CN CountyNews

'NACo AT 90' BOOK EXCERPT EXPLORES 1990s, 2000s. PG. 4

TINCHER JOINS NACo AS MEMBER ENGAGEMENT DIRECTOR. PG. 9

TEXAS COUNTY TURNS FORMER OIL FIELD INTO FLOOD BUFFER. PG. 13

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES VOL. 57, NO. 18 NOVEMBER 17, 2025

Counties pivot as federal substance use funding shifts

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Federal changes to substance use disorder (SUD) funding and policy will have significant implications for how counties deliver prevention, treatment and recovery services, Blaire Bryant, NACo legislative director for health policy, told members of the NACo Opioid Solutions Leadership Network Nov. 6 in Washington, D.C.

Forthcoming federal funding reforms are expected to place additional pressure on resources counties rely on for substance use disorder (SUD) services. These include H.R. 1 reductions to Medicaid — the nation's largest payer for behavioral health services — and recissions of certain discretionary funds that have supported SUD programs. A recent White House Executive Order on homelessness and behavioral health has prompted new restrictions on the use of future Substance Use Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Services Block Grant funds for harm reduction initiatives.

Opioid settlement dollars are the only direct source of funding that counties receive for substance use disorder programs, totaling about $55 billion distributed across states, localities and tribal nations over 18 years.

While the changes outlined in H.R. 1 and the "Ending Crime and Disorder on America's Streets" Executive Order don't revoke or directly impact opioid settlement dollars, they will likely shift how counties spend the funding, because they limit how federal funding is spent, Bryant said.

"I think the biggest implication of some of the changes that we're seeing at the federal level is doing more with less, and so that has implications on how you're able to use and what you're funding with your settlement dollars," she said. Which can mean "if you were planning to do one thing with your settlement dollars, you may have to reallocate it to something else that [now] gets less funding."

There remains flexibility with Medicaid waivers, and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) continues to work with states to implement them, but it is unclear if waivers will be affected down the line, according to Bryant. Notably, even if

See FUNDING page 16

Pershing Square Plaza at Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan in New York is lit up green to show support for our nation's veterans. Operation Green Light started in 2021 as a collaboration between the New York State Association of Counties and the NYS County Veteran Service Officers Association. Today, counties across the country take part lighting up their buildings green to support veterans.

Federal government shutdown ends, but impacts linger for counties

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

The longest federal government shutdown ended after 43 days on Nov. 12, with an agreement that extended funding for key agriculture, health and other programs that support counties that expired at the end of September.

The continuing resolution included full funding for three of 12 Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations bills that fund all other federal agencies at Fiscal Year 2025 levels through Jan. 30, 2026. That sets a new deadline to pass the remaining nine appropriations bills.

During the shutdown, counties worked to bridge the gap between federal funding and residents' needs, chief among them the programs for SNAP — Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program — and WIC — Women, Infants and Children, which counties administer in 10 states. After more than two dozen states sued the Trump administration to force the use of the SNAP contingency fund, counties found themselves fol-

See OPEN page 3

Sacramento County partners with tribe to solve Indigenous cases

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Native Americans disproportionately experience violence and are murdered at higher rates than any other race in the country, and due to resource gaps and distrust in law enforcement, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) cases are at least seven times less likely to be solved than any other group.

In California, the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office and District Attorney's Office are teaming up with the Wilton Rancheria Tribe to address the crisis through the creation of a Regional MMIP Task Force — the first of its kind in California, which has the fifth-highest number of unsolved MMIP cases in the country.

Jesus Tarango, Jr., chairman of the Wilton Rancheria tribal nation, spearheaded the concept and California Assemblymember James Ramos (the first Native American lawmak-

See TASK FORCE page 8

Nebraska counties add new office, new NACo members

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

The real estate adage is location, location, location. But for the Nebraska Association of County Officials, two locations made more sense.

Naturally, proximity to the state capitol is crucial for a policy organization, which explains NACO's longstanding presence in Lancaster County (Lincoln). But when Executive Director Jon Cannon cuts the state in half from east to west, he sees a more challenging proposition.

"The population in Nebraska tilts heavily to the east, but the population of county officials is actually streaming a little bit more evenly because of the number of counties," he said. "What we found was that almost half of county officials live west of that imaginary line. It's not very efficient to send someone driving to Harrison, which is about as far as you can get from Lincoln and be spending eight hours on the road each way for a three-hour visit."

The association's Board of Directors gave Cannon and his deputy, Candace Meredith, the slack to find office space in the western part of the state, and they settled on Ogallala, in Keith County.

"It kind of permeates how we view the state in the sense that we love Douglas County and Lancaster County, but we really serve all 93 counties, so that reflects itself in the fact that we really need to have that second office again so we can project our resources more efficiently," Cannon said.

That second office, dubbed the NACO West Training Center, includes an office for Operations Clerk Peggy Bass, who moved to staff the facility, and a training center and boardroom dedicated to former executive directors Jack Mills and Larry J. Dix respectively; in all, three offices that the organization leased before opening the building. Before NACO launched a marketing campaign for rentals, the facility played host to 28 events in 13 months.

The newly built NACO West facility is designed to extend resources to membership of county officials, as well as associations and community organizations. Photo courtesy of Nebraska Association of Counties

"We're just really impressed with the community support," Meredith said. "Ogallala is a relatively small town, especially compared to Lincoln but the community has really embraced us there."

Sioux County Commissioner Josh Skavdahl sees it as a major boon to help recruit new officials in more rural counties.

"In many cases in Nebraska, county leadership was almost institutionalized," he said, noting that many officials have stayed in office for decades and some stay because they don't see successors willing to step up.

The proximity to the training that will help new county leaders do their job will make the responsibility more attractive.

"Typically, in all those rural counties, you're a full-time rancher, a farmer or banker, a school teacher, and you don't have the time to travel two or three days to eastern Nebraska [for training] so it's attracting and will continue to attract a younger generation into county positions, which is direly needed."

All-in

As July 2025 dawned, Nebraska became NACo's newest 100% membership state. Douglas County Commissioner Mary Ann Borgeson set a goal for the state to reach that point when she was NACo president in 2019-2020, but the end of her year, which was dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, became the state association's fuel to tackle the NACo membership effort.

"ARPA (the American Rescue Plan Act) was kind of a big deal and you had these counties that are seeing this influx of cash that they've never seen before, so we got out to some of those counties to explain how to use that one-time funding, but we explained that it wouldn't have been possible without the National Association of Counties working with Congress, the Trump Administration and the Biden Administration and the Treasury Department to make it happen."

NACo picked up a few new member counties from that, and then the state association Board of Directors voted to combine and collect dues for both organizations simultaneously and added the last few counties.

That reflects the state association's theme for its annual conference, "All In," when the staff will reinforce why national membership is crucial.

"We've had conversations at our district meetings in the fall and will in the spring," Meredith said.

Plugged in to WIR

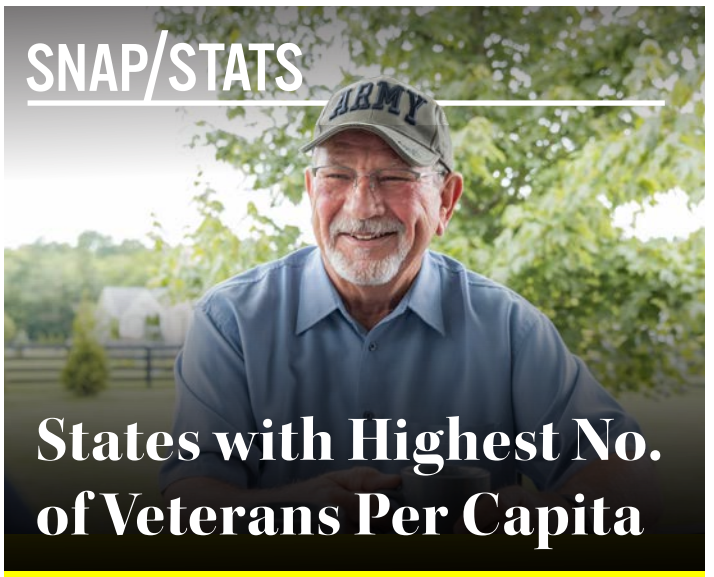
Nebraska also joined NACo's Western Interstate Region (WIR) in 2024 as a probationary associate member.

Former Banner County Commissioner Bob Post, who served as Rural Action Caucus (RAC) chair, initiated the move and Skavdahl picked up the mantle when Post left office. Both counties border Wyoming, and both officials saw a lot of similarities with their neighbors to the west.

"When I started diving into their key legislative priorities, I found they really aligned with a lot of the things that we were facing here in Nebraska," Meredith said, noting that WIR's advocacy work magnifies work done through RAC. "In some small pockets of Nebraska, we're facing public lands issues, not on the same scale as Montana or Wyoming, but there are pockets of rural counties that feel like an island, so having WIR support for PILT (Payments in Lieu of Taxes) funding was really important."

Skavdahl, who works as a rancher, sees Nebraska's membership as part of a greater agricultural economy.

"I saw that 80% of the cattle that are raised in WIR states go to Nebraska in the end," for slaughtering, Skavdahl said. "How goes WIR, so goes the beef industry in Nebraska." CN



States with Highest No. of Veterans Per Capita

Alaska:	11.9%
Montana:	10.6%
Virginia:	10.6%
Wyoming:	10.2%
Hawaii:	9.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

CountyNews

President
JD Clark
Publisher
Matthew Chase
Chief Public Affairs Officer
Lori Dicker

Editor and Senior Writer
Mary Ann Barton
Digital Editor and Senior Writer
Charlie Ban
Staff Writer
Meredith Moran
Design Director
Leon Lawrence III

ADVERTISING STAFF
Job Market/Classifieds representative
National Accounts representative
Mary Ann Barton
202.942.4223
FAX 866.752.1573

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

The appearance of paid advertisements in County News in no way implies support or endorsement by the National Association of Counties for any of the products, services or messages advertised. Periodicals postage paid at Washington D.C. and other offices.

