium, where he will play host as NACo’s new president. “I was just blessed and lucky to have roped it that one time.”

At 39, he’s the youngest NACo leader in 24 years, but his rise has been anything but beginner’s luck. Before starting his 19-year career in public service, he was covering local government for his local newspaper while still in high school under the tutelage of editor Keith Bridwell.

“He was sending me to commissioner’s court, city council, the school board,” he said. “It was a great experience and a way to learn, not just understanding it myself, but being able to explain it to other people.”

Clark started writing opinion pieces about his hometown of Chico, which drew the attention of city council members. They liked his fresh perspective and recruited him to run for an open seat while studying at the University of North Texas. After serving for a few years while teaching high school history, he was elected mayor, which put him in the middle of discussions about impending growth in the county.

“I knew that growth was coming for Wise County, and I knew we had to be ready for it,” Clark said. “I wanted to be in a better position to shape what it would look like. I looked at growth patterns out of Dallas-Fort Worth and adjacent counties and we were basically like the next and last frontier.”

He ran for county judge in 2013, taking office in 2014, once again colleagues with people he covered as a reporter as a high school and college student. He was on the other side of the story — with executive responsibilities for an entire county before the age of 30.

J.D. Clark performs an original song July 14, before conference attendees after his swearing-in as president. NACo CEO Matt Chase looks on. Photo by Denny Henry



But those responsibilities, and their limited powers, have driven Clark to be creative in managing growth. The county has no zoning or land-use authority, so shaping Wise County’s future has come through indirect means, like working with the groundwater district or setting

this looks like every other place along the highway, let’s live here! They’re seeing this community culture, it’s a small-town vibe and the downtown squares and main streets that we have, and they like that and they want to be part of that,” Clark said. “I think if somebody’s choosing to

‘We’re all local government nerds, and counties are fascinating forms of government.’

road standards for new developments through the public works department. Clark has built relationships with the developers who will be driving residential expansion and pursued infrastructure funding from the state.

“We help [developers] understand some of the ramifications, that ‘we can’t require you to do this, but this is important to us as a community,’” Clark said.

Though there’s no county component to the closing process when a Wise County newcomer buys a house or property, Clark is pushing the county to do more proactive communication about what to expect living there.

“I try to weave in a lot of Wise County’s history and background — not just for the long-timers or lifers there —but it’s a benefit to the new people coming in. They’re not looking at it and saying, ‘Oh, gosh,

come live there and be part of that, you’ve got to bring them into the loop on what the county’s history is and make them appreciate that this was a pretty rough, scrappy frontier place not that long ago. What we do with growth, with service demand, increased population, all of that, has to be done in conjunction with, ‘And let’s talk about where we’ve come from.’

“I think that’s good for people to be reminded of, whether they’ve always lived there or you’re brand new.”

He was brand new to NACo in 2015, when he first attended a Legislative Conference. Joining the Rural Action Caucus offered Clark a sampler of NACo programming that helped him find his way to the Telecommunications and Technology Steering Committee, which he later chaired, along with NACo’s Broadband Task Force in 2020.

“NACo has the opportunity to connect us with people who are experts that I couldn’t get to myself,” he said. “That’s a value for every county official who is trying to be better equipped to serve people at home.”

In 2023, he was a relatively late entrant to the race for NACo second vice president, but overcame trepidation about running, with some counsel from a colleague with whom he would work closely, and the encouragement of his wife, Leah, who serves as the executive director of the Bridgeport Economic Development Corporation in Wise County.

“I never really thought that I would run for president for a long time because I have three little girls at home, but talking to (immediate past president) James Gore helped me understand how I could make it work,” he said. Gore had been the first parent of young children in a decade to serve in NACo leadership, which carries often-extensive travel demands. “It’s a season, it’s a service. I thought I had for my county makeup, for my experience, I thought I brought something that would be a good asset on the executive committee.”

Clark brings the same curiosity to the presidency that he did to The Chico Texan 20 years ago.

“We’re all local government nerds, and counties are such a

fascinating form of government — it’s different from state to state,” he said. “It’s so interesting learning what different governing boards look like, but in this job as president, the biggest thing to continue to learn about is when it comes to counties administering social services. In Texas, we just don’t really do much of that, so I haven’t had to do too much as a county official.”

He also wants to build on the Texas enthusiasm that showed up at the 2023 Annual Conference in Travis County, Texas, when he ran for NACo office.

“We need Texas voices coming strongly from the county level to the feds, because when it comes to legislation, a lot of things that we wish hadn’t happened or that we fear, are going to have a negative impact on counties generally because somebody doesn’t understand how it works in the counties,” he said. “And that goes for all counties. We need to be part of that conversation, telling the story about how our communities and our constituents will be affected.”

“A lot of that is incumbent on members engaging, sharing stories, sharing information, certainly when talking to our representatives, but also giving NACo staff the examples they can call on when they’re working on our behalf.” **CN**

County News Podcast: Recovering from disasters



North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Executive Director Kevin Leonard speaks on an Annual Conference panel addressing how to restore the electrical grid following a disaster.

Photo by Denny Henry

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

In the weeks after Hurricane Helene devastated Western North Carolina, an eight-hour car ride launched a plan to keep the needs of more than two dozen counties, and many municipalities, on the minds of the state and federal government as recovery continued.

North Carolina Association of County Commissioners President T. Davis and Executive Director Kevin Leonard had company on their trip to their October 2024 Board meeting — a team from the White House and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. That gave them plenty of time to talk when they had a lot to discuss.

“Out of that conversation, came this idea of...pulling all the local leaders together to basically say, you know, what do you need? What’s going on?”

In less than three weeks, NCACC, the North Carolina League of Municipalities and five councils of governments convened the first of three meetings to get all the affected leaders together to speak with one voice about what they needed to bring their communities back from the worst natural disaster they had ever suffered.

“It turned out that it was a really meaningful time to come together to describe what had happened,” Leonard said. “It was almost cathartic in some way, and also, we asked them to identify what their most immediate needs were, their in-

termediate and their long-term needs.”

Leonard recently joined the County News Podcast to talk about the ongoing recovery process for Western North Carolina counties and how those insights can help inform the ongoing discussions around reforming the federal disaster response, which recently kicked off with the introduction of the bipartisan Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act, also known as the FEMA Act of 2025.

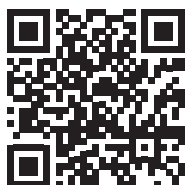
The County News Podcast also heard from Yakima County, Wash. Commissioner Amanda McKinney, whose county was affected by the Retreat Fire in August 2024.

One of McKinney’s concerns was the limited amount of time the county was allotted by FEMA to claim damages to the historic Tieton Main Canal, which is crucial to irrigating agricultural land that underpins the county’s economy.

“From the time of fire is a 100% contained, you have 30 days to show the damage, which also means on day 31, if it catastrophically falls off the side of the hill, you’re out. It doesn’t matter,” she said.

“So it really has exposed some intricacies to the federal disaster process that I think definitely need to be revamped.” **CN**

Listen to the County News Podcast on any podcast player, by visiting www.naco.org/podcast or by scanning the QR code.



Former FEMA chief is bearish on federal agency reform talks

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Brock Long compared previous congressional efforts to reform the Federal Emergency Management Agency to putting shiny new parts on a rusty old bicycle.

He should know. He rode that bicycle as FEMA administrator for two years during the first Trump administration.

Now the executive chairman of Hagerty Consulting, Long offered members of NACo’s Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force insight into the efforts to reform the agency. Originally scheduled to conclude its work at the Annual Conference, the task force will continue through the end of 2025.

“A lot of people have no idea what they’re blaming or what they’re saying when they say ... ‘FEMA’s terrible,’” he said. “We built this system where a county supervisor or a governor has no idea what they’re entitled to when it hits the fan.”

By the same token, Long decried “mission creep” at FEMA, voicing frustration that the agency was responsible for tasks like rebuilding Puerto Rico’s power grid and addressing homelessness. He argued that other federal agencies were better equipped for those responsibilities.

“Emergency managers don’t know how to solve homeless-

ness,” he said.

So far, Long has not encountered any truly innovative ideas in discussions about FEMA reform. Unless this changes, he fears that the proposals will amount to only minor adjustments—tweaking some programs and cutting others—without delivering a comprehensive overhaul of how emergency management is supported at the federal level.

“What are we striving for, what are we trying to reform?” he asked. “Are we trying to reduce expenses on the taxpayer or are we trying to figure out how to help the person who has nothing on their worst day?” he said. “What’s the goal of this reform?”

Instead of shifting FEMA between the Department of Homeland Security and a standalone cabinet-level position, Long recommended establishing emergency management as an independent agency, citing the Federal Communications Commission as a model.

“It should not be bounced back and forth based on the president of the United States,” he said.

Long recommended that if a new emergency management program replaces FEMA, the existing agency should remain operational for the first two years to ensure continuity during what will likely be a

challenging transition.

As part of these reforms, Long also suggested that FEMA should no longer fund uninsured infrastructure or base disaster declarations on thresholds tied to losses of uninsured infrastructure, which he criticized as outdated and inconsistent. “You are penalized in this country if you adopt the latest codes of the International Code Council, if you insure your public infrastructure, if you do land use planning, you will not get a disaster declaration.”

Long explained that during his time at FEMA, officials often focused excessively on anticipating specific scenarios, but dedicated insufficient attention to addressing the immediate needs common to nearly every disaster.

These include ensuring reliable systems for food, water, medical care, communications, transportation, and—most fundamentally—understanding who owns the infrastructure that could be impacted. According to Long, this is a critical area where emergency managers at every level can take proactive steps to improve preparedness.

“We sit around trying to figure out everything that could go wrong, but what we don’t sit down and figure out is what’s got to be working in your community that if it is not working, people are dying or life is disrupted,” he said. **CN**



Former FEMA Administrator Brock Long (left) and Harris County, Texas Commissioner Adrian Garcia discuss FEMA reform efforts July 13 before members of the NACo Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force. Photo by Denny Henry

GENERAL SESSION | SPEAKERS

Leading with purpose: Lessons from a four-star general



Gen. Stanley McChrystal (left) speaks to the NACo Board July 13 in a conversation with NACo President James Gore.
Photo by Denny Henry

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

What do a county leader and a four-star general have in common? More than you might think. Both roles demand resilience, vision and a deep sense of purpose — and

the lessons they learn are often universal and enduring.

On July 13, NACo Board members had the opportunity to hear from retired four-star General Stanley McChrystal, renowned for his leadership of the Joint Special Operations Command and later as com-

mander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Gen. McChrystal joined NACo President James Gore for a candid conversation during the board's meeting in Philadelphia. Gore opened the discussion by asking how county leaders can overcome "mission

fatigue."

"First, keep returning to the mission—keep coming back to the core purpose of what you're trying to do," McChrystal said. "The specifics can get extraordinarily hard, but if you can step back and remind yourself, 'We're really trying to make something better,' that perspective can carry you through."

His advice was clear: "Do what you can do. Something is more than nothing. No matter how hard it gets, you've got to stay focused."

One quote he finds particularly inspiring comes from President Obama: "Just because we can't do everything doesn't mean we can't do something."

Gore also asked how leaders can maintain their integrity and leadership when facing difficult state or federal policies, unfunded mandates or the loss of programs that are working.

"You're going to have times when you disagree," McChrystal acknowledged. "But you've got to be loyal and follow through. Be the kind of follower you'd want to have — and the kind of leader you'd want your children to follow."

McChrystal also shared how important it is for counties to create a welcoming community for veterans returning from service and advised not to "treat them as if they are weaker than they are."

He also said he believes that some sort of public-private partnership requiring civic volunteer service for young adults would go a long way toward "making better citizens for the future." He expressed frustration though that while "everybody's for it, nobody will do it." **CN**

Many of McChrystal's insights are captured in his newly published book, "On Character: Choices That Define a Life."

Casey Foundation emphasizes support for youth

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

You aren't imagining it — childhood is longer and bumpier now than it was for earlier generations.

That's why, Leslie Boissiere said, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Thrive by 25 program focuses its efforts on youth ages 14-25, reflecting research that shows brain development continues into the mid-20s.

Boissiere, Annie E. Casey's vice president for external affairs, talked to NACo Second Vice President George Dunlap July 13 about the foundation's work during the Closing General Session. The Thrive by 25 program focuses on providing youth with five essential elements through partnerships in Atlanta, Baltimore and Albuquerque, along with rural and urban communities in nearly every state. Those elements are:

- Food, health care and housing
- Stable relationships with caring adults
- Education and career skills
- Well-paying jobs and financial tools
- Leadership opportunities

"To make sure that all young people succeed, we know we have to start with young people who are furthest from opportunity," Boissiere said. "That includes youth in the juvenile justice system, the child welfare system, young people in poverty and young parents who are still growing up and providing for their children."

The foundation hopes to create opportunities for young people to learn by exploring, trying, failing and trying again without overly harsh punishment for their mistakes.

Their efforts succeed with the help of partners, including county governments.



Leslie Boissiere, of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, talks about her organization's support of youth-centered services during the Closing General Session July 13. Photo by Denny Henry

"Counties can continue to invest in prevention to keep more kids out of the justice system by funding youth recreation, after-school activities, mentoring, job training, all the supports we can provide for our kids," she said.

During the discussion, Boi-

siere encouraged county officials to offer expanded diversion options and alternatives to detention, and to address non-violent delinquency cases by partnering with trusted grassroots organizations that provide the supervision, positive programming and fam-

ily-centered services that are crucial to helping them grow, learn and thrive.

County officials can use the power of their office to set the agenda for making this work happen, reframing the narra-

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GENERAL SESSION | SPEAKERS

NFL veteran Jon Dorenbos harnesses magic and forgiveness to overcome adversity

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Jon Dorenbos, former NFL player and magician, shared his story of overcoming adversity and spoke about the power of forgiveness during the July 13 General Session at the NACo Annual Conference in Philadelphia, Pa.

Dorenbos played as a long snapper in the NFL for 14 seasons — 11 of them with the Philadelphia Eagles — but his first passion was magic. At age 12, his life was shattered when his father murdered his mother. He and his sister were placed in foster care, and he was later called to testify at the trial, and shown his mother's autopsy photos. Amid the trauma and chaos, it was watching magician Bill Malone on television — and learning magic tricks himself — that brought him comfort and escape. "Magic saved my life," Dorenbos said. He later became a finalist on America's Got Talent with his magic act.

After his mother's murder, Dorenbos underwent intensive therapy.

What he took from that experience — and has carried with him ever since — is the belief that you must come to terms with your reality. The sooner



Former NFL player and magician Jon Dorenbos, mesmerizes the General Session crowd Sunday, July 13 with his magic and life story.

Photo by Denny Henry

you do, he says, the sooner you can begin to find forgiveness for others and for the world.

"The more I hated the world around me, the more I lost myself — bit by bit, piece by piece," Dorenbos said. "It's so easy to blame people and the world when circumstances don't go

our way."

In 2017, Dorenbos was once again forced to confront a harsh reality. After being traded from the Eagles to the New Orleans Saints, a routine physical revealed a serious heart condition — one that required emergency open-heart surgery.

An aorta is typically the size of a nickel or dime, but Dorenbos' had swollen to the size of a soda can, resulting in a life-threatening aneurysm, he said.

What first felt like devastation — being traded from the Eagles, where he had hoped to finish his career — ultimately saved his life.

He also recalled a moment from his time in Philadelphia, when a local reporter asked if it was true that a friend of his mother's had sung "Wind Beneath My Wings" at her funeral. It was.

The reporter told him, "You're an Eagle now, kid. When life gets tough and the game gets harder, just open your wings. The song says, 'I

can fly higher than an eagle — you are the wind beneath my wings.' My guess is, if you open your wings, your mom will be the one pushing the wind to carry you through the storms."

Dorenbos reflected on the moment following his open-heart surgery, saying he felt as though his mother had once again helped guide him through.

"I had the wind beneath my wings here in Philly for a long time," he said. "And my mom trained me in New Orleans to have my life saved by a saint."

Dorenbos said he spent much of his youth filled with "venomous anger" — toward his father, toward life, and toward the hand he'd been dealt. He didn't speak to his father for more than 30 years.

But after becoming a father himself, he made the decision to reach out and forgive — not for his father's sake, but to free himself from the heavy burden of hatred he had carried for so long.

"I said, 'Am I going to be bitter or better from what I came from?'" Dorenbos said.

"... Me forgiving my dad had nothing to do with him. Me forgiving my dad was this — someone who is no longer in my life, shall no longer affect my life. Someone or something that is no longer in my life shall no longer affect my heart, my soul. For forgiveness has nothing to do with anything other than 'Forgive, for I and you deserve peace.'"

No matter what the world throws at you, it's up to you to chart your own path, Dorenbos said.

"May every one of us make the decision that, no matter how hard the world gets, we rise and live in vision," Dorenbos said.

"Moments in time don't define who we are — we define who we are. Together, we will hate less, we will blame less, and we shall all forgive just a little bit more." **CN**

Youth need resources to succeed

From FOUNDATION page 6

tive around how government treats youths in need and by incorporating new findings related to brain development in their juvenile justice and human service systems.

"You have the incredible power to convene stakeholders from different localities that sometimes may traditionally have been resistant," she said.

And the leaders themselves, either by working personally or supporting efforts, can provide guidance and understanding and a human connection.

"When youth are asked what

helped them the most, they might name a program, but they will absolutely name a person that believed in them," she said.

Boissiere highlighted Pierce County, Wash.'s opportunity-based probation program, which offers kids incentives, including early release, for meeting milestones in their programming. That program has resulted in 60% fewer new court referrals from those children and fewer violations overall. It demonstrates her thesis:

"When we surround young people with resources they need to succeed, they do well." **CN**

CAUCUSES & SUMMITS

LUCC members discuss importance of urban transit

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Following low ridership during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, investing in urban county transit systems is essential, now more than ever, to cultivate thriving communities, according to panelists at a July 12 Large Urban County Caucus business meeting at NACo's Annual Conference.

"In our leadership capacities, the transit services we provide and the policies that we establish play a critical role in safely and efficiently connecting residents and visitors to jobs, educational facilities, medical appointments, services and recreational opportunities," said Los Angeles County, Calif. Supervisor Kathryn Barger. "Our transit services often serve as a lifeline for our constituents who actually need it the most."

While transit use dipped across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic, studies show that people want more access, according to Gregory Krykewycz, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission's director of transportation planning.

"There's a lot more demand, regardless of which mode of transit you're talking about, there's more demand for off-peak ridership, weekend ridership, night ridership," Krykewycz said.

cz said. "So, people tend to be using the service that's available for other [purposes] than commuting to work, which is a great thing. That means that transit is sort of like a lifestyle mode of access for people. It's not just about getting to jobs. And that's a great foundation to build on looking ahead."

Los Angeles County established a local sales tax to help fund increased investments into its transit system, as it prepares to host the FIFA World Cup in 2026 and the Summer Olympics in 2028, which will attract millions to the county, said Stephanie Wiggins, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's chief executive officer.

"The ability to use a local dedicated revenue source, approved by the voters, is really important because it serves as a down payment," Wiggins said. "And it's very helpful to be able to say to our state legislature and the federal government that locally, we believe in these investments. As these global events make themselves available for our region, it's an incredible opportunity to start shifting the perception of transit and the role transit plays."

The transportation authority partnered with its school system to create the Go-Pass program, which offers free rides to students at participating schools, from kindergarten through 12th



Gregory Krykewycz (left) and Stephanie Wiggins discuss the benefits of investing in urban transit systems at the Large Urban County Caucus business meeting on July 12. Photos by Leon Lawrence III

grade into community college. As a result, more students are riding the transit system than before the pandemic. There are also more leisure trips, with more people riding transit on the weekends than they did before the pandemic, she noted.

"People want to connect again," Wiggins said. "Museums, community events, parades, sporting events, cultural events — that's what's bringing the ridership back as we continue to expand the system, because of our investment, our local sales tax initiative."

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority supports five counties in the Greater Philadelphia area and is currently facing budget changes that would cut its overall transit service by 45% by July 2026.

Pennsylvania State Sen. Nikil

Saval told county officials that it's important to invest in and maintain transit. States must be proactive in allowing local governments to craft strategies to raise capital and operating costs, Saval noted. Flexibility in local choice is essential, as local governments in Pennsylvania don't have that authority, even if residents voted for it, to raise their own funds for transit improvements, Krykewycz added.

"We need stable, long-term funding from our Commonwealth," Saval said. "And we need to make it possible for counties and municipalities to raise their own revenues for their systems. We need to fund transit at a level that both sustains it and encourages it to grow and adapt."

With a widespread move toward a more hybrid work

schedule after the pandemic, commuter rail has dropped the most in ridership, Krykewycz said. Local governments need to utilize their transit data and get creative — if there's an urban transit location that primarily serves commuters coming in from the suburbs, it's better to repurpose space like empty parking lots into something that can better serve that community's needs, he added.

"Commuter rail is the most stressed, but I would also say it's the biggest opportunity," he said. "Because all of those urban parking lots that are not as occupied as they used to be, that's land that's available for smart infill development, for housing, for everything else, and that's infrastructure that regions can leverage better than we did in the past." **CN**

NACo Mid-Size County Caucus talks data centers

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

Data centers, partnering with higher education and coordinating with military installations were the hot topics July 12 when nearly 300 county officials gathered for the inaugural meeting of NACo's Mid-Size County Caucus.

Interim Chair Gary Moore, judge/executive, Boone County, Ky., and a former NACo president, kicked off the meeting.

"I always tried to figure out

where to go," he said.

"My county, Boone County, Kentucky, is on the edge of the metro Cincinnati area. Cincinnati International Airport is in my county."

"We're fast-growing, but we only have about a 150,000 population. We have growth issues, we have workforce issues, we have issues that bigger counties have," he said.

"We've regionalized things with adjacent counties but we're not big enough for LUCC."

"We have rural issues, sub-

urban, but RAC was not always the place for me," Moore noted. "So here we are now. It's going to be an exciting endeavor. I'll be in the audience with you experiencing the benefits of this new caucus."

Moore next welcomed speaker Eric Murray, data center development manager for Google in North America and South America.

"I hope I'm not the red meat for today's events," Murray joked, alluding to controversies that can often arise when local

governments and/or residents are averse to welcoming data centers in their communities.

"I was also promised there will be no tough questions."

"How many people checked their phone in the last hour? Anyone stream anything in the last week?" Murray asked.

"So, folks are certainly using data centers, and probably Google data centers every day whether you realize it or not."

"Of our 21 data centers currently operating or in development, 15 of them are in com-

munities of the size of [counties represented by] this audience," he noted.

Murray gave some examples of how data centers can help a community boost its economy and what it looks for when searching for a data center location.

"What do we look for when we're looking for [locations for] data centers? First of all, we have to have sufficient land," he said.

See DATA CENTERS page 9

Character strengths set rural counties up for entrepreneurship

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Rural counties should not be written off as cradles of technology-driven entrepreneurship and the job growth that could follow in its wake.

When Molly Pyle left her small North Florida hometown, she headed for Silicon Valley. After years working in the tech industry, she's now the director of tech-based economics at the Center on Rural Innovation and focused on making sure rural natives with an interest in technology, like her, don't have to leave home to pursue a career.

She told the Rural Action Caucus July 12 that their counties are fertile ground for high-tech job development because of their rural character, not despite it. And to sweeten the deal, she noted that each new technology job typically leads to three-to-five new jobs in ancillary industries.

"In the age of the internet, there should be no limit to where tech talent and visionary founders can thrive," she said. "Rural folks have always been resilient and creative, figuring out how to do more with less. It's just about distributing opportunities, access to capital, access to training, so that you can be in a position to launch that company on the farm or in the garage

or go and get that job at the hospital that's desperately in need of a tech worker."

Even if residential broadband is not available, having a connection in a downtown area can help create an incubator. That may be preferable, in fact, offering the possibility of coworking spaces with nearby restaurants or housing. Ideally, Pyle said, a central location that is highly visible, where passersby can see people working inside, demonstrates that the region is capable of adapting to new industries and brings workers downtown.

"Those kinds of places are really important to shifting the culture and communities' ideas about what is possible," she said.

Before broadband or visible workplaces, communities need local leadership committed to articulating and executing a vision for development, including elected officials, rural economic developers, information hub leaders and higher education professionals.

The Center on Rural Development, Pyle said, can offer outside help to encourage people to take the first steps, and some intermediate steps, toward pursuing entrepreneurship.

"You don't need to be an MIT dropout or computer science major," she said, all you need is your own expertise and an opening where technology

can help propel it forward to meet a need.

The Center on Rural Innovation, Pyle said, is "not coming in to sell you a license to a play-book. We're just an organization that tries to partner alongside rural leaders and determine the best strategy for your communi-

ty based on your strength, your assets, what hasn't worked in the past, and where you want to go."

The access to capital can be a challenge in rural areas, where the funding network undergirding technology hotspots has not taken root. The center manages

a fund that invests in rural start-ups.

"Rural folks may not have as much access to 'friends, family and fools,' [a shorthand for technology investors in Silicon Valley] with deep, deep pockets, or they may be a little more rescue averse — they're used to investing with real estate or oil and gas but I don't know how they invest in a tech startup," Pyle said.

But the hardest part of developing technological entrepreneurship in a region where it is not part of the culture and there's no general familiarity with the process, is demystifying the process, she said. Supporting ideation workshops, in which entrepreneurs develop ideas and receive support in articulating the path ahead, is crucial to bridging the gap between the creative spark and the momentum a small business would need to grow. A Mayes County, Okla. town holds three-hour workshops to bridge the divide between its technical and real estate capacity in its data center and industrial park and the rest of the community.

"It was just an awesome event where folks were coming out and gaining familiarity with the concepts. If you can just strip it all down to the bare bones, rural people can start to understand, 'This is for me, I can do this.' That's the goal. **CN**



Molly Pyle, Center on Rural Innovation, describes the pillars for entrepreneurship success to RAC members. Photo by Salvador Farfan

From DATA CENTERS page 8

"We need to make sure before we locate in an area, that we also have the opportunity to scale, because it's very important for us, with the investments, the ability to understand we're going to have long-term growth."

Murray noted that the ability to have land that's zoned appropriately, infrastructure that is pre-positioned, power and fiber networks are also important.

"For power, electricity, we're incredibly focused on an audacious goal that by 2030 we're operating with car-

bon-free energy," he said.

Google tries to be a good neighbor when they build; in South Carolina, the company has invested more than \$6

billion in data center development.

"In addition to that, we also announced investments in weatherization programs, na-

ture conservancy and a coastal conservancy program investing over \$600,000," Murray said.

"Google wants to be a great partner, he said. We invest billions of dollars for not only direct jobs but indirect jobs."

Later, there was time for questions and comments from the audience.

"I would warn elected officials especially, do not believe that every data center is a Google data center, because they are not," said Supervisor Phyllis Randall of Loudoun County, Va., which has more data centers than any other city or county in the nation.

"Data centers take a lot of land, so make sure your

zoning and land use is in place," Randall said.

"They are not office buildings, they are huge buildings," she noted, adding:

"Ask about design standards; they take a lot of water; the power demands are insatiable and so where are you going to have your substations? Do they have turbines? Where will the power lines be located? Are all questions you have to ask."

"There are data center builders, and data center surveyors," Randall noted.

"Do not get them confused," she said.

"For all the money they can give you, there are also a lot of issues that come with data centers," she said.

"Not Google, but a lot of data centers." **CN**



Google's Eric Murray talks about data centers before members of the Mid-Size County Caucus at their first meeting at the Annual Conference. Photo by Denny Henry

MOBILE TOURS

Public-private partnership creates 'one-stop shop' to improve community wellness

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

The South Philadelphia Community Health and Literacy Center — which holds a city health center, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) primary care practice, library branch and a recreation center with a playground, all in one site — is a "one-stop shop" the city and the children's hospital created to improve community wellness and make it easier for people to get their needs met. County officials from across the country toured the facility Friday, July 11 during a NACo Health Steering Committee meeting at the Annual Conference.

The public-private partnership was born out of a need for more care in South Philadelphia — the city owned land to build on, and the hospital had funding, said Peter Grollman, the hospital's senior vice president of external affairs. The initial plan was to just build a new health center, with both the hospital and the city's services under one roof, but it evolved into a larger, more "holistic" approach to community health, according to Palak Raval-Nelson, Ph.D., the Philadelphia Department of Public Health's health commissioner.

"We said, 'There's more to be imagined here than what we're seeing, just by way of the delivery of health. Let's blow this place up and start fresh,'" Grollman said. "Let's give this community something that it deserves. Let's give it the best recreation center we can offer, let's take advantage of the literacy component, which we know is tied to health, and create a world-class library, and make these places work together."

The health center's services — some of which include primary care for adults and children, lab services, dental care, women's health and Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT)



Children play an educational game in the library at the South Philadelphia Community Health and Literacy Center. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

for substance use disorder — are available to any patient who walks through the center's doors, regardless of insurance status or income, said Sarah Ennis, the health department's chief of staff deputy commissioner. It uses a sliding scale model for the cost of services, determined by the patient's income and ability to pay.

The recreation center and library are incorporated into care, Palak Raval-Nelson said. If someone's prescribed more physical activity, they have the recreation center next door that they can use to exercise or if they're told to eat more nutritiously, they can go downstairs and check out recipes at the library, she noted.

"Not only does this building give us the opportunity to act as a one-stop medical shop," Ennis said. "But it also allows us the opportunity to say, 'You're a newly diagnosed diabetic, what does that mean for you and your family? Why don't you head down to the library and see what they have on that?' And the librarians here have been excellent about pulling out that programming material and having it available to folks."