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

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

(USPS 704-620) n (ISSN: 0744-9798)

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES NACo

We are committed to getting County News on your desktop ASAP. Send your address corrections to cnews@naco.org.

Longest federal government shutdown in history ends but SNAP, air travel upended

From OPEN page 1

lowing guidance that changed almost daily as various court orders took precedence. SNAP is now funded through September 2026.

That illustrated the conditions that federal shutdowns impose on counties, which rely on a consistent intergovernmental relationship to serve residents.

"Yes, the government shutdown ended last night when the House passed their bill and the president signed it, but it's getting the government up and running, it doesn't mean that the government's up and running today," said Lucas County, Ohio Commissioner Lisa Sobecki.

"I want to stay very optimistic, but one thing this shutdown did show me, was that, 'What one giveth, one will taketh away.' And we have families that were hurting."

Lucas County allocated $100,000 to two local food banks to help alleviate the funding challenges posed by SNAP inconsistency. The agreement that ended the shutdown will not reimburse counties for payments made to food banks.

"That's really a shame, because Lucas County stepped up, like many other counties," she said. "But we went with it, knowing that we would not be reimbursed, but we knew it was the right thing to do for our community — all the way from senior citizens to veterans to our small kiddos."

U.S. Capitol

The stress borne throughout the intergovernmental partnership was evident in airports served by the Essential Air Service (EAS) program, which helps small communities maintain commercial airline service but integrates local services and federal workers. That program received a series of short-term extensions, the latest of which was set to run through Nov. 18. After the Federal Aviation Administration mandated flight cuts to the 40 largest airports, some of those cancelations trickled down to smaller destinations, including the John Murtha Johnstown-Cambria County Airport in Pennsylvania, which lost two flights recently.

Although Transportation Security Administration personnel worked without pay for more than six weeks, the airport manager there, Cory Cree, said none of the staff called off throughout the shutdown.

"We talked to our carrier, and they were committing to continue to operate regardless of the funding from the Department of Transportation," Cree said.

Johnstown is a two-hour drive from the Pittsburgh International Airport, so air service to the area is crucial to its viability for both business and leisure travel Essential Air Service has been a cornerstone in that effort, Cree said, particularly in upgrading air carriers in 2020.

"Our flights were down because of the type of aircraft that we were flying at that time — the nine-seaters that couldn't always fly in winter weather," he said. "It was tough to be reliable all the time with that. Now that we have 50-seat jets, we can fly all year-round without as many issues with the weather. Before that, business travelers' insurance requirements wouldn't let their employees fly on single-engine aircraft, so EAS has helped us serve business travelers.

"It is a lifeline to our community."

In addition to direct effects on county-run services, the resolution to the shutdown will:

- Establish a framework for reimbursing states and grantees, including counties, that used their own funds to continue federal programs during the lapse.
- Extend authorization for the State and Local Cybersecurity Grant Program and the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act of 2015.
- Prevent sequestration cuts to the Social Services Block Grant, Promoting Safe and Stable Families, and the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.
- Authorize Wildland Fire Management funding at the Agriculture and Interior departments to continue wildfire suppression efforts.
- Authorize use of carryover funds within the Housing Choice Voucher program to fund renewals of existing rental assistance commitments.
- Prohibit the closure of Farm Service Agency county offices.
- Extend programs authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill through Sept. 30, 2026.
- Reauthorize mandatory funding for key local health safety net programs to include community health centers ($1.42 billion), the National Health Service Corps ($15.3 million), and Teaching Health Centers that operate Graduate Medical Education programs ($58.5 million) through Jan. 30, 2026.
- Extends access to enhanced supplemental payments to county hospitals serving individuals who are low-income, indigent or uninsured by delaying Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital payment reductions until Jan. 31, 2026. CN

COUNTY NEWS PODCAST

Eastern Tennessee counties invest in tourism during shutdown

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

As the most-visited national park, Great Smoky Mountains National Park has long been a major draw to Eastern Tennessee and Western North Carolina. Its creation has helped Sevier County, Tenn. transform not only its economy away from subsistence agriculture, but as a leader in the region as a major hub of tourism.

"We have about 14 million visitors come to the park every year, so it's a big draw for our area, and tourism is our major industry, and it depends a lot on the park," Sevier County Mayor Larry Waters told the County News Podcast.

That made the timing of the federal government shutdown particularly threatening for Sevier County, its main tourist town Gatlinburg and its neighbors. With fall foliage expected to attract many of the park's 14 million annual visitors, closing the park could deal a serious blow to the region's economy.

Sevier County took on responsibility as the lead agency in paying the National Park Service to keep the park open during the shutdown and give local businesses a chance to finish strong this year. Waters discusses the strategy that went into that plan, what the county and its neighbors are funding and what it means to the region on the County News Podcast. CN

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is a magnet for fall tourists, important to nearby local businesses.

Listen to the County News Podcast on your smartphone's podcasting app, by visiting www.naco.org/podcast or by scanning the QR code.

Naake-led years bring stability, growth to NACo

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

As NACo celebrates its 90th year, County News is serializing a book commemorating the occasion. You can read it in full and learn more about NACo's anniversary at www.naco.org/90.

Celebrating counties

At the end of his tenure, Executive Director John Thomas saw the birth of a major public affairs effort. The country observed National County Government Week between April 7-13, 1991, a celebration that later expanded to all of April in 2010, stressing counties' role in the intergovernmental relationship with the federal government, cities, states and tribes. More than 80 counties and state associations recognized the week.

With county officials in attendance in the Oval Office, President George H.W. Bush signed a proclamation during the Legislative Conference:

"In recent years, more and more Americans have realized what many have known all along: That the answer to many of the problems before us can be found, not in bigger federal government, but in effective local leadership and cooperation between citizens and public officials at all levels. Indeed, we know the government closest to the people is truly government of the people, by the people and for the people. This is the essence of federalism and democracy, and it is key to meeting many of the challenges and opportunities before our country."

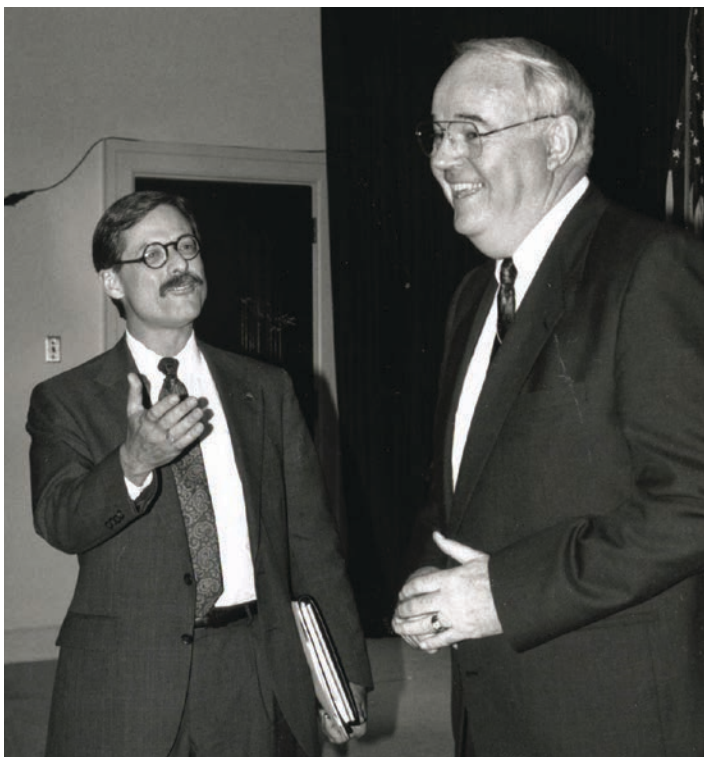
As a testament to the organization's recovery over the prior nine years, NACo received more than 200 applications to succeed Thomas, as he left to lead the American Society for Public Administration. The executive committee reached back onto NACo's bench with Larry Naake, the executive director of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), who had worked in NACo's legislative affairs in the early 1970s and again in the early 1980s. The same Larry Naake whom Bernie Hillenbrand had entrusted the General Revenue Sharing lobbying effort in the 1970s.

NACo soon advanced some of its own to the federal government. Jim Snyder, a Cattaraugus County, N.Y. legislator and former NACo president, left county office to serve as director of intergovernmental affairs for President Bush. He noted a distinct lack of county awareness among his colleagues in the executive branch, and he sought to correct this.

"Some people in the White House didn't know the difference between a county and a city. It was a shock to me," he said in 2019.

Ten years later, President George W. Bush would also bring a county veteran in as director of intergovernmental affairs, former San Mateo County, Calif. Supervisor Ruben Barrales. That administration also included former Orange County, Fla. Mayor Mel Martinez, who served as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

President George H.W. Bush signs a proclamation March 19, 1991 establishing National County Government Week. Looking on are: John Thomas, NACo executive director; Ann Klinger, NACo immediate past president; Michael Steward, NACo president; Kaye Braaten, NACo first vice president; Sen. Conrad Burns (R-Mont.) and Rep. Ben Erdreich (D-Ala.), who introduced the measure in Congress; Barbara Sheen Todd, NACo third vice president and John Stroger, NACo second vice president. Photo by David Hathcox



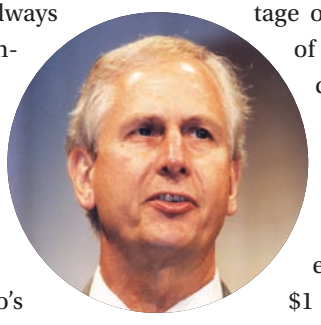
NACo Past President James Snyder (right) served as special assistant to the president for intergovernmental affairs for George Bush.

Cooperative purchasing

When Naake returned to NACo, he left a small but reliable cooperative purchasing project at CSAC which his successor, Steve Swendiman, grew.

He soon recruited Swendiman, formerly a Shasta County, Calif. supervisor, to join NACo and bring his business sense with him.

"I was never a guy who wanted to lobby," Swendiman said. "I always preferred the management side of things."



Larry Naake

Swendiman didn't take a salary and lived on the road while he built NACo's new for-profit Financial Services Center.

"That revenue went back into the organization, after the expenses, and really supported the concept that we don't have to live just on dues," Swendiman said.

The program, one of the first of its kind, took advantage of the economies of scale when bundling the needs of many counties to secure lower purchase prices. David Davenport invested $1 million to seed the program.

Swendiman is quick to credit Naake with navigating the elements at play.

"How do you create something that's going to have a residual revenue flow to NACo? How do you do that without disturbing a nonprofit?" he said. "I think it was masterful."

Swendiman also lauded Fairfax County, Va. Supervisor Gerry Hyland for giving cooperative purchasing the shot in the arm it needed, after pitches to other nonprofits to get in on the business were unsuccessful. Hyland won Fairfax's purchasing director over on the service and before too long, Fairfax County and Los Angeles County were competing to do the most business, motivated by the 5% commission counties would earn.

The first major contract, with Office Depot, started at $2 million and grew to $700 million a year in seven years.

"It turned out to be our bread-and-butter program and it allowed us to do a bunch of other programs," Swendiman said. Doug Bovin, a Delta County, Mich. commissioner who was NACo's president when the Financial Services Center launched, was an evangelist for the program in Michigan. "It had the great dual benefit of making things more affordable for counties, while allowing NACo to be able to do more and be financially secure," he said. "The savings were incredible. We could never have paid the same prices on our own. It was a way NACo could demonstrate its value on counties' balance sheets."

By 2018, U.S. Communities, as the cooperative purchasing venture was known, had grown in 23 years to $3.5 billion in annual sales, with 45 high-value national contracts. When partners in the business sold to a competitor, NACo sold its interest in the entity. Following a four-year non-compete agreement, NACo returned to the business, launching Public Promise Procurement and Public Promise Insurance under the

See HISTORY page 5

From HISTORY page 4

rebranded NACo EDGE.

Back in the 1990s, a growing corporate membership program put vendors in front of county decision-makers, reflecting a nationwide trend toward more formalized public-private partnerships to address local and regional issues.

NACo also sold its option to purchase the building on First Street, netting $2.3 million. By 1997, NACo's 15-year deficit was eliminated and two years later, the organization boasted a $5.5 million surplus.

Caucuses

Following the riots in Los Angeles in April and May 1992, then-First Vice President John Stroger, a Cook County, Ill. commissioner, called for an urban county summit later in May to meet with White House and congressional leaders.

"All you need to do is look at the Los Angeles riots to see how extensive a role county government plays in the life of urban America," Stroger said. "It was the county health network that handled the emergency admissions during the unrest. It was the county fire department that fought nearly 1,000 fires during the days of the disturbance, and it's the county that will have to deal with the overcrowded court system in the aftermath of thousands of riot arrests."

The Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) held its first regular conference in Washington, D.C. that fall. The caucus would meet every year but 2020 for its own conference with urban-centric themes. Programming and advocacy are oriented toward counties with populations of 500,000 and above.

Four years later, President Michael Hightower, a Fulton County, Ga. commissioner, established the Rural Renaissance Task Force, which later begat the Rural Action Caucus (RAC), led by Blue Earth County, Minn. Commissioner Colleen Landkamer, later a NACo president, and Harney County, Ore. Judge Dale White, previously a Western Interstate Region president. Landkamer later twice served as Minnesota state director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The 1990s brought a new opponent into view for counties: Unfunded mandates. President George H.W. Bush decried them during his 1992 State of the Union address. Photo by David Hathcox

"At first it was just 10 or 20 of us — now look at it," Landkamer said of RAC, a caucus that strains the occupancy limits of its conference meeting rooms. "The rural voice is so critical, and RAC members are getting so much information tailored to their needs they wouldn't get anywhere else."

In 2025, NACo's board filled the gap by establishing a new Mid-Sized County Caucus.

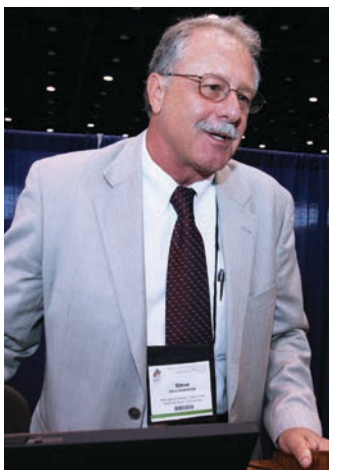
Unfunded mandates

The 1990s brought a new opponent into view for counties: Unfunded mandates. President Bush decried them during his 1992 State of the Union address:

"We must put an end to unfinanced federal government mandates. These are the requirements Congress puts on our cities, counties and states without supplying the money. If Congress passes a mandate, it should be forced to pay for it and balance the cost with savings elsewhere. After all, a mandate just increases someone else's burden, and that means higher taxes at the state and local level."

In 1993, NACo found allies among the Big Seven public interest organizations, including the National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the International City/County Management Association.

"We couldn't have done this on our own. No one organization could do this without help," said then-NACo President Barbara Sheen Todd, a Pinellas County, Fla. commissioner. "This wasn't a matter of being against Congress, it was a matter of saying, 'This is how it affects us when Congress makes decisions.'"



Steve Swendiman, founder and managing director of NACo's Financial Services Center. Photo by David Hathcox

The Big Seven organizations held news conferences across the country on Oct. 27 — National Unfunded Mandates Day, including results from a survey by PriceWaterhouse that found that unfunded mandates cost counties $4.9 billion.

In 1994, Legislative Conference attendees marched to Capitol Hill for a "Stop the Mandate Madness" rally.

The effort got some help from the Republican Party's Contract with America platform, which supported Sen. Dick Kempthorne's (R-Idaho) Unfunded Mandates Reform Act. That bill was signed into law March 22, 1995, requiring that the federal government consult with elected officers of local governments to provide meaningful and timely input in the development of proposed rules containing significant federal intergovernmental mandates, consider a reasonable number of regulatory alternatives and select the least costly, least burdensome or most cost-effective option and include cost-benefit analyses for the rule.

Members in the driver's seat

NACo's legitimacy on Capitol Hill and around the United States is derived from our member-driven approach to policy development and advancement. Members on 10 policy steering committees recommend the agenda each year, giving the NACo board and staff direction in our government affairs efforts.

NACo members engage in many ways. Steering committee members dedicate an hour each month for calls, plus countless other ways, in actively offering ideas and feedback to White House and agency officials, congressional committee and coalition partners.

Other officials encourage their staff to attend conferences. Some large counties like Franklin County, Ohio bring more than two dozen staff to conferences. Some elected officials, such as those in Hanover County, Va. in 2005, made it a point in their public meetings to credit NACo with a particular program or solution they are employing. In recent years, Ramsey County, Minn. commissioners have been prolific in NACo leadership, serving as chairs of two steering committees and the Large Urban County Caucus in the 2010s. Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire went even further, serving as NACo's president.

"It's just part of our culture in Ramsey County to be involved in NACo and the Association of Minnesota Counties," she said. "It was accepted, encouraged and supported. We make sure there's a travel budget because it's an investment in our county."

McGuire credited the rest of her Board of Commissioners with shifting her responsibilities during her presidency to accommodate both roles.

"They were totally behind me because they knew what NACo means when we interact with the federal government," she said.

Don Stapley ran for the NACo executive committee, and served as president in the late 2000s, to ensure that Maricopa County, Ariz., where he was a supervisor, had a voice in the national policy discussion.

"We knew the issues we faced were on a different scale than a lot of counties, but more often than not, they are still the same issues," he said.

NACo's Board of Directors is one of the largest in the nonprofit world. In addition to Board nominees from state associations, NACo's president nominates 10 members, and NACo's 24 affiliates also have seats.

States that have 100 percent NACo membership earn an extra seat on the Board of Directors, which motivates recruitment. Larry Johnson, a DeKalb County, Ga. commissioner, served as NACo's ambassador throughout the state, before, during and after his presidency, helping to achieve 100 percent membership.

"I was able to show Georgians that NACo is a partner,

See HISTORY page 6

NACo officials formalized governance structure, leadership

From HISTORY page 5

Fairfax County, Va. Supervisor Gerry Hyland (center) was an early champion of the U.S. Communities cooperative purchasing business.

that it complements everything we do on the state level," he said. "We're the eighth largest state in the nation, and it's time for us to use that voice and to make the South even stronger. We have so many more Georgians involved in steering committees now, it's a point of pride for me."

NACo executive leadership displays an even higher level of commitment.

Randy Johnson, then a Hennepin County, Minn. commissioner, once made three trips to Washington, D.C. in the 1990s to testify before congressional committees in a single week while he was a NACo vice president, all while attending to his responsibilities at home. Riki Hokama's presidency may have set a record for air miles traveled, owing to his home county of Maui in Hawaii. The distance and the time zone difference did not dull his passion for NACo advocacy.