The site's city health center

sees more patients than the city's other locations, according to Ennis, who attributed that to its one-stop shop model. More people come into the facility's recreation center as well, noted Susan Slawson, Philadelphia's parks and recreation commissioner. To be able to provide everything the site offers in one location is "priceless," Slawson said.

"We used to have to go to a single store to get everything, but now you have Walmart, you have Target or Costco, whatever you have in your community where everything you need is in one spot — that's what you have here," Slawson said. "So, you're going to get additional people coming to the health center, you're going to get additional people coming to the rec center and the library, because they can do all of that in one place."

"... Don't think that your visions are small," Slawson said. "If you have ideas that maybe there's a location in your county where this can happen, find the right people and make it happen."

Philadelphia's one-stop shop model was "fascinating" to see, and it's something any county would benefit from, said

Loudoun County, Va. Chair Phyllis Randall, who is also NACo's Health Steering Committee chair.

"If you can have a central location, where people can get their health care needs met, get their literacy needs met, get their childcare needs met, feeding needs — any of those needs met in one location is always much more powerful," Randall said.

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) has a stop right outside the center, and Philadelphia is piloting a "zero fare" program that automatically enrolls low-income individuals and provides them with a free SEPTA card. Many of the people who use the site's services live within walking distance of it, but because it's so easily accessible, people will come from all over the city, according to Echo Phillips, the Free Library of Philadelphia's children's librarian.

"This can be transferred to any county government," Randall said. "And what it does is it helps the people who probably are most in need and least able to get around from location to location." **CN**

'Wellness recovery village' offers hope

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

When Philadelphia found that it didn't have the capacity to provide supportive recovery housing to everyone living on the streets who wanted it, the city renovated an unused building, a former homeless shelter, into a care and recovery housing center for people with substance use disorder.

Prior to the creation of Riverview Wellness Village, there were 200 people on the wait list for recovery housing at any given time, according to Isabel McDevitt, the City and County of Philadelphia's executive director of community wellness and recovery. Now, there are currently 152 people living in the village's six residential cottages, which can house up to 336 people for up to a year at a time. County officials toured the village July 14 at NACo's Annual Conference.

While people are living at Riverview Wellness Village, they're connected to outpatient treatment, ongoing clinical support and medically assisted treatment (MAT), as well as programming to help them become more financially stable once they move on from the recovery housing model, including links to employment, adult basic education and workforce training.

"Relationships and connection to community, building those positive relationships with other people who are on the same journey, is so critical for people in recovery," McDevitt said. "And this campus provides that."

Riverview Wellness Village will soon be expanding through Philadelphia's Housing Opportunities Made Easy (HOME) initiative, which is working to build and preserve 30,000 affordable

See VILLAGE page 14

COMMITTEES

AI offers potential for hiring, retention

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Despite employees' concerns over the disruptive potential of artificial intelligence adoption in the job market, workforce professionals maintain optimism that the technology, still in its infancy, could lead to better services and products from the public sector.

Several workforce experts discussed the issue during a panel discussion July 11 during the Community, Economic and Workforce Development Policy Steering Committee meeting.

"Start with a ruthlessly skeptical eye — we are not using technology for technology's sake, we are using technology to solve a particular problem," said Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, a senior fellow at the National Skills Coalition.

Although the private sector holds a persistent salary advantage, counties can help close the hiring gap by thoughtfully embracing AI tools. That starts with making sure that job descriptions reflect the role.

"That's a tough task for any employer — goals evolve, tasks change — but making that description as accurate as you can is really important as we enter a more automated phrase of job seek and job matching," Bergson-Shilcock said.

"A lot of what's most important in public sector work is not well quantified by the current tools that we have," she said.

When she worked in a public library, the most important skills she used included problem solving, de-escalation, collaboration and relationship building, she noted. As AI software becomes more prevalent in government work, county leaders should offer employees opportunities to develop digital resilience skills for applying those tools before expecting them to master their use. Breaking them in like a catcher's mitt.

Chandler Morse, vice president of corporate affairs for Workday, noted that private sector firms are expediting their



"Humans don't need to be talked into using technology if they see a clear connection to making our own and other people's lives better," Amanda Bergson-Shilcock told the Community, Economic and Workforce Development Policy Steering Committee July 11.
Photo by Denny Henry

hiring processes and finding better matches between applicants and openings, reducing their time to hire, thanks to AI.

Meanwhile, the public sector hiring process remains opaque in many cases, leading to disillusion by job seekers, along with horror stories of yearlong processes for federal jobs, according to Kate May, the principal product manager for AI data insights and solutions for Granicus, a software company catering to the public sector.

Counties could make up some ground by adopting those tools, Morse said, citing a 50% increase in recruiter capacity and a 30% acceleration for hiring reviews for private sector companies using AI recruitment tools. Companies using those tools also reported doubling their internal hiring for open positions, reducing recruitment needs

"It also takes friction out of internal mobility," he said.

But success relies on more than just a few visionaries.

"You need a cultural shift, you need to train human resources folks on what you're looking for, and hiring managers to understand it," he said.

May said that artificial intelligence, applied to the institutional knowledge concentrated in long-tenured employees, could help organizations maintain continuity in the face of retirements and other turnover.

"Government is a tribal tra-

dition with no written history," she said. "There's a shortage of mentors, so fewer people are passing down their knowledge."

By committing that institutional knowledge to writing, staffers can use generative artificial intelligence to find applications for that information, helping to smooth any transitions as the workforce changes, to maintain continuity.

May also noted that although procurement professionals tend to be more experienced in most organizations, counties would be well served by adding younger staffers, who could remain in the county for years to come, to the teams that look for the next technology their organization would use.

"You have to think about what you're setting up for the future," she said.

Along the same lines, Bergson-Shilcock said counties can increase employee buy-in and address concerns about career disruption by inviting staffers into AI policy discussions.

"Don't assume the conclusion," about massive job losses, she said. "When the users are at the table, satisfaction is higher."

May said it is crucial to keep county goals in sight at all times.

"We don't want to eliminate jobs, we want to make things easier," she said. "Answer, 'How can we give better government experiences?'" through these changes. **CN**

Counties can help troubled youth thrive

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

The onus is on county governments to build the programming and infrastructure needed to help youth thrive and combat their involvement with crime, panelists said July 13 at a County Innovations in Youth Justice session at NACo's Annual Conference.

While youth crime overall is down across the country, serious crimes and those involving firearms are on the rise. Evidence-based work to combat crime among youth include providing them with enriched education environments and mentorships, access to green

out and get a job.' Well, if there are no jobs there, there is nothing available. That's a policy move — that's not an individual move ... Our environments physically drive your ability to be healthy and safe."

Through NACo's County Juvenile Justice Innovation Network, Boone County, Mo. is working to develop strategic action plans that highlight youth well-being, improve data-sharing and build stronger community partnerships. The first thing the county did was create sequential intercept mapping to track resources and gaps in the community related to its justice-involved population, according to Boone County Commissioner Janet



Bernadette Hohl, Philadelphia Department of Public Health senior research investigator, speaks to attendees. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

spaces and opportunities for social connection and skill strengthening — all things that local governments can build and invest in, according to Dr. Bernadette Hohl, Philadelphia Department of Public Health's senior research investigator.

Establishing a local tax credit dedicated to youth programming is one way to fund programming. "We're ignoring what we know because maybe it's a little harder, or maybe we can't get the people to be on our side or maybe the people that look like us are avoiding it because it's not an 'us' problem," Hohl said.

"Proven strategies to address some of these things are that folks have economic security — those are policy moves. Those are not things like [saying], 'Go

Thompson.

"The upstream mapping process is specifically designed for kids, and I ask you to visualize that whole notion of the bodies in the stream, coming past you," Thompson said. "And if you're looking at the bodies in the stream, you're looking at something that's already happening. When we look upstream, when we say, 'Why are those bodies in the stream?' And we go upstream, that's when we're asking, 'Are these kids being pushed into the stream? Are they jumping into the stream or is the stream giving out from under their feet?'"

As a result of the work, the county implemented a re-entry

See **YOUTH** page 12

Roadless rule loss heralds change in Forest Service policy, official says



Chris French, deputy chief of the National Forest System for the U.S. Forest Service, speaks July 11 to the Public Lands Steering Committee. Photo by Denny Henry

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Emphasizing its potential to alleviate wildfire risk and restore local decision-making authority, the U.S. Forest Service's Chris French pitched the secretary of Agriculture's recent decision to rescind the roadless rule to the Public Lands Steering Committee July 11.

The 2001 rule prohibited new road construction and reconstruction in roughly 58.5 million acres of U.S. Forest Service

land, limiting logging in those areas. Inventoried roadless areas account for nearly one-third of Forest Service land in 38 states.

French, the deputy chief of the National Forest System, said that 8 million of the acres covered by the roadless rule were at risk of catastrophic wildfire, with 4 million of those acres within a mile of the wildland-urban interface, putting communities at direct risk.

"We have communities saying, 'Why are you not thinning these areas?' and it's [because

of] an administrative rule that's 25 years old," he said, noting that the Forest Service was working to find ways to manage timber sales in a way that would limit sediment movement and protect water sources.

"When an area burns, especially at a high severity, it is likely to produce 4-5 times more sediment into our water supplies," French said. "This is just common-sense management, and that's our focus now."

The rule "basically forces us not to be able to use commercial timber harvests to reduce wildland fuel work or put roads in, even if they're temporary, so that we can access those removed [trees] in an efficient way," French said. "So instead, what we do is we do a lot of other things that are much more costly for \$4,000-\$5,000 or higher per acre rather than actually having some sort of revenue that comes from this."

The process of rescinding the rule would take roughly a year, he said, through the Administrative Procedure Dct.

"By taking away this national rule that doesn't allow for local decision-making, to do anything different than once established in the rule, we are driving back local decision-making projects and forest plans," he said. "What we're doing in the future really reflects what the communities around those national staff for us are looking for, rather than being dictated in Washington." **CN**

provides peer support services (in addition to evidence-based therapy and supportive case management) to survivors of, or witnesses of, violent injuries. All peers have lived experience with violence, according to Jermaine McCoy, who serves as a community health worker peer through Drexel University's Center for Non-Violence and Social Justice.

"The difference of when someone with lived experience interacts with someone, what happens is the wall of distrust is broken down," McCoy said. "We have a shared language, a shared experience... you're able to engage the person and become in tune to their feelings and make them feel valued. That's what peers bring to the table, as far as an ability that would trump a normal professional or clinician." **CN**

Providing support services key

From YOUTH page 11

peer support specialist program in its juvenile detention center and is working to create one specifically for the families, "because kids don't grow up in petri dishes. They grow up in some kind of environment, and we're trying to help that to improve so that they can thrive," Thompson said.

When a young person has a connection to another person who positively influence them, it reduces their likelihood to be involved in violence and provides them with someone to intervene when smaller offenses begin to occur, Hohl said. Building out mentoring and peer support programming is important, she noted.

The hospital and community-based violence intervention program, Healing Hurt People,

FEMA's no 'be-all, end-all' for recovery

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Danielle Bethell, for one, doesn't worry about how personnel and budget cuts at the Federal Emergency Management Agency will affect counties like hers, Marion County, Ore., that have suffered from disasters.

"I don't think it's going to make much of a difference, because I don't think [FEMA] made much of a difference, yet, for us," she said, noting that the county is still waiting on reimbursement from wildfire fighting efforts from 2020. "In that the three [situations] that we've had to partner with FEMA, even when they were funded, it wasn't the most successful relationship."

Bethell made her remarks

housing, recovery, infrastructure, recovery.

"I think that we have to do things a little more locally."

Cynthia Lee Sheng, Jefferson Parish, La.'s president and a co-chair of NACo's Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force, said that rulemaking has consumed too much of FEMA's efforts, and the resulting environment slows recovery efforts.

"I think if you're a FEMA employee, you want to follow a rule. Federal government employees are afraid to make mistakes," she said, comparing emergency surgery to elective surgery. "They're not interested in forms; they're not interested in checking the boxes. It's a singular motivation to stabilize you and save you. And that view has got to make



Marion County, Ore. Commissioner Danielle Bethell, photographed at the 2025 WIR Conference. Photo by Rebecca DeWitt

during a panel discussion July 13, part of the Forum on Public Lands.

What FEMA does offer, but doesn't promote enough in her opinion, is a list of organizations that exist across the country that are not federally funded or supported but that counties can access after emergencies, a resource Bethell credits with helping Marion County recovery quickly from its 2020 wildfire, both with assistance and with internal change.

"We tapped into local entities, community-based organizations that came into our region," she said. "We modified local policies and ordinances to be able to adopt certain systems of building codes or laborers, to different types of trades that came in to do

its way into the emergency response world. Because we're fighting for our lives."

Before emergencies even reach that point, counties want more proactive authority and resources, both for mitigation and to head off growing threats.

Lee Sheng said the cost savings for mitigation — \$6 saved on cleanup and the \$7 opportunity cost for general economic conditions following a disaster — makes each \$1 spent worth the investment.

"We really have to build a stronger way to brace for that punch," she said, noting that 3,000 New Orleans homes that were elevated after Hurricane Katrina all survived Hurricane Ida because of those improve-

See FEMA page 26

Engaging people with ‘lived experience’ can help counties build unique substance use disorder programming, experts say

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Overdose deaths are down nationally, but that doesn't mean that the work is done, several panelists said during a "State and Local Partnership for Overdose Prevention" meeting July 11 at the NACo Annual Conference.

Engaging people with lived experience, both those who are in recovery and in active drug use, and investing in evidence-based practices are the best ways for localities to build effective substance use disorder and overdose programming, they said.

Fatal overdose is just one data point, and it's not a barometer for community health, said Keli McLoyd, director of Philadelphia's overdose response unit.

While fewer people are dying of drug overdoses, that doesn't mean fewer people are struggling with substance use disorder, but instead that more people are surviving overdoses, thanks to increased harm reduction initiatives, like widespread distribution of Naloxone, she added.

"It would be so much easier if we knew who was using drugs — if it were just 'that person over there' we could point at," McLoyd said.

"But we also know that the amount of folks that are experiencing substance use disorder and homelessness in that very visible way are actually a very small percentage of the population.

"So, that really requires us to develop different interventions and methods of supporting people that might be at risk for overdose, without even really knowing who these people are."

Philadelphia's Response Unit acts as the convener among city departments — including the Office of Homeless Services, the health department, the fire department, emergency services, the commerce department and law enforcement — so that work in the overdose space isn't done in siloes, according to McLoyd.



Keli McLoyd, director of Philadelphia's overdose response unit, speaks to Annual Conference attendees July 11. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Localities need to invest in evidence-based practices, because even if it's more costly on the front-end, comprehensive harm reduction and prevention work will more than pay for itself, according to Dr. Megan Reed, a research assistant professor at Thomas Jefferson University.