"I wanted to try to visit every state while I was on the executive committee," said Valerie Brown, a Sonoma County, Calif. supervisor who served as NACo's president. "You meet so many people who put their time and energy into county government in states where they have different responsibilities and powers, it's really fascinating."

Randy Franke, a Marion County, Ore. commissioner who served as NACo's president in the 1990s, regularly came home with napkins covered in notes from conversations with county officials at different state association meetings. "The travel was worth it for all of the impressions you get to make and receive from the members," he said. "It's a big country and there was always something to learn about what more we could be doing for counties."

The runway through the executive committee has shortened since its six-seat process in the late 1970s to four today.

State and county policies often play a large part in when county officials can seek office, given county officials in some states face term limits. New Mexico, for example, limits officials to two terms, forcing candidates to pursue NACo office very early in their elected careers. Others have short windows of opportunity.

"When I thought about it, there was really only one year that it made sense for me to run, given what I wanted to do with my career," said Bill Hansell, a Umatilla County, Ore. commissioner who served as NACo president.

Because they must be elected county officials to serve in a leadership capacity, some NACo officers have had to forfeit their seats after losing reelection. On the other side of the spectrum, King County, Wash. Executive John Spellman vacated his seat upon his election as governor in 1980. There are times when NACo has held simultaneous elections for multiple executive committee seats.

NACo moved away from a nominating committee in favor of direct elections for officer positions in the late 1980s.

> 'I was just a nurse from a farming community who ran to fix our roads and bridges...'
>
> *– Kaye Braaten, Richland County, N.D.*

Now, the executive committee consists of a second vice president, first vice president, president and immediate past president, along with four regional representatives, a format introduced in 2010 after a governance review committee led by San Diego County, Calif. Supervisor Greg Cox, who served as NACo president several years later. Those regional representatives, the West, South, Central and Northeast, help facilitate communications with membership on a regional level.

Competitive elections don't necessarily lead to acrimony among candidates. During the three-ballot, four-way race for second vice president in 2018, the candidates bonded and became friends during and after the campaign. En route to the Western Interstate Region Conference in Blaine County, Idaho, Boone County, Ky. Judge-Executive Gary Moore and DeKalb County, Ga. Commissioner Larry Johnson found themselves sitting next to each other on the flight from Salt Lake City.

"We had both been through primaries the day before, so we had a lot to talk about there," Moore said. "He was elected the next year, and we worked so closely together and became great friends."

In the late 1980s, the election for the executive committee featured a matchup between Kaye Braaten, from 18,000-person Richland County, N.D. and John Stroger, of then-5 million-person Cook County, Ill. Braaten prevailed, and Stroger succeeded her.

"We got along very well even though we ran against each other," Braaten said. "It was important for NACo to have that diversity. I was just a nurse from a farming community who ran to fix our roads and bridges, and he was from a county that did anything you could think of."

In addition to biweekly calls, members of the executive committee committed to ambitious travel schedules to attend conferences by state associations of counties.

NACo's leadership has featured noted diversity. Honolulu County, Hawaii's Clesson Chikasuye was NACo's first Japanese American president in 1970. Gladys Spellman, of Prince George's County, Md. was NACo's first woman president in 1972. Charlotte Williams, a Genessee County, Mich. Commissioner, was NACo's first African American president in 1978, and Santa Fe, N.M County Commissioner Javier Gonzales was NACo's first Hispanic president in 2001.

2000 election

The level of scrutiny over county-run elections reached a peak in November 2000, when the balance of the presidential election hung on the "butterfly" ballots distributed in Palm Beach County, Fla.

NACo and the National Association of County Recorders, Election Officials and Clerks formed the National Commission on Election

See HISTORY page 7

From HISTORY page 6

Standards and Reform to develop policy recommendations for Congress, states and counties. The commission's report, delivered in May 2001, addressed a variety of areas of concern and recommended best practices for dissemination throughout county election offices.

"One good thing that has come out of this year's election is that people have started talking about the role of counties in the electoral process," said King County, Wash. Councilmember Jane Hague, then NACo's president and a county elections official earlier in her career.

September 11, 2001

While the entire country, and even the world, was transfixed by the enormity of the day, counties were at work, cooperating with state and federal officials.

Flight 93 crashed less than 10 miles from the home of Somerset County, Pa. Commissioner Pamela Tokar-Ickes.

"On that day, we sort of divided all of the responsibilities that fell upon the county of Somerset," Tokar-Ickes said in 2022. "And we did what needed to be done. One of my fellow commissioners worked very closely with the coroner's office. Another one of the commissioners really assisted with all of the central purchasing requirements and the things that were needed. And I was tasked, really, immediately, with working on memorialization."

Three days later, the Somerset County courthouse was home to a massive memorial service, drawing thousands for one of the biggest gatherings in the county's history, including family members of Flight 93 passengers.

Knowing the site would soon become a national memorial, the county coordinated with the local historical society.

The response to the crash of United Airlines Flight 93 fell to county government. The county was responsible for coordinating with the coroner's office the recovery of the remains and the purchase of everything that was needed at that site for recovery.

Officers Randy Johnson, Jane Hague and Betty Lou Ward draw states during an Annual Business Meeting. Johnson was a Hennepin County commissioner, Hague was a King County councilmember and Ward was a Wake County commissioner. All served as NACo president. Photo by David Hathcox

"Everything from lip balm and sunscreen to the individuals who needed to be mobilized to actually search the site for human remains, everything," Tokar-Ickes said. "The Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency team told us: "This is your responsibility from start to finish. We just want you to know that. Nobody's going to come in here and do this for you. This is the county's responsibility.

"The county coroner held the crash site for more than a year and the county hired sheriff's deputies to patrol it day and night for more than a year until we could transition it over to the National Park Service. We could not release that site because you had people who were always wanting to come onto the site for various reasons, to pay their respects. We didn't feel that anyone should be on that site."

Across the river from New York City, Hudson County, N.J. assembled three staging areas where EMS personnel treated injured people and transported them to hospitals. The county's fire department responded on the day of the attacks, and several EMS personnel remained on the scene during recovery operations.

Arlington County, Va. EMS crews were first on site at the Pentagon, and by mid-morning more than 270 personnel were at work. Nearby counties contributed personnel and resources to the affected areas.

Counties bridged the gap staffing security at their airports between September 11 and when the Aviation Security Act established the Transportation Security Agency and put federal employees in charge of security and baggage screening at some county airports, which account for one-third of the nation's airports, and a user fee funded security measures at all U.S. airports.

> 'Counties have a significant role to play in our new national strategy for homeland security.'
>
> *– Javier Gonzales, Santa Fe County, N.M.*

Santa Fe County, N.M. Commissioner Javier Gonzales came into the NACo presidency focusing on rural county development. In an instant, his leadership pivoted.

"We got him a place to speak in front of the National Press Club that December, and he did a great job presenting where counties were in terms of protecting the country," said former NACo Legislative Director Ed Rosado.

Gonzales served as chairman of NACo's Homeland Security Task Force and testified before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, Dec. 11, 2001, demanding better coordination from federal agencies and increased assistance to counties for preparedness and security. He called for a $3 billion local anti-terrorism block grant to help finance emergency preparedness investments and for adequate funding of local public health infrastructure under the Public Health Threats and Emergencies Act.

"Counties have a significant role to play in our new national strategy for homeland security," Gonzales told the committee. "We are the public's first defense, but we do have limited resources and will need additional support and cooperation from the federal government in order to succeed."

NACo's Homeland Security Task Force adopted a 16-point policy platform addressing top issues for county governments in the areas of public health, local law enforcement and intelligence sharing, infrastructure security and emergency planning and public safety.

County leader education and training

"I always saw NACo as a higher education for elected officials," said C. Vernon Gray, a Howard County, Md. Councilmember who served as NACo president in 1999-2000. "It's a place where you go and learn more. A lot of people become local officials because they're popular at home. They get elected, and they've not done much in terms of educating themselves with all the issues."

Gray himself was chair of the political science department at Morgan State University, so had a unique perspective on the issue.

NACo has always incorporated educational workshops into its programming. More and more, steering committee meetings include presentations by subject matter experts to help communicate complex issues to county officials who are otherwise trying to manage their counties, usually while working a full-time job at home.

Former President Bryan Desloge, a Leon County, Fla. commissioner, said NACo's educational resources are important for smaller counties, where newly elected officials are more likely new to local government and need training that may not be available at home. Making county-focused education opportunities available to them, he said, can cut years off their learning curves and help prepare elected officials to govern effectively much faster than with experience alone.

In 2004, NACo introduced the County Leadership Institute (CLI) at New York University, later moved to Washington, D.C. The intensive leadership education course has served as an investment in county leaders, many of whom are in leadership roles in their state associations. Others would go on to NACo leadership and the presidency. Santa Barbara County, Calif. Supervisor Salud Carbajal later served in Congress.

Linn County, Iowa Supervisor Linda Langston, later a NACo president, was part of the inaugural CLI class. Participants to address the governing challenges one of their classmates was facing at home.

But Langston noted that a lot of the growth happened outside of class as the officials navigated New York City together.

"There were some people who had never been on the subway system and bonding over some of the experiences we had and things we saw along the way, built relationships that last to this day," she said. "When we face challenges in our counties, a lot of times we're consulting people who we got to know in that course." NACo added training for rank-and-file county staff in 2019 with the development of the High Performance Leadership Academy. The 12-week online program was designed by former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who cele-

See HISTORY page 9

County creates first-of-its-kind task force in California to solve Indigenous cases

From TASK FORCE page 1

er elected in the state) was a vocal supporter and helped make it happen.

"We will not let up," Tarango said at a task force memorandum of understanding signing in May. "To our community — especially those who have lost loved ones, who have waited years for answers — we will be unrelenting in our pursuit of justice, because our people deserve answers. Our families deserve closure, and our future generations deserve better."

The Sacramento County District Attorney's Office is dedicating an attorney, investigator and victim advocate, as well as access to its crime lab's DNA technology, to MMIP cases. Homicide detectives from the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office are working on both current and decades-old cold cases.

Previously, if an MMIP case needed forensic work, such as follow-up DNA testing or ballistics testing, it would be taken to the California Department of Justice crime lab, which can have a backlog of anywhere from six months to a year, according to Sacramento County District Attorney Thien Ho. The county district attorney's office (which is one of only a few in the country that directly runs a crime lab) can expedite that forensic work and make it happen in as little as two weeks, Ho said.

The creation of an MMIP task force is overdue, and should be a standard nationally, Ho said. More education around the prevalence of violence against Native Americans would lead to more institutional progress, he noted.

"We get so engrossed in the everyday struggle of everyday life, of one case after the other, that we then sometimes lose perspective in terms of seeing a need," Ho said. "… But when I started looking at the statistics — that Native women are 10 times more likely to be murdered — that is just jarring, so with that education and attention, we now need to take action."

The MMIP task force was able to launch earlier this year in 60 days. That sense of urgency needs to transfer over now to actually getting these cases solved, Ho said.

"We have to act with speed," Ho said. "We've waited, frankly, too long to get this going as a criminal justice system. We've waited decades, and every single day that goes by is another day of anguish for the families of those that are missing and murdered of indigenous people."

At least 20 MMIP cases are recorded every year in Northern California, and the actual number is believed to be much higher due to underreporting and limited data collection.

"These are not statistics — these are human beings," Tarango said at the memorandum signing. "They are daughters, they are sons, they are sisters, they are mothers — people whose lives mattered."

KCRA-TV, a local news station in Sacramento County, recently interviewed the grandparents of Khadijah Britton, a member of the Round Valley Indian Tribes who has been missing since 2018.

"Time's not on my side," Ronnie Hostler, Britton's grandfather, said. "… I want justice — that's my main goal now, is justice."

A 2017 poll conducted by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that 36% of Native Americans living in majority-Native American areas, including reservations, avoid calling law enforcement because they fear discrimination. The task force is a step forward in working to mend that distrust, according to Ho.

Sacramento County Supervisor Pat Hume has worked closely with the Wilton Rancheria Tribe since his time as an Elk Grove City Councilmember. For counties looking to have a closer relationship with tribal governments, it's important that there's an acknowledgement that it's a government dealing with a government, and there's no "hierarchy" in play, he said.

"We can't go back and unring the bell of what has happened in the past, but we can certainly start today and try and work better together," Hume said. "I think the first thing is, you've got to give respect to get respect.

"I can't even fathom the deep-seated mistrust that probably is generational, but I just try and present today that, 'Hey, I recognize you, I see you, and I'd like to work with you,' and recognize that it's not a top-down approach, or we're not pandering to you. This is important, how do we work together? And I just feel very fortunate that the Sheriff and the DA also recognize the value of that relationship."

Staff in the District Attorney's Office who are part of the MMIP task force team are set to undergo training by members of the Wilton Rancheria on tribal laws and procedures and attend tribal cultural competency training from the Pala Tribe in San Diego County, according to Ho. Next year, the office is planning to create a cold case training program for different tribes and law enforcement agencies — not only regionally, but statewide and nationally, according to Ho.

Deputies are also being trained to better understand Public Law 280, which allows California to have criminal jurisdiction over tribal citizens and territory, according to Sacramento County Sheriff Jim Cooper. There's historically been confusion about the relationship between state and tribal law enforcement, so the training is working to address that.

"We have great supervisors here in Sacramento County, we have great partners in law enforcement, Sheriff Cooper, and we have a great relationship with the tribe, so it made it really easy and natural to bridge that divide," Ho said. "While in other places, that is sometimes difficult. It was like the perfect storm of people involved in our experiences, in our relationships, to get this across the finish line." CN

Family members hold signs of their lost loved ones during an MMIP vigil at the state Capitol. Photos by Lezlie Sterling, The Sacramento Bee

Bernadette Smith attends the vigil in honor of her sister Nicole, who was murdered in 2017.

Tincher joins NACo as director of member engagement

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

After serving seven years as a Greenbrier County, W.Va. commissioner, Tammy Tincher has joined NACo as the director of member engagement. Photo by Denny Henry

Northeast Region to vote on new rep in February

Tammy Tincher's resignation from the Greenbrier County, W.Va. commission, and thus NACo's Northeast Region Representative position, opens a vacancy on the NACo Executive Committee. That position will remain vacant until the 2026 Legislative Conference. The Northeast Region Caucus will meet Feb. 24 and vote on a representative for the remainder of the unexpired term, which lasts until July 20 at the Annual Conference in Orleans Parish, La.

In less than 10 years, Tammy Tincher went from having no involvement in government to becoming NACo's chief outreach advocate to county officials.

After serving seven years as a Greenbrier County, W.Va. commissioner, Tincher has joined NACo as the director of member engagement, bringing with her the insight she gained over years of increasing involvement in NACo.

Her neighbors recruited her to run for the Greenbrier County Commission after she helped her community recover from a devastating flood in 2016. Her part of the county had historically been under-represented on the Commission, and she sought to change that.

She did more than that, later serving as president of the County Commissioners Association of West Virginia, as a member of NACo's Board of Directors and then for two years as chair of NACo's Membership Committee. Along the way, she brought NACo's Rural Action Caucus symposium to Greenbrier County in 2023. In 2024, she was elected Northeast Region representative, putting her on NACo's executive committee and in tune with the organization's governance.

Although she started in county government by hoping to put Rainelle on the map in her own county, she found fulfillment in the enrichment she received in her state and national roles.

"It just provided so much information to me to take back to my home and my state and it just helped me be a better representative and a better person and human being all together," she said.

She saw on the state and national levels how policies in either arena affected her ability to effectively make local policy. And she learned that a county official's job educating her state and federal representatives was never over.

"Even when we gain ground on an issue, an administration will change, or you'll have an election with new legislators and you always have to show them and their staff how counties fit in the intergovernmental system," she said. "You can't be complacent."

Her years chairing the Membership Committee put her in direct contact with some of NACo's most fervent champions.

"I learned that counties need to be able to tell their stories," she said. "Every time you speak, it's an opportunity to help people understand counties better."

Now, she will be helping county officials and staff alike find resources and involvement in NACo's advocacy, programs and EDGE financial tools.

Her experience representing a rural county of 33,000 residents gives her the perspective and credibility to help bring officials like herself into NACo's networks. She acknowledges that county leaders in those communities often handle many roles and the idea of adding national involvement can be daunting, but ultimately empowering.

"One of the things that we want to be able to do is connect those leaders who may think that their biggest responsibility is being on the ground all the time at home," she said. "That is true that rural officials have a lot of responsibilities, but traveling or participating in what NACo has to offer can make them much more effective leaders, as they come to understand what resources they could lean on or peer exchanges that put them in touch with someone in another county who has solved the same problem that they're facing.

"The strength of NACo is in our members and what they have to offer one another, the insight they can receive from being part of a discussion with their peers or just talking to someone who understands what they're dealing with in their county. NACo is able to connect the dots for our members and help them make use of resources they may never have heard of. That time and energy they put into NACo pays off for their county." CN

NACo took the lead on civic education with iCivics partnership, Counties Work game

From HISTORY page 7

brated the partnership at the 20202 Legislative Conference.

The NACo Board invested $2.5 million in scholarships for county staff to participate in the academy, covering the cost for 2,000 graduates. An additional 8,000 county officials followed suit in the next few years.

Civic education

In 2011, NACo partnered with iCivics, a nonpartisan nonprofit founded by Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, to develop an interactive computer game that placed users in the shoes of a county official. Faced with a budget, a suite of county departments and a procession of constituents armed with requests for service, players learned the variety of responsibilities and powers county governments wield.

Javier Gonzales (right) speaks about domestic security after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as Past President Kay Braaten looks on.

By matching their request to the appropriate department, players earned the confidence, and approval, of the voters to aid them in their quest for reelection. iCivics also offered a civic education curriculum focused on county government aimed at students from grades 6-12.

The online game helped counties reach a complex target audience thanks to the wide variation in county authorities, and names, in different states.

"Your major textbook publishers aren't going to put a chapter in a national civics or social studies textbook about county government because they'd have to change for every state," said NACo President Glen Whitley, Tarrant County, Texas judge.

In 2022, NACo published "Governing on the Ground," the story of county government seen through the eyes of 31 elected and appointed officials. These county leaders not only explained how their responsibilities and expertise in subjects like county roads, information technology, climate preparedness, mental health and homelessness interact with the public, they also offered a window into their motivations for pursuing a career in county government. CN

WORD SEARCH

CHELAN COUNTY, WASH.

Created by Mary Ann Barton

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

APPLES: The county seat of Wenatchee is known as the "Apple Capital of the World."

BAVARIAN: The town of Leavenworth in the county attracts tourists with its Bavarian theme.

BONANZA: Bonanza Peak has an elevation of 9,516 feet. It is the highest non-volcanic peak in the state.

BORDERS: The county borders the Cascade Mountains and the Columbia River.

CAMPBELLS: The most historic restaurant in the county is Campbell's Resort, which has been in operation since 1901.

CASCADE: The Cascade Mountains are a part of the county.

CHELAN: The county name is an Indian word meaning "deep water."

COURTHOUSE: The Italianate Renaissance Revival style courthouse was built between 1924 to 1925.