"We know that medication for opioid use disorder works — it cuts fatalities by about half, and I don't know any other medication that does that. It's incredible," Dr. Reed said. "Widespread Naloxone distribution works, it saves lives. And we have to keep investing in resources.

"Some resources seem really expensive — providing housing to people, meeting basic needs, healthcare needs, it looks expensive — but when you address those upstream determinants of health, you also address conditions that create diabetes, hypertension, things like that, and you can also interrupt the generational cycle of addiction and drug use when you reduce those adverse experiences."

Down the line costs show up in other ways too, which Philadelphia is seeing right now in having to increase its budget to serve the city's growing disabled population, McLoyd

said. According to Thomas Jefferson University Hospital data, amputations for patients who use drugs doubled from 2018 to 2022 due to an increase in severe wounds from drug use, the majority of which was from Xylazine, a veterinary tranquilizer also known as "Tranq" that's entered the drug supply.

"So as we think about something like Xylazine and the wounds that it causes and the amount of amputations it causes, one of the things that we've had to think about as a system is that we had to put a lot more money into our capital budgets to pay for vehicles to transport people, because more people are in wheelchairs," McLoyd said.

"Philadelphia is a very old city, and so many of our facilities were just not made for people experiencing loss of limbs, so in addition to the sort of heartbreaking and humanness of it, there are actual costs that are associated with making sure our facilities can take care of folks."

Pennsylvania's overdose prevention program provides free drug test strips and Naloxone (it's distributed more than 820,000 doses) across the state, according to Dr. Latika Davis-Jones, the secretary of the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's department of drug and alcohol programs.

In response to a shortage in the state's substance use disorder workforce, the department created a student loan repayment program that has served more than 500 individuals so far in its first two rounds of funding, providing an average payment of \$68,000 for the first round and an average of \$56,000 for the second.

"We wanted to incentivize individuals to stay in the field," Davis-Jones said. "Without the healers and helpers, we can't support those that are on the journey to recover.

"... For many individuals in the field, we're completely eliminating their student loan debt, and people are really excited about that. The economic impact of that alone — people are saying that now they can pay for their kids' college tuition without taking student loans, they're buying homes."

One Day at a Time, an addiction recovery services organization based in Philadelphia, functions through a peer support model and offers supportive services, including connections to housing and healthcare, to low-income and unhoused individuals with substance use disorder.

Roughly 80% of the organization's staff have previously lived on the streets, according to Mel Wells, president and CEO of One Day at a Time.

"April Steele, the leader of our outreach team of over 30 employees, now has a master's degree," Wells said.

"She used to do come from a life of prostitution, a life of drug dealing and drug use, but she's the peer support that goes out every day, along with the team, to reach back out to their friends and let them know that miracles still happen."

The organization worked to create the Same-Day Pay program, which offers same-day payment, as opposed to a week or monthly structure, for participants to do tasks that better the community, such as painting murals or cleaning up neighborhoods. Providing same-day pay helps break down the financial barriers of accessing supports necessary for recovery, such as housing, Wells said.

Working directly with people who use drugs and seeking their input is the most effective way to create programming, Reed said.

Pennsylvania's department of drug and alcohol programs staff have traveled across 40 counties and sat down with more than 400 people at roundtable discussions — including people with lived experience who are actively engaged in treatment, people who are actively using drugs and not interested in treatment and people who are contemplating starting treatment — to learn more about what's working and what's not when it comes to SUD support and overdose programming, according to Davis-Jones.

"They are the experts on their own lives," Reed said.

"Through doing qualitative research, that's often the best way to hear early on what people are seeing.

"And then, in this dynamic drug market, it's so important to be on the ground, capturing those perspectives. They're often the best ones to come up with solutions." **CN**

The arts can fuel economic growth in counties of all sizes

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

There's often a misconception that arts are just for the "elite" or are only present in urban areas, said Jay Dick, Americans for the Arts' director of equitable advocacy and partnerships. The industry brings in \$1.2 trillion a year nationwide and a county doesn't have to be Los Angeles or New York to see the economic benefits from the arts, he told county officials July 12 at a NACo Arts and Culture Innovation Council meeting.

"You might have a skeptical county commissioner sitting next to you, like, 'Why should we care about the arts?'" Dick said. "Well, the arts are a big industry, and if you invest in the arts, you're going to improve the quality of life, you're going to improve the economics of your county and all of the stuff that goes along with that."

Lackawanna County, Pa. — a largely rural county with just



Maureen McGuigan, Lackawanna County's deputy director of arts and culture, talks July 12 to members of the NACo Arts and Culture Innovation Council. Photo by Leon Lawrence III.

over 216,000 people — is a local government that's investing in, and prioritizing, the arts. The county has a dedicated tax that goes toward arts and culture programming and institutions, which has translated into \$1.7 million. The county has awarded over \$852,000 to 87 organizations and municipalities for the arts so far this year, according to Maureen McGuigan, Lackawanna County's deputy director of arts and culture.

The county identified an opportunity to combine arts and culture with human services, so it launched an arts organization grant program using funding streams allocated for children and youth programming, and the data showed that self-esteem and peer-to-peer relationships improved.

As a result, the county created an Arts Engage! Task Force to see how the arts could expand into, and benefit, other coun-

ty departments. Roundtable discussions were held, including with county stakeholders in transportation, economic development and the environment, to start a dialogue, and now the task force has members from nearly every department and meets monthly to cultivate community projects, according to McGuigan.

One of the current programs is "Shelter for All," where unhoused individuals sheltered at the county's community intervention center decorate birdhouses; the 2,500 birdhouses that have been decorated through the initiative will be part of an installation at the Everhart Museum of Natural History, Science and Art located in the county.

"People just love this," McGuigan said. "They love decorating things, they like creativity. And it's a way to engage other audiences ... No matter how big or how small you are, you're all doing great work in a county, and this is something

you can scale up or down.

"You don't have to pay for 2,500 birdhouses. You could start off small and do 50 and use that as an anchor. You could display them in the library — you don't have to necessarily build a huge installation."

Lackawanna County is a home rule county, which allows for the flexibility needed to establish a dedicated arts tax at the local government level, but any county can implement low-cost programming, especially by creating partnerships with local arts organizations and non-profits, McGuigan said.

"Building allies is super important, using your artists and arts organizations to be a voice for the arts, because politicians do listen to their constituents," McGuigan said. "Everything takes time, and I know we're all stretched, but there are a lot of things you can do between zero dollars and \$500. There's nothing too small in the arts." **CN**

MOBILE TOURS (CONT.)

Philadelphia's 'wellness village' houses, supports people in recovery



Isabel McDevitt leads a July 14 tour of the new Riverview Wellness Recovery Village. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

From **VILLAGE** page 10

housing units throughout the city. Funding will help create another building on the village campus to provide an additional 300 beds for both transitional and permanent housing.

The new building will have a more sophisticated medi-

cal suite, and the additional housing will be able to better accommodate a wider variety of situations, like couples who are wanting to live together and people with pets, McDevitt said. The recovery village is the cornerstone of Philadelphia Mayor Cherelle Parker's wellness "ecosystem," she noted.

"Every community in this country is struggling with these issues related to homelessness, substance use disorder, behavioral health services, and we haven't gotten it right yet," McDevitt said. "So, what's really encouraging about what we're doing here in Philadelphia is we are truly, as Mayor Parker likes

to say, 'challenging the status quo,' and really looking at ways to break down the silos, to connect the dots."

The space had been unused for nearly a decade and had become a spot for stray cats to roam, before it was identified as a recovery housing opportunity by the city/county, according to McDevitt, who said the center was then fully renovated in just 88 days. It's funded through general city/county funds and opioid settlement dollars. The Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium operates a medical clinic on-site with four exam rooms, where they deliver primary care services, ongoing chronic disease management and offer connections to substance use disorder medical teams.

"We're bringing in other providers to deliver other services for this to be a one-stop shop, but that said, people are able to come and go," McDevitt said. "If someone is able to get em-

ployment, they're able to go out to their work, they're able to go out and see family, but it is all about building those solid recovery skills so that folks can be successful."

Around 70% of people who come to access care and housing at the village stay — the others either need a higher level of care or are able to stabilize and return to their families, according to McDevitt. Residents range in age from 23 to their early 70s.

"Many folks who come to us have a lot of barriers and are not quite ready, and that is OK," McDevitt said. "We know that it takes upwards of five or more contacts to get people to connect, and sometimes it takes a lot more than that. It doesn't always work the first time. But what we want to do is we want to be data-informed and really comprehensive, so that we are understanding people's needs, but also connecting them to the right service." **CN**

2025 NACo
CONFERENCE IN

PICTURES

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DENNY HENRY
UNLESS NOTED



Quaker City String Band, a Philadelphia-based Mummers musical group, performs at the opening of the NACo Exhibit Hall.



Like Clark Kent, NACo President James Gore reveals a secret T-shirt.



The Annual Business Meeting audience pauses for the Pledge of Allegiance.



An acrobat entertains at the NACo Board of Directors reception. Photo by Salvador Farfan



Ben Franklin greets Annual Conference attendees. Photo by Salvador Farfan



NACo President James Gore awards Fulton County, Ind. an Achievement Award in the Civic Education and Public Information category.

(Below) Twenty-five of NACo's past presidents joined President James Gore (left) on stage during the Opening General Session: Bill Murphy ('82-'83, Rensselaer County, N.Y.), Barbara Sheen Todd ('93-'94, Pinellas County, Fla.), Randy Franke ('94-'95, Marion County, Ore.), Michael Hightower ('96-'97, Fulton County, Ga.), C. Vernon Gray ('99-'00, Howard County, Md.), Ken Mayfield ('02-'03, Dallas County, Texas), Karen Miller ('03-'04, Boone County, Mo.), Angelo Kyle ('04-'05, Lake County, Ill.), Bill Hansell ('05-'06, Umatilla County, Ore.), Colleen Landkamer ('06-'07, Blue Earth County, Minn.), Don Stapley ('08-'09, Maricopa County, Ariz.), Valerie Brown ('09-'10, Sonoma County, Calif.), Glen Whitley ('10-'11, Tarrant County, Texas), Lenny Eliason ('11-'12, Athens County, Ohio), Chris Rodgers ('12-'13, Douglas County, Neb.), Linda Langston ('13-'14, Linn County, Iowa), Riki Hokama ('14-'15, Maui County, Hawaii), Sallie Clark ('15-'16, El Paso County, Colo.), Roy Charles Brooks ('17-'18, Tarrant County, Texas), Greg Cox ('18-'19, San Diego County, Calif.), Mary Ann Borgeson ('19-'20, Douglas County, Neb.), Gary Moore ('20-'21, Boone County, Ky.), Larry Johnson ('21-'22, DeKalb County, Ga.), Denise Winfrey ('22-'23, Will County, Ill.), Mary Jo McGuire ('23-'24, Ramsey County, Minn.) and former Executive Director Larry Naake ('91-'12).
Photo by Salvador Farfan



Montana commissioners show off their "NACo at 90" gift bag. From left to right: George Real Bird III, Big Horn County, Shane Gorder, Richland County and Darin Miske, Wibaux County. Photo by Leon Lawrence III



South Region Representative Ron Berry dances the night away at a reception with his wife, Marsha. Photo by Salvador Farfan



Anna Brewster (center), Harris County, Texas deputy chief operating officer, lines up for ice cream with fellow attendees at the NACo Exhibit Hall.





NACo Presidential Scholarship winner Bode Gower accepts a \$16,000 check, the David Davenport Memorial Scholarship. Gower attended high school in Mendocino County, Calif. Gower is surrounded by (l-r) Matt Chase, J.D. Clark, James Gore, Mary Jo McGuire and George Dunlap.



Women of NACo officers pause for a photo (l-r) – Laurie Stringham, Salt Lake County, Utah; Juli Briskman, Loudoun County, Va.; Wendy Root Askew, Monterey County, Calif.; Michele Lieberman, Alachua County, Fla.; Monique Baker McCormick, Wayne County, Mich., president; Linnie Taylor, Oakland County, Mich.; Maureen McGuigan, Lackawanna County, Pa. and Lisa Sobbecki, Lucas County, Ohio.

NACo Board members thank CIO Rita Reynolds for her service to NACo.



Illustrator Jim Nuttle at work. Photo by Leon Lawrence III



Commissioner Paul Heimel of Potter County, Pa. (center), receives the Public Leadership in the Arts Award from Mary Hammond Rolland, Dakota County, Minn., commissioner and chair of the Arts and Culture Commission and Jay Dick, Sr. Director of Advocacy & Partnerships, Americans for the Arts. Photo by Salvador Farfan



Attendees kicked off the second day of the conference with a 6 a.m. run from the Philadelphia Museum of Art, with a journey up the steps to the “Rocky” statue.





Smile! Annual Conference attendees surround the “NACo at 90” installation in the Great Hall of the Philadelphia Convention Center.



Delegates from Louisiana dance the Louisiana Second Line at the Annual Business Meeting.



Toyia Tucker (right), councilor, Columbus-Muscogee County, Ga., and friend pause for a photo. Photo by Salvador Farfan



Wayne County, Mich. Commissioner Alisha Bell reacts as she wins election for NACo second vice president.



NACo Second Vice President George Dunlap talks with Commissioner Katie Kenlan and Commissioner Amanda Robertson, Chatham County, N.C. during the First-Time Attendee Breakfast.

RESOLUTIONS



ALL PHOTOS BY
DENNY HENRY



Phyllis Randall,
Loudoun County,
Va. reports on the
Health Steering
Committee.

NEW RESOLUTIONS SET THE COUNTY AGENDA

NACo's 10 policy steering committees and the Board of Directors passed more than 100 new resolutions setting the agenda for counties at the Annual Conference. Those policies include establishing PFAS liability protections for passive receivers, priorities for Medicaid eligibility, consideration for earthen dams as levees, amending the population caps for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program and more.

The adopted policies are summarized here but can be viewed in full, including detailed policies and the background for each issue and adopted changes to the American County Platform, by scanning the QR code or visiting: <https://www.naco.org/event/2025-naco-annual-conference-exposition/info-resolutions-packet>.



AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Permit and fund invasive species removal

NACo urges Congress to support federal legislation allowing counties to comprehensively remove invasive species in their waterways.

Minimize loss of agricultural land

NACo urges the federal government to support state and local efforts to reduce losses of agricultural land.

County priorities in the 2025 farm bill

NACo urges Congress to include county priorities in the 2025 farm bill, including:

- Improving ease of access and flexibility of farm bill programs
- Maintaining and expanding support for farmers

- Providing stronger support for small and mid-sized producers
- Maintaining and expanding farm bill conservation programs
- Investing in the governing capacity of rural counties
- Investing in high-speed internet access
- Expanding opportunities for the rural economy
- Elevating the county role in federal land management

COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Workforce Modernization Act

NACo urges Congress to develop legislation that creates a fair, efficient and humane legal pathway for non-U.S. citizens to work in this country more easily.