LAKE: Lake Chelan is 50.5 miles long and its maximum depth is 1,486 feet deep after ancient glaciers carved depressions in the rock. It's the third deepest lake in the country.

NEWSPAPER: *The Wenatchee World*, the main daily newspaper for the county, got its start in 1905.

NUTCRACKERS: The county has a nutcracker museum with over 7,000 varieties.

RAINBOW: Rainbow Falls is a 312-foot waterfall accessible by ferry, private boat, horseback or on foot.

STEHEKIN: A town in the county only accessible by boat, foot or float plane.

WENATCHEE: The county seat's name is derived from the nearby Wenatchi tribe and is a Native American word meaning "meeting of the rivers." Its population is about 36,000.

WINERIES: The county is home to more than 40 wineries.

GET TO KNOW...

Brown County, Wis.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Brown County, Wis., established in 1818, is named for Jacob Brown, an Army general during the War of 1812 who was known as "the fighting Quaker." The county seat, Green Bay, was founded in 1634 as a fur-trading post, making it Wisconsin's oldest city. **Green Bay, home to the NFL's Green Bay Packers, is the smallest city in the country with a professional sports team. The Packers are the only team in the league owned by its fans, who call themselves "Cheeseheads."**

The city was the first in Wisconsin to receive mail and have a state newspaper. Green Bay has also been referred to as the "Toilet Paper Capital of the World," for being the birthplace of splinter-free toilet paper.

Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary, a 535-acre wildlife refuge located in the county, is home to more than 6,500 orphaned or injured animals. It's the largest park in the Green Bay Park system and the largest wildlife rehabilitation program in Wisconsin. The sanctuary, which was initially founded in 1936 as a waterfowl rehabilitation site, features wildlife-viewing opportunities, animal exhibits with educational displays and miles of hiking and skiing trails.

The actor Tony Shalhoub, who has won five Emmys, a Golden Globe, six Screen Actors Guild Awards and a Tony Award, was born and raised in Green Bay. Shalhoub is best known for his starring role in the television show "Monk" as detective Adrian Monk and he also was in the television show "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel" and films such as the "Men in Black" franchise and "Cars." A recent episode of his CNN show "Tony Shalhoub Breaking Bread" featured him visiting bakeries in Brown County.

The Meyer Theatre, which was called The Fox Theater when it opened in 1930, has hosted many acts over the years, including Nat King Cole, Johnny Cash and Liberace. Green Bay's Art Garage, a gallery and non-profit arts center organization, provides local artists with a space to display and sell their creations, some of which include pottery, jewelry and textiles, and hold community workshops.

The National Railroad Museum, located in the village of Ashwaubenon, is the only congressionally designated railroad museum in the country. Its exhibits range from railroad graffiti to the world's largest steam locomotive, which is called "Big Boy."

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.

Green Bay Packer fans enjoy a game. Brown County is home to the only NFL team owned by its fans.

SPONSORED CONTENT

NACo Public Promise Procurement Announces Two New Contracts

Public Promise Procurement (PPP) is a cooperative purchasing platform wholly owned and operated by NACo designed to simplify and optimize county procurement processes. By leveraging economies of scale, PPP helps counties save time and money while accessing top-tier solutions across a range of critical sectors at the best possible value.

PPP counties gain access to nationally solicited contracts with leading vendors, reducing administrative burdens and ensuring competitive pricing. All contracts are single-award and have been vetted by an advisory committee of expert county procurement professionals.

Public Promise Procurement announces two new contracts in its portfolio:

Lilypad EV: Turnkey EV Charging Solutions

Counties nationwide are accelerating efforts to electrify vehicle fleets, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and modernize public services. Through NACo's Public Promise Procurement program, counties can access cooperative contracts that streamline the deployment of electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure and sustainable services — saving time, reducing administrative burden and ensuring competitive pricing.

Lilypad EV, a certified woman-owned business, offers comprehensive EV charging solutions tailored to the needs of local governments. Their services include:

- Site planning and feasibility assessments
- Installation of Level 2 and DC fast chargers
- Ongoing maintenance and support
- Integration with fleet management systems

A recent example of Lilypad EV's impact is Ventura County, Calif., which expanded its EV charging network across municipal sites to support both fleet and public access charging. While this project was not procured through NACo's contract, it highlights Lilypad's deep experience in working with counties to deliver scalable, community-focused infrastructure.

By leveraging the NACo Public Promise Procurement contract, counties can:

- Access pre-negotiated pricing and terms, reducing procurement complexity
- Support inclusive procurement by working with a woman-owned business
- Accelerate EV infrastructure deployment to meet climate action plans and sustainability benchmarks

Lilypad EV's solutions help counties reduce fleet emissions, improve air quality and enhance public access to clean transportation options, all while aligning with federal and state sustainability mandates.

Iron Mountain: Secure and Sustainable Information Management

In addition to EV infrastructure, counties can also advance sustainability through Iron Mountain, another NACo Public Promise Procurement partner. Iron Mountain provides:

- Secure records storage and digitization
- Data center services powered by renewable energy
- Shredding and recycling programs for paper and electronics

Iron Mountain services help counties reduce paper waste, transition to digital workflows, and minimize environmental impact from data operations. Their commitment to sustainability includes:

- Operating carbon-neutral data centers
- Achieving zero-waste-to-landfill for shredding operations
- Supporting ESG reporting and compliance for public agencies

Together, Lilypad EV and Iron Mountain offer counties a powerful toolkit for achieving sustainability goals — whether through cleaner transportation or greener information management.

Other Public Promise Procurement contracts include:

Elevator, Escalator, Walkway, and Lift Services: Providing new construction, modernization, maintenance, and repair services to keep county facilities safe and operational.

- Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness: Equipping counties with tools to enhance community resilience and preparedness for disasters.
- Equipment Solutions: Offering rental, lease, and purchase options for equipment, complete with associated services and support.
- Human Resources and Talent recruiting services: Offering talent recruiting services to help your county find and retain the best people.

Public Promise Procurement reflects NACo's commitment to empowering county governments with innovative solutions that drive efficiency, savings and improved service delivery. Early adopters have highlighted the tangible benefits of these initiatives, with many counties citing reduced administrative overhead, enhanced employee satisfaction, and substantial cost reductions as key outcomes.

As counties across the nation face increasing financial and operational pressures, NACo's Public Promise Procurement business offers a sustainable path forward. By fostering collaboration and leveraging collective purchasing power, PPP is poised to transform the way counties approach procurement and employee benefits.

Interested in learning more about NACo's Public Promise Procurement or utilizing one of the current contracts? Please contact National Program Director, PPP, Anthony Chapman at achapman@naco.org or visit publicpromiseprocurement.org.

San Juan County, N.M. Commissioner Terri Fortner Photo by Charlie Ban

... I can adapt my communication style

by Terri Fortner
San Juan County, N.M. commissioner

I spent most of my career working directly with people. I was a registered nurse, so there was really no other way to do my job than communicating one-on-one with patients.

But when I ran for the county commission in 2020, it was the middle of the pandemic. When I was elected, we weren't meeting in person, and that took away the kind of communication that helped me get to know my colleagues.

My husband was a commissioner before I was, so a lot of my experiences in county government meetings, either things I saw or things he related to me, took place in our commission room, where people could make eye contact with one another and there was a lot more nonverbal communication going on. And you could bump into people and have impromptu conversations.

In online meetings, it feels like there's more of a running clock that you don't have in person, so it seems like there's less time to say what you want. That means you have to be concise and to the point if you want to cover everything in that short amount of time. You have to make sure there aren't any miscommunications, either.

It's also hard to make sure you aren't talking over someone else because there's that little lag in the connection. Sometimes if their internet service isn't great, they'll drop off and you'll have to repeat what you said to the empty end of the line.

I finished my master's degree online, so I had some experience working on group projects with people in different states, so that was my first time doing that.

But I learned that how you communicate online depends on your audience and the topic. If you're talking about doing a road project, as long as its funded and straightforward with no opposition, that's easy to discuss. If you're talking about doing a project that could disrupt their lives in their neighborhood, then you are going to have a lot more people involved, so public comment would be different in those settings. You must be more patient than you would be in person, because someone's always going to be muted while they're talking and there are going to be hiccups.

It's still not my favorite way to communicate, but there are a lot of cost savings when you don't have to drive somewhere for a meeting. But I'm always looking forward to being able to look someone right in the eye when I'm talking to them. CN

Now I Know features pivotal experiences in the careers of county officials, as told to Senior Writer Charlie Ban.

Registration opens for 2026 NACo Legislative Conference

Registration is now open for the 2026 NACo Legislative Conference, taking place Feb. 21-24, 2026 at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C.

The NACo Legislative Conference brings together nearly 2,000 elected and appointed county officials to focus on federal policy issues that matter most to county governments.

Attendees will experience timely, high-impact policy sessions and will interact with executive branch officials, members of Congress and their staff.

Registration includes access to all workshops, committee meetings, general sessions and conference-wide receptions.

Pre-conference events include meetings with chief information officers (CIOs). Scan the QR code below to register.

Scan to register.

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

- President **J.D. Clark** and Senior Operations Manager **Miranda Morvay** attended the Kentucky Association of Counties Annual Conference in Jefferson County.

NACo STAFF

- **Christopher Blanchette** has joined NACo as the national program director for Public Promise Insurance. He previously served as an employee benefits advisor for Marsh and in sales management for Aetna. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Connecticut.

Blanchette

- **Tammy Tincher** has joined NACo as director of membership engagement. She previously served as a commissioner in Greenbrier County, W.Va., where she was NACo's Northeast Region representative starting in July 2024. She earned a bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech.

Tincher

Kasthurirangan

- Clean Energy Siting Fellow **Padma Kasthurirangan** was naturalized as a U.S. citizen.
- Tincher, Executive Director **Matt Chase, Grace Dunlap** and **Anthony Chapman** attended the Virginia Association of Counties Annual Conference in Bath County.
- Legislative Director **Blaire Bryant** attended the New Hampshire Association of Counties Annual Conference in Coos County.
- Director of Intergovernmental Affairs and Partner Engagement **Rick Hart** attended the County Officials Association of Tennessee Annual Conference in Sevier County.

BEHIND THE SEAL

JONES COUNTY, IOWA

If Jones County, Iowa's seal evokes the memory of some famous artwork, that's no surprise. The two-story house on the left side of the design is reminiscent of the building in "American Gothic," painted by Jones County native Grant Wood.

The barn represents the county's agricultural character, and the towering Ferris Wheel celebrates the Great Jones County Fair, one of the largest in the state despite the county's relatively small population, bringing in 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) shows and large concerts that can draw more than 20,000 visitors on any given concert night.

The 1837 sign celebrates the county's formation and the names on the border celebrate the county's nine cities.

Recorder Whitney Hein assisted with this interpretation.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

SCHUYLER HARDING

NACo Board Member
National Association of County Information Officers
President

Number of years active in NACo: Six

Years in public service: 13

My first NACo event was: 2023 NACo Legislative Conference

Occupation: Director of Communications and External Affairs, Association County Commissioners of Georgia

Education: B.A. in Journalism from Georgia State University and M.S. in Strategic Public Relations from Virginia Commonwealth University

The hardest thing I've ever done: Be a fan of Atlanta's professional sports teams.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: My mother, former Congressman John Lewis and marketing executive and author Ericka Pittman.

HARDING

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Have a fraternal twin sister.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done: Eaten street food in Tanzania.

I'm most proud of: The person I am continuously becoming.

Every morning, I read: Scripture or my current devotional.

My favorite meal is: Vietnamese Pho

My pet peeve is: Witnessing unkindness toward others.

A dream I have is to: Own a coffee shop.

My motto is: Always lead by example and with integrity.

The last book I read was: "Say It Well: Find Your Voice, Speak Your Mind, Inspire Any Audience: by Terry Szuplat

My favorite movie is: Tie between "Malcolm X" by Spike Lee and "Brown Sugar"

My favorite music is: R&B

My favorite U.S. president is: Barack Obama

My county is a NACo member because: My county association strongly supports and appreciates what NACo does for counties, especially Georgia's counties, on the federal level. NACo's mission of strengthening America's counties is similar to that of ACCG's, which is to advance Georgia's counties.

BRIGHT IDEAS | HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

Restoration Efforts Turn Former Texas Oil Field into Flood Buffer and Wildlife Sanctuary

PROBLEM: A former oilfield could have been bought by developers, further exacerbating flooding in the area.

SOLUTION: The county helped purchase the land to restore it, while also creating a buffer for flooding.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Members of Student Conservation Association's GulfCorps, who perform critical invasive species removal and shoreline restoration along the Gulf Coast, volunteer at the Armand Bayou Nature Center.

Harris County, Texas is helping restore a former industrial oil field into protected coastal prairie and wetland, which will mitigate the impact of flooding and create an "urban wilderness" in the nation's fastest growing county. The land is adjacent to the Armand Bayou Nature Center, which now co-owns it with Harris County Precinct 2 and is conducting the restoration process. The 1,147 acre addition makes the Armand Bayou Nature Center the largest urban wilderness nature preserve in Texas, and one of the largest in the country, sprawling across nearly 4,000 acres.

There were once 9 million acres of tallgrass prairie along the coasts of Texas and Louisiana, but less than 1% of that historical prairie remains. Urban development, industrial activity and flooding have significantly degraded the land over time, and restoring it is a unique opportunity that will help the county expand habitat protection, mitigate the impact of flooding and improve the well-being of residents, according to Kristen Lee, Harris County Precinct 2's senior director of legislative affairs.

The preservation and restoration project is a big win for the county, where opportunities for conservation work are "so few and far between," Lee said. "There's not a lot of land out here to save, and there's not a lot of land at this scale that would make that big of a difference [with flooding mitigation]."

When flooding occurs, the prairie land will act as a "massive sponge" and mitigate its impact on local homeowners and industrial corporations, Lee said. A single acre of Texas coastal tall grass prairie will hold a million gallons of flood water.

"It's very cost intensive and dangerous to flood when you're a resident and these homes that are basically between Exploration Green [another nature preserve] and Armand Bayou, now they all stand a chance," Lee said. "We're at sea level out here, so when the water comes and it doesn't have anywhere to go, it really is in our homes and in our cars and in our businesses. So, to have that sort of buffer built in is huge."

In terms of carbon sequestration, that same acre of prairie that holds a million gallons of flood water sequesters 1.3 tons of carbon each year, according to Tim Pylate, Armand Bayou Nature Center's executive director.

"You can almost offset your commute with an acre of prairie," Pylate said.

Many of the wildlife species that used to live on prairies have disappeared — in the past few decades, the bobwhite quail has declined by 80%, the songbird population was cut nearly in half and one million prairie chickens have dwindled down to 80 in total, according to Pylate.

The Armand Bayou Conservation project is providing new habitat for native and returning species, including bald eagles, alligators and river otters, and laid the groundwork for the reintroduction of prairie-obligate bird species, such as bobwhite quail and potentially the endangered Attwater's prairie chicken.

Exxon Mobil Corporation sold the land to the county and nature center at roughly half of what it's worth, and retains environmental liability, which is uncommon for oil and gas corporations to do, according to Pylate. The land has a conservation easement, so it will never be developed.

"So, when we want to plant 10,000 plants to restore that prairie, Exxon says, 'Wait just a second,'" Pylate said. "And they stick some probes down on the ground, and they do some testing, and they say, 'All clear, you're good to go, go plant some plants.' It's really a neat partnership."

The Armand Bayou Nature Center utilized RESTORE Act funding (which is dedicated to restoration work across the Gulf Coast) to purchase its shared half of the ownership with the county, which contributed Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act funding and bond money from its Flood Control District.

The deal finalized last year. Now, the restoration work begins. The first step is to remove invasive species — tallow trees, which are native to eastern Asia, are one of the largest obstacles, Pylate said. Then, planting will begin. Roughly 10,000 plants will be planted on the prairie each year. Once plants start to flourish, it's time for maintenance, which includes mowing, controlled burning and more planting.

"This is not going to be a short-term investment," Lee said. There will be ongoing maintenance costs, and the process is expected to take decades, she noted. There are also plans to create trails that connect the community with the green space.

"This is a beautiful example of what can happen when local government, industry and grassroots nonprofits come together for the benefit of their community," Pylate said. CN

Harris County's Armand Bayou Conservation Project was the 2025 NACo Achievement Award "Best in Category" winner in County Resiliency: Infrastructure, Energy, and Sustainability.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

CALIFORNIA

MERCED COUNTY is acting to ensure residents impacted by the delays in CalFresh benefits have **access to food** and other resources during the government shutdown.

The county recently rolled out a new, interactive community food resource map. When you go online, you can find dozens of food pantry locations, food bank partners and other community food distribution sites throughout the county. Each listing includes site details such as addresses, hours of operation and contact information to make it easier for residents to find the help they need.

COLORADO

BOULDER COUNTY recently launched a $500,000 **housing innovation** fund to address the affordability crisis, Hoodline.com reported. Municipal governments and nonprofit organizations throughout Boulder County are being called to action, urged to apply for these grants and step up with inventive proposals.

"We want to support new ideas that challenge the status quo and move us toward a future where everyone in Boulder County has access to a safe, affordable place to live," Susana Lopez-Baker, Boulder County housing director.

IOWA

• **POLK COUNTY** pledged to allocate $1 million to local **food organizations** during the lapse in funding for federal nutrition programs, *Iowa Capital Dispatch* reported. Although the federal government is set to partially fund the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program during the shutdown, experts say the rollout of partial payments could take weeks.

"Because this is fluid, and because people are concerned about where their food will come from, they're hitting the food banks now," county Supervisor Matt McCoy said. "We hope (the administration) will fund this program, but until that happens, we need an immediate infusion of cash. And the check is cut from Polk County, and it will go out the door immediately."

HAWAII

The **COUNTY of MAUI** Department of Parks and Recreation, in partnership with the University of Hawaii Sea Grant Program, hosted a **dune restoration** event at Baldwin Beach (Kapukaulua). Volunteers helped plant 750 native coastal species, including phuehue vine, akiaki grass and kulikuli, as part of the Kapukaulua Dune Restoration Project to reduce erosion, improve wildlife habitat and strengthen shoreline resilience to sea level rise.

Gloves, tools and a water refill station were provided, and participants were encouraged to bring a reusable water bottle, sun protection, a hat and a garden trowel. Funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's National Coastal Resilience Fund, the dune restoration focused on restoring dune ecosystems along the coastline.

MARYLAND

• **PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY** is partnering with "100 Black Men of Prince George's," a local nonprofit, to establish a $1 million relief fund for federal workers affected by the **federal shutdown**, WTOP-FM reports.

Furloughed or laid off workers can apply on the non-profit's website and eligible applicants will receive a one-time payment of $1,000. In all, $800,000 of the funds will come from the MGM National Harbor casino, with the rest coming from a grant fund established by the County Council.

"While we cannot solve every challenge brought by federal workforce cuts, we can ensure that our neighbors know their local government stands with them in solidarity and action," Council Chair Ed Burroughs III said.