Reauthorize CDBG

NACo urges Congress to pass CDBG reauthorization legislation to allow increased federal support for county community development initiatives, affordable housing and economic revitalization efforts.

Homelessness assistance

NACo urges support from both Congress and the administration for increased federal programs on homelessness assistance.

Staff support for HUD Office of Community Planning and Development

NACo strongly supports adequate staffing and administrative resources for HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD) to ensure timely delivery, technical assistance and oversight of federal programs including CDBG, HOME, Homeless Assistance Grants and CDBG-DR. Ensure HUD's CPD office is fully ca-

pable to support counties in meeting urgent housing, homelessness, and community development needs.

Support local homeless shelters

NACo urges Congress to provide funding to help enhance local homeless shelter programs.

ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY AND LAND USE

Increase water access for fire infrastructure in rural and frontier communities

NACo urges Congress to establish funding to assist counties in ensuring adequate access to water for fire suppression for first responders.

RESTORE Act Direct Component Implementation

See **RESOLUTIONS** page 18

NACo urges providing federal workforce dollars for election workers

From RESOLUTIONS page 19

NACo urges the Treasury Department to undertake a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement process to improve the project funding delivery of the RESTORE Act Direct Component, Bucket 1.

PFAS liability protections for passive receivers

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation that recognizes local governments and other publicly owned utilities including but not limited to water treatment plants, wastewater treatment plants and landfills as passive receivers of PFAS and provides liability protections for local governments from the 2024 CERCLA rule.

Comprehensive permitting reform

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation comprehensively reforming the federal permitting process, limiting federal preemption of local authority and requiring meaningful consultation and updates with local governments from the inception of critical infrastructure and fuel management projects—such as transportation, energy, broadband deployment, air quality, fuel breaks, forest thinning and use of prescribed fire—that require a federal permit.

Protect local authority over data centers and cryptocurrency mining facilities

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation protecting local governments' authority to regulate, restrict or ban data centers and cryptocurrency mining operations within their jurisdictions.

Safeguard water quality and improve contamination management

NACo urges Congress to significantly increase federal appropriations for the Clean Water SRF, Drinking Water SRF and the WIFIA program to help counties comply with federal water quality mandates.

Oppose NIETC

NACo requires the Department of Energy and the Federal

Energy Regulatory Commission comply with existing federal and state and tribal laws requiring assessment of potential impacts, consultation, cooperation and coordination with state and local governments.

Expedite guidance and funding for flood control and coastal emergencies projects

NACo urges the Army Corps of Engineers to:

- Immediately release implementation guidance for Section 1145 of WRDA 2024, allowing planning and construction to begin within the authorized two-year window.
- Develop a workplan to deploy the \$745 million in Flood Control and Coastal Emergencies funding to protect impacted communities during the remainder of the 2025 and the full 2026 hurricane seasons.

Reauthorize the CFATS program

NACo urges Congress to reauthorize the Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards (CFATS) Program.

Don't preempt counties' ability to recover damages from costly and destructive weather

NACo opposes any legislation that would limit or pre-

empt counties' access to courts or give companies immunity from lawsuits over damages and costs.

FINANCE, PENSIONS AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Pass appropriations in a timely manner

NACo calls on Congress to pass appropriations in a timely manner.

Federal standards for use of AI in voting systems

NACo urges the Election Assistance Commission to develop standards and guidance for the use of generative AI in voting systems, and in election administration generally, and supports federal legislation requiring the EAC to do so.

Support the continued role of federal entities in election assistance for counties

NACo supports the continued existence and full funding of CISA and the entities they support, the EAC and DOJ election related task forces as they provide counties with low- or no-cost election security and administrative resources and generally ensure the security of our elections. NACo urges Congress and the Administration to:

- Maintain stable and sufficient funding for CISA and EAC to continue offering counties low- or no-cost election security resources, training and technical assistance,
- Preserve the role of CISA and EAC as nonpartisan agencies that provide practical, voluntary support for counties without imposing regulatory burdens,
- Maintain federal entities that investigate and combat election crimes,
- Encourage ongoing collaboration between these agencies and local election officials to enhance best practices in election administration, cybersecurity and accessibility.

Continue federal funding for EI-ISAC

NACo urges Congress and the Department of Homeland Security, through the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, to restore and maintain robust federal funding for the Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center (EI-ISAC). Continued support is essential to ensure that counties and local jurisdictions—particularly those with limited resources—have access to critical cybersecurity services and support to protect election infrastructure.

Oppose federal government nonpayment of special district fees

NACo supports federal regulatory and legislative efforts to ensure the federal government pays its fair share of special district fees.

Provide federal workforce dollars for election worker recruitment, training and retention

NACo advocates for federal workforce funding to be made available for the recruitment, training, and retention of both temporary poll and election workers and permanent staff of election offices.

Equal mileage reimbursement for volunteer drivers

NACo urges Congress to enact the Volunteer Driver Tax Appreciation Act of 2025 to ensure equal mileage reimbursement between the charitable and business mileage rates.

Continue funding of awarded projects

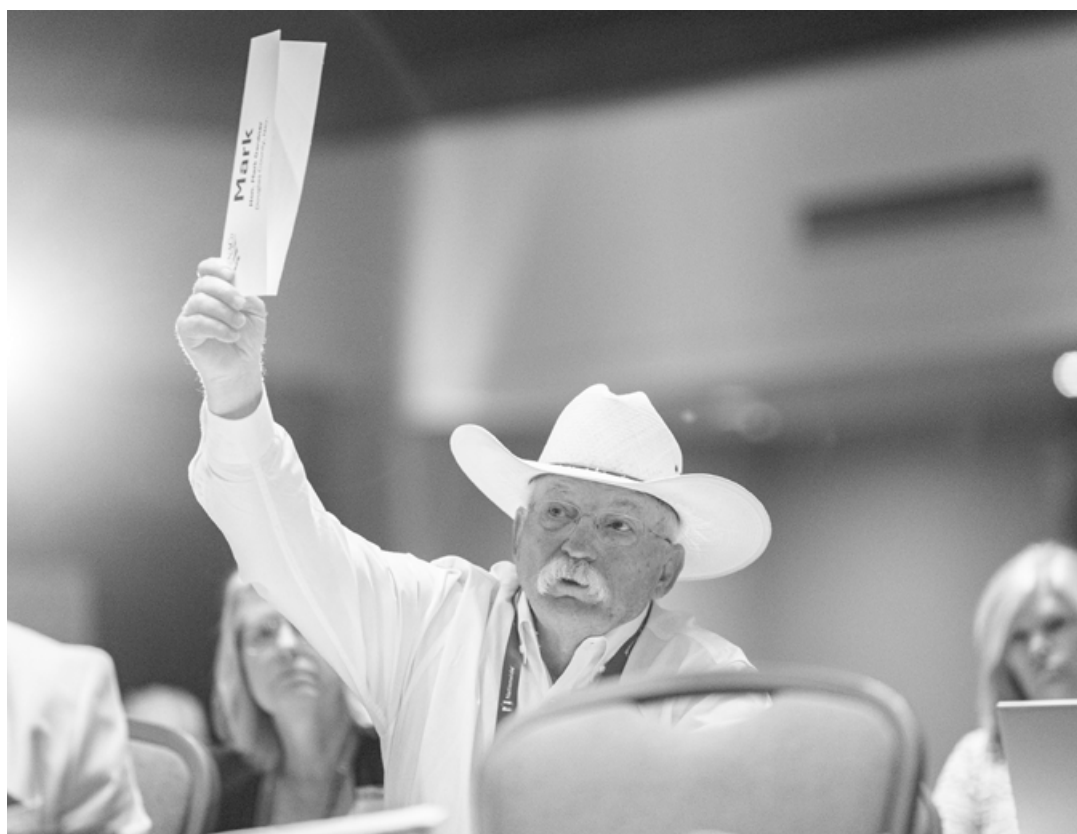
NACo urges Congress to enact legislation that prohibits the executive branch and federal agencies from cancelling or freezing funds for previously awarded projects and programs even in the case of a new congress or administration and that ensures Congress includes funding for awarded projects when passing a budget or continued resolution.

Ensure counties' authority to choose voting systems and vendors

NACo opposes any federal policy that restricts vendor choice or imposes review requirements on county procurement processes without consultation, coordination, and sufficient funding.

Ensure the accuracy of the census

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation establishing the Census Bureau as its own executive agency and removing the president from the apportionment process. NACo insists that the US Census Bureau conduct the



Commissioner Mark Gardner of Douglas County, Nev., seconds a motion at the Board meeting.

See RESOLUTIONS page 21

Ensure timely death certificate signatures by VA clinicians

From RESOLUTIONS page 20

most accurate count possible and maintain its independence.

Protect election officials from criminal penalties for administrative error

NACo opposes federal or state policies that impose criminal penalties on election officials or workers for good-faith administrative errors. Protecting the election workforce is essential to maintaining trust and continuity in election administration.

Empower states and counties to enforce the collection of state and local taxes on short- and long-term rentals

NACo supports federal efforts that support the authority for all counties to enforce laws that provide for the collection of taxes on short and long-term rentals.

Exempt poll worker pay from federal taxes

NACo calls upon Congress to enact legislation exempting compensation paid to election day precinct election workers, from federal income taxes, Social Security and Medicare.

Penalties for threats against election officials, election workers and their families

NACo calls upon Congress to enact legislation that will impose appropriate penalties for offenses including but not limited to the following: harassing or intimidating election officials in the performance of their duty, threatening or causing harm to election officials or their families, attempting to pressure election officials or their family members to violate state law or the Constitution and disseminating by any means the personal information of election officials or their family members.

Expand election funding beyond HAVA

NACo supports local counties' ability to request additional Help America Vote Act grants from the Election Assistance Commission directly for local election operations and long-

term local election infrastructure.

Establish hard scan standards for ballot tracking in IMB-enabled counties

NACo urges the United States Postal Service to establish national standards for ballot tracking for counties that opt into the Intelligent Mail Barcode system.

HEALTH

Robust federal data and enhanced county access for local public health departments

NACo urges the federal government, particularly agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and all privatized health entities, U.S. Census Bureau, to issue clear, uniform guidance to support and expand the standardized release of de-identified, granular health data at local levels with local public health agencies.

Increase funding for uterine fibroid education, research and treatment

NACo urges the federal government and Congress to assist counties by providing funding that increases 1) increased public awareness and education campaigns for the early detection and intervention of uterine fibroids; 2) supports increased research on uterine fibroid causes, early detection and interventions; 3) increases available treatment options for uterine fibroids, to include fertility friendly, long-term and less invasive interventions; 4) and ensures equal access to insurance coverage for uterine fibroid treatments; to ameliorate maternal health outcomes for all women and address racial disparities in maternal health, mortality and morbidity.

Support preventative health

NACo urges federal support and collaboration to provide preventative care services at no cost to uninsured patients by:

- expanding and reauthorizing the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program;



Miami-Dade County Commissioner Eileen Higgins reports on the Transportation Steering Committee at the NACo Board meeting.

- creating a similar federally funded program for prostate and lung cancer screenings under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC);
- directing federal funding for evidence-based screenings to county governments and county health facilities to support initiatives like the Birthday Screening Program across the U.S.
- promoting research and innovation in preventive care to enhance early detection efforts and outcomes.

Reimburse pharmacies and other health care providers in rural communities

NACo urges an increase in reimbursement rates and policies that expand access to pharmacies and other healthcare in rural communities.

Ensuring timely death certificate signatures by VA clinicians

NACo urges Congress and the administration to pass legislation or enact rules directing VA primary clinicians or other clinic providers to sign death certificates within 72 hours for veterans in their care whose deaths do not fall under the medical examiner/coroner (ME/C) jurisdiction.

Tri-care finance reform

NACo urges finance reform

for Tri-care as a critical step in protecting access to care for military families and veterans and to protect our healthcare systems vulnerable to inadequate funding. Particularly in rural communities that support our military bases, the threats to our rural healthcare systems is significant.

Oppose proposed federal Medicaid cuts to preserve local programming and services

NACo opposes changes to Medicaid funding that would significantly damage this country's critical health safety net for vulnerable populations and shift much of the financial burden to county governments including:

- eliminating or underfunding existing Medicaid expansion levels
- capping federal Medicaid spending or turning Medicaid into a block grant
- reducing the Medicaid matching rate for some or all states
- making it harder for people to enroll or renew coverage

Support comprehensive behavioral health crisis care and 988 implementation

NACo supports federal legislation to ensure that all people, including those on tribal land, have access to comprehensive crisis care services to stabilize patients in crisis and direct

them to the most appropriate treatment options.

Support legislation and administrative waivers to lift the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion prior to reentry

NACo urges support of legislation which would allow Medicaid payment for medical services furnished to an incarcerated individual during a specified period preceding the individual's release. NACo also supports advancing such provisions via the earliest available legislative vehicle.

Support Medicaid IMD Exclusion reform

NACo urges Congress to amend the Medicaid statute to allow states that have a plan for providing appropriate outpatient care, to receive federal Medicaid payments for services provided in IMDs for people with severe mental illness and substance use disorder.

Repeal or delay pending statutory cuts to Medicaid DSH payments

NACo urges Congress to repeal or delay the harmful statutory reductions to Medicaid DSH allotments before they go into effect, as scheduled.

Support direct support professionals

See RESOLUTIONS page 22

Establish a national drug rate for county-owned nursing homes

From RESOLUTIONS page 21

NACo urges federal efforts to develop a discrete occupational category for DSPs to help states and the federal government better interpret the shortage of these professionals in the labor market and collect data on the high turnover rate of DSPs.

Align nursing home DNR protocols with hospital standards

NACo urges the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to revise federal guidelines to permit the use of two physician signatures for DNR orders in nursing homes when a surrogate decision-maker is unavailable, aligning with hospital policy.

Amend the federal tort claims act health center policy manual

NACo urges regulatory action to amend the Tort Claim Act Health Center Policy Manual to clarify that an individual court-ordered into treatment at a Federally Qualified Health Clinic is a patient of the entity and that claims arising from the actions of such patients are covered activities.

Amend the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy in the Federal Social Security Act

NACo urges Congress to amend the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy in the Social Security Act, allowing pre-trial detainees to access Medicaid services while awaiting trial.

Declare the fentanyl crisis a public health emergency

NACo urges Congress and the administration to take action to address the fentanyl crisis. A federal declaration of emergency is needed to open new and immediate avenues to enhance capabilities, coordination and collaboration across local, state, tribal and federal agencies to promote public health and safety.

Eliminate the federal RN staffing mandate for nursing homes

NACo urges the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

(CMS) and Congress to withdraw the proposed federal registered nurse (RN) staffing mandate and instead support acuity-based, locally-designed staffing models that promote flexibility while maintaining quality outcomes.

Establish a national drug rate for county-owned nursing homes

NACo urges Congress to authorize county-owned nursing homes to access a national prescription drug rate equivalent to that of Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and other public health entities, either through 340B or a newly authorized mechanism to work together with the administration agenda to eliminate waste, fraud and abuse.

Increase IMD bed capacity

Until permanent IMD reform legislation can be enacted and implemented (such as the complete elimination of the IMD bed cap), NACo urges the federal government to offer states and counties the below:

Expand the IMD Exclusion bed capacity and allow for Medicaid reimbursement for inpatient and residential mental health/substance use disorder treatment services in Medicaid certified facilities including Short Term Residential Treatment Programs.

Clarification that, for each facility up to 10 hospitals, nursing facilities and/or other institutions located on the same campus, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) may not combine the number of beds across facilities for the purpose of evaluating whether an institution is an IMD.

Mandate dissemination and recognition of accurate vaccination information in the Congress

NACo urges Congress to recognize and disseminate only fact-based information, research, and material as it relates to vaccinations in America, vaccine effectiveness in

public health, and their alleged link to neurodivergence.

Limit penalties for self-reporting in nursing homes

NACo urges CMS and Congress to revise enforcement and oversight procedures to reduce or eliminate penalties for those who appropriately self-report and respond to allegations or adverse events in nursing homes, to promote greater transparency and align with quality improvement best practices.

Less frequent reevaluations for home and community-based services

NACo supports amendments to the federal requirements to reduce the frequency of reevaluations to occur only every three years, upon request, or when there is a significant change in the person's condition.

Restore three-month retroactive Medicaid eligibility

NACo urges Congress to reject proposals that would eliminate or shorten retroactive Medicaid eligibility. NACo supports restoring the current standard of three-month retroactive coverage to ensure continued access to essential care for vulnerable populations.

Strengthen the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act

Counties urge the federal government to fully implement the 2024 Final Rule and continue to strengthen MH-PAEA to improve treatment access, reduce healthcare disparities, and realize significant economic and social benefits.

Screen earlier for breast and colorectal cancer

NACo urges the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Health Resources and Services Administration to adopt updated screening recommendations that lower the starting age for routine breast cancer screening to 30 and for colorectal cancer screening to 40.

HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION

Extend supportive services for veteran families housing assistance to 12 months

NACo urges the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress to extend the maximum duration of temporary financial assistance for housing under the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program from 9 to 12 months. This extension would increase landlord participation, improve veteran housing outcomes and better align with community-based rehousing efforts.

Support the Foster Youth to Independence housing choice voucher

NACo urges the federal government to preserve and expand the Foster Youth to Independence housing voucher program.

Expand Title IV eligibility to short-term vocational programs

Congress should expand eligibility for Title IV federal student aid to include high-quality, short-term vocational programs in high-demand occupational fields, increasing the number of certified, job-ready workers and address pressing labor shortages.

Safeguard rural veterans in VA CVSO grant process and implementation

NACo urges Congress and the Administration to take legislative and regulatory action to ensure the VA CVSO competitive grant process is informed, developed and implemented to safeguard veterans in rural counties creating equal access to accredited CVSOs.

Reinstate the VASP program

NACo urges the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress to reinstate and adequately fund the Veterans Affairs Servicing Purchase program, or a similar support program, to address the costs of inflation, a national shortage of affordable housing and assist veterans who may be on a low or fixed income.

Waive sequestration cuts impacting human services programs

NACo urges Congress to waive S-PAYGO as triggered by the passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act to protect vital federal funding streams that support county human services delivery.

JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Medical examiners and coroners

NACo urges Congress to provide grants and microgrants specific to strengthening Medical Examiner and Coroner Offices (ME/C) to improve the medicolegal death investigation system which is often managed at the county level and develop, implement and fund national standards, certification of personnel, accreditation of ME/C offices and data modernization of the medicolegal death investigation system.

Community-based violence intervention programs

NACo urges Congress to increase financial support for measures that maximize the ability of counties to develop and support community-based violence intervention programs addressing the root causes of gun crimes.

Recommendations and best practices from the National Judicial Task Force to examine state courts' response to mental illness

NACo supports the federal policy recommendations and best practices from the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Response to Mental Illness.

Support increased hazardous product end-of-life management

NACo urges Manufacturers to provide for safe and responsible end-of-life management in the design, labeling and marketing of hazardous products.

Risk Rating 2.0's implementation

See RESOLUTIONS page 23

Restore emergency management and homeland security grants

From **RESOLUTIONS** page 22

tation and NFIP reauthorization

NACo urges FEMA for further transparency regarding implementation of Risk Rating 2.0; urging Congress to include provisions in the reauthorization of the National Flood Insurance Program that ensure equity, address affordability, and empower counties.

Restore emergency management and homeland security grants

NACo joins with our partners at the National Emergency Managers Association and the International Association of Emergency Managers in urging Congress to restore the drastic cuts to EMPG and the suite of homeland security grants to the states and local governments.

Streamline the application process for FEMA individual assistance

NACo supports efforts to create a streamlined or universal federal application for individual assistance for federal aid programs that are available in the aftermath of an emergency, which will help accelerate community recovery.

Include earthen structures in definition of levees

NACo urges FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers to collaborate on a study of the efficacy of earthen structures which have been in existence for a period of longer than 30 years, have not been breached by a natural disaster and do not have documented history of how it was engineered, and produce a report that outlines viable next steps to accept it as a levee.

PUBLIC LANDS

Use existing studies and promote efficient siting of infrastructure projects

NACo urges federal land management agencies to prioritize and incorporate existing studies, including cultural and archaeological analyses from other federal agencies and environmental data collected by other agencies and organiza-

tions, when assessing proposals for infrastructure projects.

Recognize outdoor recreation and tourism as critical economic drivers

NACo calls on federal agencies to incorporate outdoor recreation and tourism as core pillars in economic development, land management, transportation and public health planning and supports the establishment of new dedicated, predictable funding streams and intergovernmental partnerships that enhance infrastructure, visitor services, workforce development and sustainable tourism management on and near federal public lands.

Amend the Antiquities Act

NACo supports amending current statute “54 USC Ch. 3203: MONUMENTS, RUINS, SITES, AND OBJECTS OF ANTIQUITY From Title 54—NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND RELATED PROGRAMS Subtitle III—National Preservation Programs DIVISION C—AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES

CHAPTER 3203—MONUMENTS, RUINS, SITES, AND OBJECTS OF ANTIQUITY §320301.

Amend the Recreation and Public Purposes Act

NACo supports legislation that would allow counties that have federal lands within their park system the opportunity to offer concessions operated by third-party vendors.

Nuclear power on federal lands

NACo urges Congress and the administration to support and enable safe and reliable nuclear power generation on public lands due to its small land use footprint.

Remove the gray wolf from the Endangered and Threatened Wildlife List

NACo supports congressional efforts to remove the Gray Wolf from the list of endangered and threatened wildlife.

Amend PILT population caps

NACo supports amending the Payments in Lieu of Taxes formula to extend the population multipliers to include additional multipliers for local governments with populations in the range of 4,000, 3,000, 2,000 and 1,000.

Use targeted grazing for wildland fire management

The federal government should establish a program to target livestock grazing in and adjacent to areas at high risk of

wildland fire.

Oppose nationwide resource management planning

NACo opposes federal land management agencies developing amendments to local resource management plans by conducting a national, multi-state, amendment process.

Staffing on federal recreation public lands

NACo urges Congress to provide additional federal funding and resources to increase staffing for federal agencies that manage access, hold jurisdictional responsibilities, provide public safety or deliver administrative and specialized services on federal recreational public lands, particularly those that impact adjacent gateway communities.

Local authority and forest management reforms

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation based on the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission’s recommendations.

Prevent catastrophic wildfires through long-term forest restoration funding and local control

NACo calls on Congress and the administration to:

Sustain and expand forest restoration funding beyond FY2026, ensuring counties can finish work already underway;

Implement the Fix Our Forests Act and similar legislative reforms that reduce permitting delays and federal roadblocks to treatment;

Require input, collaboration and partnership with local governments and landowners to manage forests and rangelands through proven tools like mechanical thinning, grazing and prescribed fire;

Fund counties directly, not just federal agencies, so we can act fast, manage risk and protect our communities before disaster strikes.

Codify federal agency adherence to the Administrative Procedures Act

NACo urges congressional action that statutorily codifies the principles of federalism from Executive Order 13132 into the APA.

Furthermore, NACo urges appropriate and substantive revision of rules governing the Office of Management and Budget and Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs to implement federalism that is protective of state and local governments.

Increase the minimum level for a 1099-MISC/1099-NEC filing when performing natural disaster mitigation activities

The administration should increase the minimum level for a 1099-MISC/1099-NEC form to be filed to \$5000 from \$600 or create an exemption of any natural disaster mitigation reimbursement funded by a federal grant.

Oppose BLM’s Public Lands Rule

NACo opposes the “Public Lands Rule” implemented by the BLM.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

Support the BEAD program

NACo urges continued fed-

See **RESOLUTIONS** page 24



Wake County, N.C. Commissioner Shinica Thomas discusses telecom issues at the Board meeting.

Reauthorize the State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program

From RESOLUTIONS page 23

eral support and timely implementation of the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program to expand broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas. NACo supports robust county engagement in BEAD planning and implementation processes and encourages coordination with local governments to ensure funds address community-specific needs.

Support digital literacy programming

NACo urges Congress and relevant federal agencies to expand funding and support for county-led and community-based digital literacy programs. These programs should include digital skills training for workforce development, education, telehealth access, and general technology confidence-building initiatives.

Expand remote services and digital credential for citizens

NACo urges Congress and federal agencies to provide funding, technical assistance and regulatory support to counties seeking to implement and expand digital service offerings.

Establish responsible AI guardrails

NACo calls on Congress and relevant federal agencies to enact a national AI framework that:

- Adopts a risk-based regulatory model
- Safeguards civil rights and local accountability
- Funds local government AI capacity
- Promotes innovation through smart regulation
- Mandates transparency in federal AI tools deployed locally
- Invests in workforce transition and education
- Establishes baseline national data privacy standards

Open-source technology adoption

NACo urges Congress and federal agencies to provide funding and resources to help counties train IT personnel on the deployment, security and



Public Lands Steering Committee Chair Todd Devlin discusses several resolutions at the NACo Board meeting.

management of open-source software.

Oppose the federal AI moratorium and BEAD funding condition

NACo urges Congress to preserve local regulatory flexibility and support a collaborative, multi-tiered AI governance framework. NACo opposes any federal moratorium on state and local AI governance, including provisions tying BEAD broadband funds to moratorium compliance.

Reauthorize the State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program

NACo urges Congress to reauthorize the State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program and consider programmatic changes that improves direct pass-through of funding to county governments.

TRANSPORTATION

Parity between permitting for highway and transit projects

NACo urges Congress to pass permitting reform to bring consistency between transportation modes to reduce cost,

shrink timelines and minimize project risk of transit projects.

Federal safety standards for lithium-ion batteries in micromobility devices

NACo urges Congress to pass H.R. 973/S. 389, the "Setting Consumer Standards for Lithium-Ion Batteries Act," requiring the Consumer Product Safety Commission to promulgate safety standards for lithium-ion batteries in micromobility devices.

Dedicated funding for inland waterways

NACo urges Congress to approve dedicated funding for maintenance of inland waterways.

Support the Highway Formula Fairness Act

NACo supports the goals outlined in H.R. 3030 – the *Highway Formula Fairness Act* – which seeks to improve the distribution of federal highway funds to reflect changing population dynamics and transportation demands.

Direct Harbor Maintenance Trust funding for ports

NACo urges Congress to provide direct funding to ports.

Sustain federal investment in active transportation

NACo urges Congress to continue funding for active transportation investment programs managed by the Federal Highway Administration.

Transportation project-specific permitting reform

NACo urges Congress to make commonsense reforms a central part of any upcoming surface transportation reauthorization legislation.

Aeronautical revenue use for aviation initiatives

NACo urges Congress and the Federal Aviation Administration to revise the current statutory and regulatory framework governing the use of airport-generated revenues to allow counties to allocate a portion of their aeronautical revenue toward non-aviation, community-driven priorities.

County road funding for forest health

NACo urges Congress and the U.S. Department of Transporta-

tion to supply funding for specific county road maintenance and upgrades necessary to protect health, safety and welfare.

Funding for regional transportation planning organizations

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation making it easier to form federally designated Regional Transportation Planning Organizations and provide guaranteed funding for those organizations.

Amend federal law regarding the use of Federal Highway Administration Emergency Relief Fund

NACo urges Congress to amend federal law to allow entities receiving FHWA ER funds six years after a disaster occurrence to advance projects to the construction obligation stage, as opposed to two years in current law.

Promote safe and consistent federal regulation of autonomous semi-trucks on intra-state highways

NACo urges Congress and the

See RESOLUTIONS page 25

Support national railway safety for local communities

From RESOLUTIONS page 24

U.S. Department of Transportation to establish a comprehensive federal regulatory framework for autonomous trucks, including through the development of consistent, risk-based federal regulations for the testing, certification and commercial deployment of autonomous semi-trucks, ensuring uniform safety standards across states to streamline compliance for manufacturers and operators and guaranteeing that autonomous trucks operating exclusively on intrastate highways are subject to the same stringent level of safety oversight as interstate operations.

Reduce GPS-directed commercial freight traffic on local roadways

NACo urges Congress and the Department of Transportation to work with commercial and private GPS data providers to restrict routing of heavy commercial vehicles onto local roadways unless they are explicitly designated as truck routes.

Support national railway safety for local communities

NACo urges Congress and the Federal Railroad Administration to take immediate action to address delays that result in idling freight trains and create blocked at-grade crossings.

Reform competitive grant programs

NACo urges Congress to include additional options to waive or decrease local match requirements for USDOT competitive grant programs based on a population threshold, developed in coordination with local governments, within notices of funding opportunities and to reduce and simplify reporting requirements to help rural counties with limited staff capacity.

Create a national infrastructure bank

NACo urges Congress to create a \$5-trillion National Infrastructure Bank to be capitalized

by existing Treasury debt and requiring no new federal appropriations or no new federal taxes.

Provide direct funding to county-owned roads and bridges

- NACo urges Congress to:
- Return solvency to the Highway Trust Fund using a permanent fix that accounts for inflation, declining gasoline tax revenues and all users of the roads;
 - Establish a federal formula, developed in coordination with local governments, that directs funding to counties or local public agencies who own, operate, and maintain

road and bridge infrastructure;

- Enact a new, long-term reauthorization timely upon the IIJA's expiration at current or increased levels that protects competitive grant opportunities, especially those that prioritize local and rural applicants.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

LARRY WHITE

NACo Board Member
Escambia County, Ala.
Commissioner

Number of years active in NACo: 25 years

Years in public service: 27

Occupation: Independent insurance agency owner

Education: BA, MA

The hardest thing I've ever done: Dismiss 13 employees during a budget shortfall.



WHITE

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Former Senator Jeff Sessions, McArthur Hines, Mary Ella White

A dream I have is to: Hear the Lord say, "well done."