• **ST. MARY'S COUNTY** Transit System announced a one-year pilot that will make **bus rides fare-free** across the county, including paratransit services, officials said. The county said the pilot aims to boost ridership, reduce traffic, support a cleaner environment and make transportation more accessible, Citizen Portal reported. Officials encouraged riders to download a mobile app for trip planning and updates.

"All rides, all routes, all transfers are fare free, including paratransit services," a county transit staff member said.

MICHIGAN

• Residents who visit the George N. Fletcher branch of the **ALPENA COUNTY** library system can now **learn a new language,** selecting from more than 70 languages and dialects including courses for English language learners. Parents or caregivers who homeschool can access a specialized guide to help incorporate language learning into their curriculum using courses designed for ages 0-5.

• **ST. CLAIR COUNTY's** Department of Military Affairs is stepping up to **support military families** at Scott Air Force Base during the federal government shutdown, WJBK-TV reported. The county's Department of Military Affairs launched an emergency food drive to collect nonperishable food and other items to ease the burden as Thanksgiving approaches.

"There are some civilians that are being paid, but there are some civilians that are working and not being paid," said Kimberly Huth, the county's director of military affairs and food drive organizer. The base is home to more than 15,000 service members with more than 10,000 residing in the county.

"What is the need right now? It's the uncertainty and the number of people that aren't being paid," Huth said. "This is the least we could do."

• The **WAYNE COUNTY** Airport recently **welcomed the community to the airport** for its annual evening of trick-or-treating, a family-friendly Halloween tradition that began in

See NEWS FROM page 15

IOWA

• The **JOHNSON COUNTY** Board of Supervisors is considering adopting a one-year moratorium on approval of rezoning applications, site plans and building permits for **data centers** in unincorporated parts of the county, *The Gazette* reported.

The board was set to consider a resolution that would put a moratorium into effect. If passed, the moratorium would expire in November 2026.

Discussions around a moratorium arose during the county's update of other development ordinances, such as those on auxiliary dwelling units, to comply with state code.

From NEWS FROM page 14

2020 and has grown each year. Airport manager Matt Long said the pilots eagerly participate, dressing up and donating all the candy for the event.

This year's celebration drew an estimated 375 trick-or-treaters — the airport's largest turnout yet — coinciding with Smithville's community trick-or-treat night to make it easy for families to attend both. Children collected candy among the hangars, viewed planes up close, and talked with pilots. "Parents appreciate that it's safe, fun and educational," Long said, adding that it's also a great way to showcase the airport's role in pilot training, emergency services and connecting local people and businesses.

NEVADA

The **CLARK COUNTY** coroner has reported nearly 300 **heat-related deaths** so far in 2025, KVVU-TV reported. The total number of deaths so far this year where heat was a factor is 279. The coroner said that number is not final, as 90% of cases take up to 90 days to investigate the cause and manner of death.

The county saw an all-time high of heat-related deaths last year, at 527 deaths, according to the county. The county hit a record 120 degrees on July 7, 2024. The highest temperature this year was 112 on July 14.

NEW JERSEY

Cars, canines and cats are part of a special free open house at the **BURLINGTON COUNTY** Animal Shelter. The second annual **Motors for Mutts** Open House and Car Show was recently held showcasing cars, trucks and motorcycles along with music, food and children's activities. Visitors met shelter dogs and cats available for adoption or foster and fees were waived. The car show and open house was organized by the County in partnership with the Friends of the Burlington County Animal Shelter to raise awareness about the shelter's mission and connect adoptable pets with loving families.

During last year's event, more than 90 vehicles participated in the show, and 26 dogs and cats were adopted.

NORTH CAROLINA

• **DURHAM COUNTY**, in partnership with Forward Cities, has launched the 2025 Innovate Durham Cohort, a group of **entrepreneurs and innovators** who will participate in a four-month program designed to transform Durham into "a living lab for innovation," the county noted.

Innovate Durham launched in 2017 as a partnership between the county and the City of Durham to give local entrepreneurs the opportunity to test new ideas, products and services in real-world settings with the support of local government partners.

• A small, unnamed stream that feeds into **WAKE COUNTY's** Walnut Creek runs through the busy North Carolina State Farmers Market, carrying runoff from buildings, roads and parking lots. The stream is the focus of a feasibility study aimed at restoring its health and managing the State Farmers Market's **stormwater** more effectively. The project promises to bring environmental improvements and a greener, more inviting space for visitors.

"This is an impaired stream, which means it receives excessive runoff and can no longer support its natural floodplain or provide a healthy ecosystem for plants and animals," said Susan Evans, chair, Wake County Board of Commissioners. "An engineering and feasibility study will explore ways to restore the stream and create a healthy buffer after years of erosion and vegetation loss."

TEXAS

The **EL PASO COUNTY Jail** was recently selected by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care to receive the 2025 Program of the Year Award. The award recognizes the Jail's groundbreaking **Therapeutic Response Unit and Stabilization Team** (TRUST) Program, launched in 2022 in response to a rise in use-of-force incidents and assaults on peace officers. TRUST pairs trained clinicians with deputies to de-escalate crises involving incarcerated individuals experiencing acute mental health challenges. Since its inception, the program has seen a 30% reduction in use-of-force events and an overall 87% success rate in crisis de-escalations in 2024.

OREGON

WALLOWA COUNTY, known for its remote and frontier characteristics, faces unique challenges in **emergency response times**. The county's Wallowa Memorial Hospital EMS team recently received the 2025 Oregon Rural Health Excellence Award in the EMS category from the Oregon Office of Rural Health for its program Community Resilience and Injury Prevention Program.

The program equips rural residents with essential life-saving knowledge and tools. The EMS team brought critical training, including CPR with feedback devices and "Stop-the-Bleed" techniques, directly to schools and community centers. They also strategically distributed comprehensive first aid bags to help remote residents provide immediate aid during medical emergencies. Supplies were acquired through a grant from the Roundhouse Foundation.

VIRGINIA

FAIRFAX COUNTY Urban Search and Rescue Team recently visited Jamaica to **help communities devastated by Hurricane Melissa,** one of the most powerful Atlantic storms ever recorded, WTOP-FM reported.

County spokesman John Morrison said the destruction is "catastrophic," with massive trees knocked down and roads washed away, making logistics a constant challenge.

"It's really an immense amount of destruction," Morrison said. "Not to mention all of the homes and businesses that have been destroyed."

The team visited some of Jamaica's hardest-hit communities to assess their needs and help deliver life-saving aid, including medicine, food and water. Morrison said they will stay in Jamaica as long as their help is needed.

WEST VIRGINIA

A West Virginia state senator from **MONONGALIA COUNTY** has proposed that encourages 30 bordering counties in Virginia and Maryland **to secede from their states** and join West Virginia**,** WBOY-TV reported. The proposal cited the counties' "geographic, economic, cultural, and historical connections with West Virginia, including a strong Appalachian heritage, rural lifestyles, and a focus on individual liberties," as the reason for the invitation. Sen. Chris Rose added in his post that such a move would "address residents' concerns over policies in their current states that may not align with local priorities."

WISCONSIN

Before the federal government shutdown ended, **DANE COUNTY** Executive Melissa Agard recently announced an **emergency food drive,** encouraging residents to donate directly to the volunteer-run Badger Prairie Needs Network, any county government building or a local food bank, WISC-TV reported. The effort aims to support the roughly 64,000 people in the county who rely on FoodShare, Wisconsin's version of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

"This is what it is that we can do to help for our community," Agard said. "This is when we all need to come together."

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

Counties encouraged to create independent councils for opioid trusts

From FUNDING page 1

a waiver remains approved at the federal level, the process of implementing it may be stalled and not feasible from a cost perspective because of state and localities' concerns around other funding cuts and limitations.

"All of the flexibilities you currently have with regard to health-related social needs, re-entry, the IMD waivers, all of that still exists," Bryant said. But "just because the flexibility is still there with the waiver, doesn't mean that the finances are, so thinking specifically about work requirements, that is going to be probably one of the biggest financial lifts for states under H.R. 1."

Panelists discuss small opioid settlement allocation best practices Nov. 6 at NACo headquarters in Washington, D.C. Photo by Charlie Ban

Oregon recently stepped back from implementing re-entry waivers, even though it was federally approved to do so, to account for some of the other state and local costs that are set to rise through the changes in federal funding, Bryant noted.

The state of Georgia implemented work requirements for Medicaid recipients in 2023, and just to get the program started, it cost an estimated $80 million between the state and federal government, according to a U.S. Government Accountability Office report.

In response to the July Executive Order, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration released a "Dear Colleague" letter to states, localities and grant recipients, outlining which harm reduction initiatives it is no longer eligible to fund, including syringe services and safer smoking kits.

"If you're looking to utilize the settlement dollars to fill some of those harm reduction gaps, that's going to give you a pretty clear outline of where those gaps are going to be," a peer exchange ambassador said.

State associations can work with counties to identify r funding gaps and plot how they can be supplemented with opioid settlement dollars, but it will have to be a balancing act in making sure the county is not then expected to fund the services long-term, said peer exchange participant Sydney Blodgett, member engagement manager for the Kentucky Association of Counties.

NACo is encouraging counties to create an independent council or board for their opioid trusts, said Annie Qing, NACo substance use disorder senior program manager.

"The counties that have created a process or a council are much more safe, I think, from making reactive decisions," Qing said. "… If you have these funds protected in that way, then you're a little bit less subject to the idea of it getting pulled in multiple directions.

"A lot of the county commissioners that we've talked to or the people who manage opioid settlement funds have said, 'Suddenly a lot of agencies are knocking on my door,' because they're feeling the depth of the cuts too." CN