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Enjoy thrill rides; i.e. Wild Eagle at Dollywood

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Whitewater rafting in the Smokies

My favorite way to relax is: Freshwater fishing

I'm most proud of: My loving family

Every morning I read: Emails, texts and Fox News

My favorite meal is: Fresh Gulf seafood

My pet peeve is: Prolonged waiting. Patience is not my strongest virtue.

My motto is: The Golden Rule

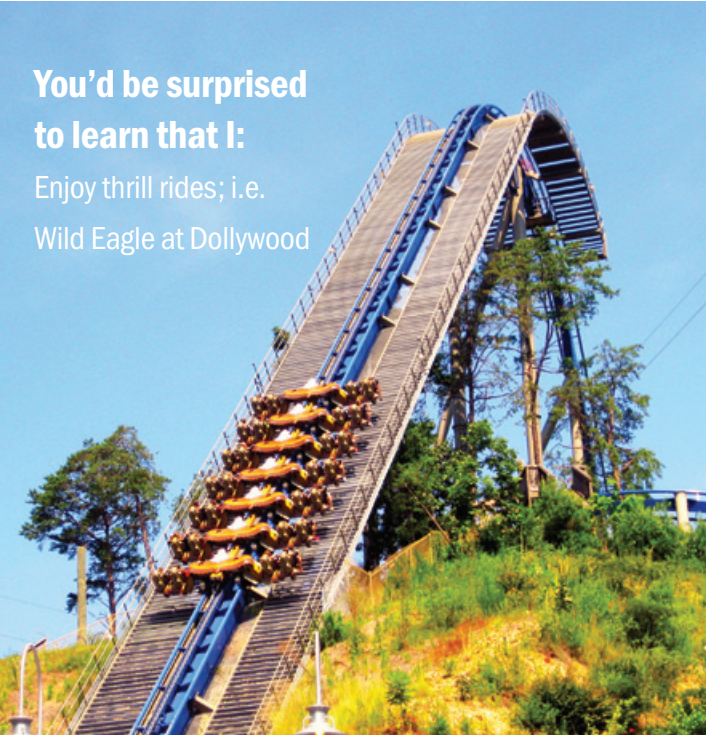
The last book I read was: The Holy Bible

My favorite movie is: "American Graffiti"

My favorite music is: Classic country

My favorite U.S. president is: Ronald Reagan

My county is a NACo member because: The great benefits: Education, representation in Washington, joint purchasing, etc.



BEHIND THE SEAL MONROE COUNTY, GA.

The Monroe County, Ga. seal features a train that signifies Monroe County as the site of one of the first railroads in Georgia in the 1830s and one of the most significant railroad locations in the state for more than a century thereafter.

The firehouse signifies Monroe County's status as the "Public Safety Capital of Georgia" thanks to the county seat, Forsyth, being the site of the Georgia Public Safety Training Center, which provides training grounds for law enforcement and firefighters/EMTs all over the state.

The cotton on the seal signifies Monroe County's status as one of Georgia's major cotton producers, particularly in antebellum times. In the 20th century, several major textile mills, including Bibb Manufacturing Company, saw its heyday in the 1940s.

The trees on the seal signify Monroe County's centuries-long commitment to the timber and forestry industries, including Forsyth's status as the home of the state's Georgia Forestry Association headquarters.

The mill represents the Juliette Milling Company, which was once the largest hydro-powered grist mill in the world, along the Ocmulgee River.



The cow and barn signify Monroe County's status as one of the state's top producers of numerous agricultural sectors, including sheep, beef cattle, barley and peaches.

The church signifies the more than 40 religious congregations in the county, including many church congregations that have been in existence for 150 years or more.

Would you like to see your seal featured in County News? Contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org.

SPONSORED CONTENT

Shining a SPOTLIGHT on the Board of County Commissioners of Palm Beach County's Municipal Investment Recovery Cooperative

A UNIQUE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL FORM OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Among its broad and diverse responsibilities and duties, the Office of Financial Management & Budget's Fixed Assets Management Office (FAMO) operates a Municipal Investment Recovery Cooperative, a mutually beneficial collaborative partnership involving area local governments and agencies. The program, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, has generated \$70 million in sale related revenue and cost savings for the county and its partner agencies.

The cooperative functions as a specialized marketplace where surplus government property finds new life. From vehicles and boats to computers and office furniture, items that might otherwise be discarded are instead auctioned to the public or transferred to departments in need.

This resource-sharing ap-

proach creates a win-win scenario. The selling agency receives funds to replenish their budgets, while the purchasing department or citizen acquires needed items at reduced costs.

Major beneficiaries include:

- Palm Beach International Airport
- County Fire-Rescue
- Various municipalities
- Local taxing districts
- The County's Fleet Policy Replacement Fund

The cooperative has built a loyal following of over 32,000 clients who regularly participate in auctions and sales. Upcoming public auctions are posted on the county website, with on-site bidding available during published sale dates.

Available items frequently include:

- Fleet-maintained vehicles
- Marine equipment
- Office furniture and tech-



nology

- Power tools
- Lost and found jewelry
- Specialty equipment

Florida local governments receive special access through the Priority Purchase Program, allowing them first opportunity to acquire needed items before public sale.

The program recently received national recognition when FAMO and the County's Information Systems Services Department won a National Association of Counties Innovation Achievement Award for

modernizing their inventory system.

The award recognizes the county's transition from barcode scanning to Radio Frequency Identification Technology with real-time connectivity for the capital asset inventory process. This upgrade integrates with the Fixed Assets Bidding System, a comprehensive database that manages everything from surplus inventory to point-of-sale transactions.

As government agencies continue facing budget constraints, the cooperative model pioneered by Palm Beach County offers a template for others to follow. FAMO's portfolio also includes assisting the Board's departments and agencies with processing approved donations, trading-in obsolete equipment in exchange for monetary consideration on the purchase of replace-

ment equipment and generating revenue from its contracts for recycling end-of-life electronics, scrap ferrous and non-ferrous materials. By treating surplus as an asset rather than a burden, the program transforms waste into wealth while benefitting the environment.

For more information on upcoming auctions or participation opportunities, visit the Palm Beach County website or contact the Fixed Assets Management Office directly.

The Cooperative is commonly known as the Palm Beach County Thrift Store and County News readers are invited to visit its Website @ pbcgov.org/ofmb/thriftstore where first-time customers can register and subscribe to the e-mailing list to receive an electronic postcard announcing upcoming bid lots and retail specials.

COMMITTEES (CONT.)

Federal government must trust counties in disaster recovery work

From FEMA page 12

ments.

She emphasized that counties have a responsibility to do work themselves.

"We cannot let our infrastructure age," she said. "We have got to stay on top of our water sewer systems, our road systems. We can't be like the homeowner who never replaces a roof and then hopes for a storm so insurance comes and fixes it for us."

Lee Sheng also advised counties to embed finance

personnel in emergency management teams to accurately account for expenses and for large counties to sign contracts for emergency services and debris cleanup ahead of time to avoid competing with their state government, when services are needed the most. Jefferson Parish has more than three dozen contracts in place, she noted.

She also advises her team to prepare to be self-sufficient for more than 72 hours.

"I tell my team to prepare like no one is coming," she

'I tell my team to prepare like no one is coming.'

said. "Someone will come... but maybe the roads are going to be blocked, maybe there isn't hotel space for all the staff for an electric company to come in."

Bethell said the federal government needs to be more responsible for the land it owns, noting that the 2020 Marion

County wildfire burned for weeks on U.S. Forest Service land, or at least let counties muster their own responses.

"I take it very personally that they don't actually do anything about fires, areas that they deem too risky," she said. "We should be allowed, and we should be trusted, to make sure that we protect ourselves from any disaster, regardless of where it starts."

Bethell said the county was denied access to the forest because the Forest Service didn't have active contracts with the

right jurisdictions.

On top of that, \$422 million of federal funding earmarked for recovery for those fires in Oregon has been mired in state bureaucracy for years, with none of it reaching the affected counties.

"The federal government needs to trust counties," Bethell said. "They don't see us as viable governments for some reason. And I know they can do it [provide direct funding] because we all received ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) money." **CN**

GET TO KNOW...

Platte County, Nebraska

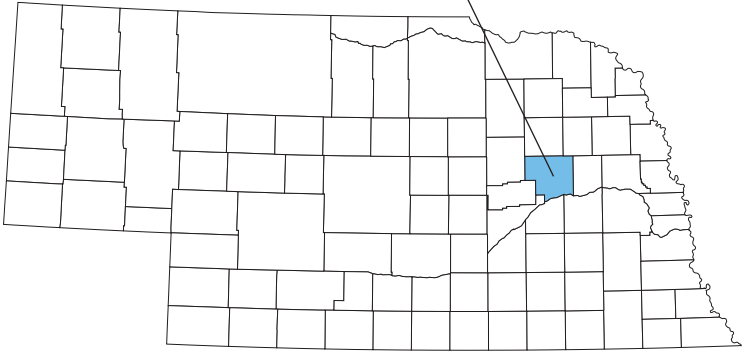
by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Established in 1856, Platte County is named for the Platte River on its southern boundary. The county gets its name, “Platte” from the French word for “flat.” The county seat, Columbus, is home to Glur’s Tavern, the oldest continuously operating tavern west of the Missouri River, and Dorothy Lynch salad dressing, bottled beginning in the 1940s.

The first dress rehearsal of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, a touring outdoor entertainment event highlighting the American West, occurred in Columbus in 1883, and formally opened in Omaha a few days later.

The show’s cast included Native Americans, cowboys and sharpshooters, including Annie Oakley, who would shoot cigarettes out of her husband’s mouth and hit targets behind her back, using a mirror to aim. Sitting Bull, a member of the Hunkpapa Lakota who was best known for leading the Lakota and Cheyenne tribal nations to victory against the U.S. Army in the Battle of Little Bighorn, went on tour with the Wild West show for one season. The show romanticized the American West, and featured trick riding and roping and reenactments of stage-coach robberies and battles, including the Battle of Little Bighorn.

Steel from the New York Twin Towers was used to create a sculpture for the Andrew Jackson Higgins National Memorial in Columbus’ Pawnee Park. The memorial is dedicated to Higgins, a Columbus native who designed the “Higgins Boat,” a crucial landing craft used in World War II. The World Trade Center steel was added to commemorate the victims of the 9/11 attacks. The sculpture is topped by a bronze eagle with a plaque that reads: “The eagle represents our



promise to the future. As long as the eagle flies in the heavens, the men and women of this great nation will forever fight to keep its home free.”

Notable Platte County natives include James Keough, a White House speechwriter under President Richard Nixon and executive editor for Time magazine, and Brad William Henke, a professional football player and actor who had roles in “Orange Is the New Black” and “Lost.”

Columbus, which once garnered the nickname “the

City of Power and Progress,” is home to three public power districts: Nebraska Public Power, Loup Public Power and Cornhusker Public Power.

In 1943, Platte County was accidentally bombed by the U.S. Army, which mistook a nearby village, Tarnov, for a bombing range. Seven practice bombs, filled with sand and a small explosive charge, were dropped, but there were no injuries or deaths.

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.



WORD SEARCH

MULTNOMAH COUNTY, ORE.
Created by Mary Ann Barton

N	M	T	S	A	L	V	B	S	O	J	I	F	S	A	O	A	N	F	V
O	B	R	K	H	K	E	K	T	Z	Y	F	M	M	R	I	E	B	P	V
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BAGS: The county banned single-use plastic bags before the practice went statewide.

BICYCLES: The county seat of Portland features more than 385 miles of bike paths.

FALL: The county is home to Oregon’s tallest waterfall, Multnomah Falls, which plunges 620 feet.

GORGE: The county offers easy access to the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, a hiker’s paradise with more than 90 waterfalls.

HUBERS: Established in 1879, Huber’s is the county’s oldest restaurant, known for its turkey dishes.

MARKET: Portland Saturday Market is one of the longest-running open air arts and crafts markets in the United States, operating since 1974.

MULTNOMAH: The word “Multnomah” originates from the Chinookan language, meaning “those toward water.”

OREGONIAN: The oldest newspaper on the West Coast, *The Oregonian* was founded as a weekly in 1850 and has

published a daily newspaper since 1861.

PORTLAND: The county seat is Portland, known for its food carts, bike culture and indie spirit.

POWELLS: The world’s largest independent bookstore is located in the county, featuring more than one million books.

ROSES: If you love roses, you’re in the right place. Be sure to visit the International Rose Test Garden in the county. More than 10,000 roses bushes represent more than 610 varieties.

SMALL: The county is the state’s smallest county, at 466 square miles but has the largest population, with more than 800,000 residents.

TAX: Like the rest of Oregon, the county has no sales tax.

TELEVISION: The county has been featured in TV (“Portlandia”) and film (“The Goonies”).

WEIRD: “Keep Portland Weird” is a slogan that reflects the county’s embrace of individuality.



finally!

NACo swag is now available online!



SPONSORED CONTENT

PAULINE MEDRANO: Leading with Connection to Drive Retirement Success in DALLAS COUNTY

Since becoming Dallas County treasurer in 2015, Pauline Medrano has led with a relationship-centered approach that has transformed the county's retirement program. Her leadership is defined by collaboration, trust-building and a deep commitment to employee well-being — qualities that have directly contributed to measurable improvements in retirement readiness.

A Leadership Style Rooted in Engagement

Medrano's success stems



Medrano

from her ability to connect with employees, partners and stakeholders. She fosters open communication, listens to employee needs and works closely with Nationwide and NACo to tailor retirement education and services. Her leadership on the Deferred Compensation Committee has helped embed financial wellness into the county's culture.

Each year, she reaches out to elected officials to co-host in-person and virtual workshops with Nationwide, covering topics like Social Security, Women in Retirement and Tax-Efficient



Planning. In 2025 alone, over 75 employees attended these sessions — demonstrating her ability to mobilize and engage employees.

Results That Reflect Her Impact

Under Medrano's leadership, the Dallas County Deferred Compensation Program has seen:

- 103% increase in plan assets (2015–2025)
- 49% growth in participant enrollment
- 35% increase in contributions per participant

- 60% of new hires now enroll within their first 90 days
- Participation among part-time employees has doubled since 2018

These outcomes are not just financial—they reflect a cultural shift toward proactive retirement planning, driven by Medrano's inclusive and empowering leadership.

Innovations That Empower Employees

Medrano has championed several key enhancements to the retirement program:

- **Flexible Contribution Op-**

tions to meet diverse financial needs

- **Targeted Outreach** to younger and part-time workers
- **Support for SECURE 2.0 and HB2783** to reduce financial stress

A Legacy of Inclusive Financial Stewardship

Pauline Medrano's leadership is a model of how relationship-building and strategic vision can drive real results. By prioritizing education, inclusion and employee engagement, she has helped thousands of Dallas County employees take control of their financial futures.

Her legacy is one of service, empowerment, and lasting impact.



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BRIGHT IDEAS | EL PASO COUNTY, TEXAS

County's New Healing Garden Offers Community Solace in Memory of 2019 Shooting Victims

PROBLEM: El Paso County residents were grieving from the aftermath of a mass shooting.

SOLUTION: The county built a "healing garden" where people could gather to remember the lost.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Six years ago, on Aug. 3, a white supremacist opened fire at an El Paso County, Texas Walmart, killing 23 people and injuring 22. The racist attack was the deadliest mass shooting against Hispanics in U.S. history, in a county where more than 80% of the population is Hispanic.

The county built a healing garden in its largest park to provide a place for people to gather in memory of those who lost their lives. Each year, on the anniversary of the tragedy, the county holds a memorial ceremony at the garden. To make sure that the dead are not just reduced to a number, the 23 names are read aloud, followed by the release of 23 paper lanterns.

The garden is shaped in a circle, which El Paso County Administrator Betsy Keller said makes you "feel like you're walking into a hug." The trees surrounding the garden were planted by family members of the deceased.

Because there was so much shock and grief following the tragedy, people were looking for a way to come together, and creating a healing garden was the county's way of providing that.

"Something like that had never happened," El Paso County Judge Ricardo Samaniego said, of the mass shooting. "We're such a united, close community and so it just sort of stayed inside of me, this idea that there had to be something tangible."

More than 75% of the funding for the healing garden

came from donations, and the remaining 25% was paid for by the county, Samaniego said. El Paso is a tight-knit community — one where you immediately ask someone what high school they went to as a way to find a mutual connection — and everyone was affected by the mass shooting in some way, whether directly or indirectly, so the garden is a space for people to heal in a communal way, Samaniego said. Immediately after the shooting ended, Samaniego rushed to the hospital, where he held a man's wounded grandson, a baby, as he received the news that the man's son didn't survive.

"Somehow, somehow everybody experienced it," he said.

Pastor Michael Grady, whose daughter survived the shooting, helped lead the prayer at the Aug. 3 anniversary ceremony. His daughter was shot three times and subsequently endured 22 operations. It's important to continue to uplift those who were injured in the attack, in addition to those who

died, as the community works to heal, Samaniego said.

"I don't want anybody to ever forget the wounded that continue to struggle, like Pastor Grady's daughter," he said. "She always reminds me, 'We don't get the coverage, we don't get the hugs, like the other families do, and we went through a lot.'"

In 2022, the garden was designated as a national memorial. The mass shooting devastated the El Paso community, but Samaniego said he also often thinks about its effect on Hispanic people across the country.

"I always say there's this young man in Chicago who's Hispanic, wondering why anybody would not want [someone to be] Hispanic, or why they would go against Hispanics?" Samaniego said.

"We know that the healing is not just our community. I would say the entire United States got impacted, because of the disbelief of what happened, so I feel, with a tremendous amount of passion, that the

healing has to continue."

A beautiful thing that has come out of the tragedy is connection — not just within the community, but with communities across the country that have dealt with mass shootings, Samaniego said. People from Houston who experienced the Santa Fe High School mass shooting in 2018 reached out to El Paso County, asking how they could help, and Samaniego said he reached out to local government representatives in Uvalde, Texas and Buffalo, N.Y. after their mass shootings.

"I think just every community that has gone through that feels a sense of responsibility to help another community and always reach out and make a call," he said. "I encourage every community who has gone through that to continue to help each other and, hopefully that never happens again to anybody, but if it does, they can reach out to us and we can reach out to them to see how we can help them."

The garden broke ground

exactly one year after the mass shooting and opened to the public on its second anniversary. At the opening ceremony, labor leader and civil rights activist Dolores Huerta — co-founder of the United Farm Workers union alongside Cesar Chavez — delivered a speech.

The fifth anniversary marked an unveiling of the garden's "eternal flame" installation, which burns 24/7 and was donated by a local gas company, and a mural painted by three local artists. Samaniego envisions the memorial as a space that will continually evolve.

"We haven't recovered internally. I think we're still dealing with it," Samaniego said. "... I always feel that we've got to keep this as a reminder, but a very beautiful reminder, of how a community can move forward and come out stronger." **CN**

The El Paso County Healing Garden was the 2025 NACo Achievement Award "Best in Category" winner in Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation.



Visitors recently reflect on those who lost their lives in a 2019 shooting, at El Paso County, Texas healing garden memorial park.

CALIFORNIA

• **Kennel Comforters** is a volunteer group that meets monthly at **SAN DIEGO COUNTY**'s Carlsbad animal shelter to make **handmade beds for shelter animals**. Volunteers prep donated fabric at home, then gather to cut, stuff and sew washable beds of all sizes. What started 15 years ago with small cat beds has grown to include mats and custom sized mats for dogs, with each bed featuring a signature heart-shaped stitch.

The group now supports several shelters making up to 70 beds in a weekend. Volunteers of all ages and skill levels create the beds and the county provides space and support at the shelter.

MARYLAND

• **HOWARD COUNTY** Health Department has launched the **Doula Partnership Program**, a groundbreaking initiative aimed at improving maternal and infant health. This first-of-its-kind effort bridges public health services with private-sector expertise by connecting trained, certified doulas with families across a wide income range — from Medicaid-eligible individuals to those with private insurance. The program offers comprehensive support through pregnancy, birth, and the postpartum period.

Doulas provide emotional, physical, and informational support while working alongside medical teams to ensure



MISSISSIPPI

LAFAYETTE COUNTY's new animal shelter recently opened, marking a major milestone in local animal welfare, *The Oxford Eagle* reported. After years of planning and months of construction, the shelter began accepting animals in June. "We had our first intake on June 26, and just a few days later, we announced on Facebook that we were officially open," said Shelter Director Daniel Christenbury. The shelter has already seen its first adoption and received several applications.

The 4,160-square-foot facility includes an outdoor exercise area and is funded by the county. It is managed by the Lafayette County Humane Society, which partners with the Tubbs Spay and Neuter Clinic to support its operations.



CALIFORNIA

• The **ALAMEDA COUNTY** Board of Supervisors recently heard testimony from a responding officer about a **drone's role during a police chase**, *SiliconValley.com* reported. "Because of the UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle), I didn't have to worry about being ambushed or any threats close by," he said. While the sheriff's office has used drones for years, the new model will launch remotely from a substation to respond to active crimes and emergencies, providing real-time reconnaissance to

Officers enables remote drone launches for active crimes and emergencies, delivering reconnaissance to police and firefighters ahead of arrival.

police and firefighters and potentially reducing unnecessary dispatches.

The Board recently approved a one-year \$600,000 contract with a company to supply a Drone as First Responder (DFR) system. "It's really been an invaluable tool for road safety, law enforcement and fire operations," said Sgt. Justin Brannon said. "DFR is the future."

all birthing needs are met. Through the department's P.E.A.C.E. Project, eligible families are referred to doulas, with most or all service costs covered. "This innovative model of care strengthens our commitment to health equity and gives families the resources they need for a healthier start," said Dr. Maura Rossman, Howard County Health officer.

• **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** recently launched a pilot program called "**Curbside Seating Cafes**." This initiative allows participating restaurants to convert curbside parking spaces into accessible outdoor dining areas, complete with seating, tables and plant-

ings either at street level or on raised platforms. County Executive Marc Elrich expressed enthusiasm for the program, highlighting its potential to support local businesses and enhance the community's vibrancy through increased outdoor dining options.

Restaurant owners must follow specific steps including obtaining written support from nearby businesses, gaining site approval, applying for a public right-of-way permit and paying applicable fees.

Participants must also submit plans and documentation online, contact a DPS ROW inspector after the permit is issued, and secure an alcohol license if serving alcoholic beverages.

PENNSYLVANIA

• **LUZERNE COUNTY**'s administration recently scheduled a town hall to brief the public on how **artificial intelligence** may be used in its government operations to enhance services, *The Times Leader* reported.

The county officially launched "NextGen Luzerne County," which it describes as a groundbreaking pilot program exploring how AI can responsibly enhance the efficiency, transparency and delivery of public services. County First Assistant Solicitor Vito DeLuca is spearheading the initiative and is Pennsylvania's first county-level chief artificial intelligence officer, county announcements have noted. "We want to ensure that our residents have a clear understanding of what the county's AI initiative entails," County Manager Romilda Crocamo said.

• The **COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA** has hired Kyle Kopko as its **executive di-**



GEORGIA

DEKALB COUNTY recently opened a **state-of-the-art tuberculosis (TB) clinic**, as the county works to address the highest number of TB cases in Georgia, *WAGA-TV* reported.

According to the Georgia Department of Public Health, the county reported 52 TB cases last year — more than any of the state's 159 counties. Along with **FULTON** and **GWINNETT** counties, the metro Atlanta area accounted for nearly 46% of all TB cases statewide. The new clinic spans 2,625 square feet and is specifically designed to improve care and reduce the risk of airborne disease transmission.



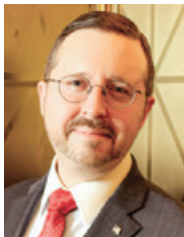
NEW YORK

After a suspected shark bite occurred on Long Island, N.Y. earlier this summer, **NASSAU COUNTY** Executive Bruce Blakeman ramped up safety measures to **keep beachgoers safe this summer**, People magazine reported.

Blakeman held a beachside press conference to announce plans for patrols by air and sea to watch out for sharks. To prove that he felt safe, he even took a dip in the ocean for the cameras.

“We will have our helicopters out. We will have drones out. We will have our beach patrols out. The lifeguards will be out. We will do everything to keep you safe. We’ll have boats on the water,” said Blakeman said, according to LIHerald.com. The patrols will also help identify other seaside risks such as riptides, which Blakeman also warned beachgoers to be aware of while in the waters.

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Kopko

rector. He was previously the executive director of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania

and an associate dean and associate professor of political science at Elizabethtown College.

TENNESSEE

KNOX COUNTY recently announced that it has launched a website to promote economic opportunities through **trade-based education and workforce training**, according to WVLT-TV. The Skilled Trades Academy Regional Training (START) Center brings together information and highlights program offerings and upcoming opportunities. County Mayor Glenn Jacobs said visitors can also sign up to receive updates and learn how to get involved.

“This new webpage makes it even easier for students, families, and job seekers to learn about the opportunities available,” said Jacobs. “This is about connecting people

to real careers in the skilled trades and continuing to grow our local workforce.” See the new website here: <https://starttn.com/>

TEXAS

TRAVIS COUNTY has established a short-term **disaster relief program** to help

support residents impacted by the tragic flooding near the Guadalupe River, KVUE-TV reported. The County Commissioners Court approved a formal agreement with the Central Texas Community Foundation to establish and manage the Travis County CARES Fund.

“Travis County CARES will help affected community members and families get back on their feet and allow them to focus their efforts on personal healing,” said Travis County Judge Andy Brown. “The road to full recovery will be long, but with partners like the Central Texas Community Foundation, we can make this road a little easier for those who need the help. I thank everyone at Central Texas Community Foundation for their partnership and the people who are generously donating to this worthy cause.”

• **Tourism in KANE COUNTY** faces uncertainty as two wildfires near the Arizona border block access to major attractions, KJZZ-TV reported. “We rank number four in the state for tourism reliance,” said county Tourism Director Jeanette Peatross. “About 1,600 jobs depend on it.” Nearly 4.8 million cars pass through the region annually. With the

VIRGINIA

To **attract visitors to its parks**, **HENRY COUNTY** has introduced the Trailblazer Challenge, an initiative designed to transform ordinary park visits into engaging, photo-filled adventures, WSET-TV reported.

Participants are encouraged to visit 10 of the county’s 29 parks and capture photos at each location based on fun prompts.

Brandon Martin, the public information officer for Henry County, said, “We really want people to explore our

parks. It promotes health, strengthens community ties, and just brings people together around nature. Parks are a very valuable asset, and the more people use them, the more benefits they provide.”



Grand Canyon’s North Rim now closed for the year, local businesses are losing vital summer and fall visitors early.

To ease the impact, Peatross is calling for support from all levels of government and coordination with the National Park Service. “We need to

work with park officials, our state, and neighboring states to show we’re ready to help and recover,” she said.

Send your news and photos to Mary Ann Barton at mbarton@naco.org.

UTAH

• **Search and rescue teams in GRAND COUNTY** responded to three separate incidents over two days recently, including an incident involving a BASE jumper, KSL-TV reported. BASE jumping is an extreme sport involving parachuting from a fixed object. The BASE jumper was injured after striking a wall during a jump near Ida Gulch along the Colorado River. Crews used a boat to reach the injured jumper and transported him to a nearby medical helicopter; he was taken to a hospital, though his condition was not released.

With temperatures in Moab exceeding 100 degrees, officials are urging people to plan ahead for outdoor activities. The team advised starting early in the day, hydrating the day before, and bringing water, electrolytes, salty snacks and a map to stay safe during high-heat conditions.



SAVE THE DATES

Upcoming NACo Conferences

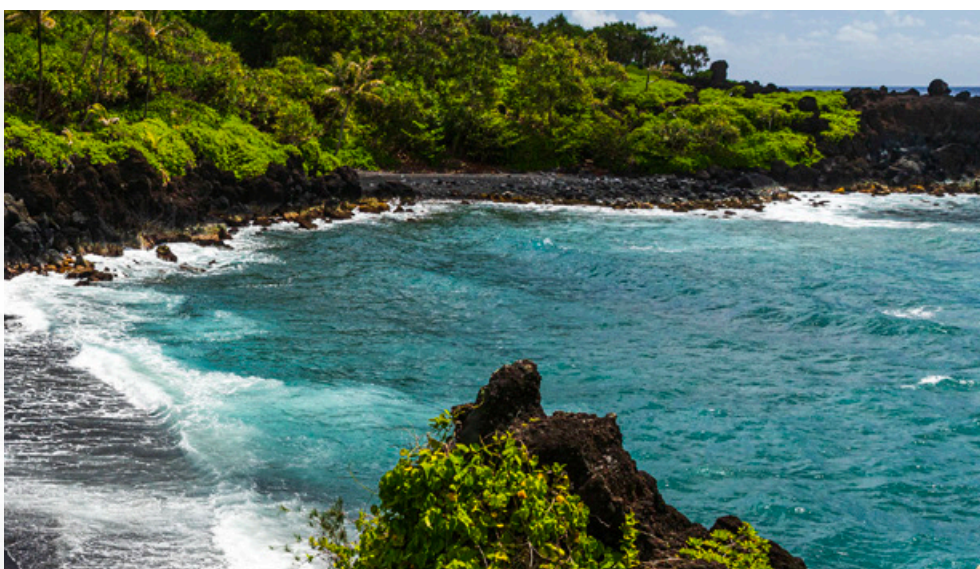
2026 NACo Legislative Conference

February 21-24
Washington, D.C.



2026 Western Interstate Region Conference

May 5-8
Maui County, Hawaii



2026 NACo Annual Conference & Expo

July 17-20
Orleans Parish/New Orleans, La.

