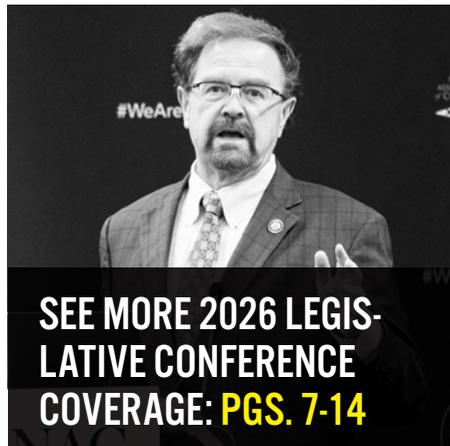
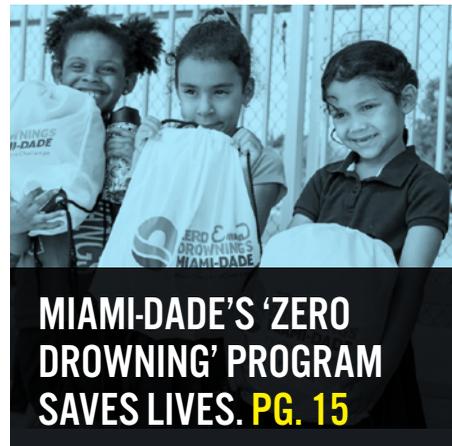




SALUTE TO COUNTY LEADERS: MARY ANN BORGESON. PG. 3



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MIAMI-DADE'S 'ZERO DROWNING' PROGRAM SAVES LIVES. PG. 15

PDFs are DOA as new web standards approach

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Nearly one-third of all counties are rushing toward an April deadline to meet new standards for website and social media accessibility.

The 973 counties with at least 50,000 residents have until April 24 to comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 Level AA, while the remaining 2,096 smaller counties have until April 26, 2027. The guidelines were set by the World Wide Web Consortium, and those deadlines were set two years ago, when the Department of Justice published a final rule for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Chesterfield County, Va. combined the early deadline with the process of redesigning its website to rethink how its content is presented to residents.

"It was evident that it was a better experience," said Chris Coleman, Chesterfield County's eGovernment Services manager. "It's a perfect example of a solution that was better for the organization and was just as good, if not better, for our end users, especially those with disabilities."

"The reality is, there is a significant portion of the population that has visual disabilities and hearing disabilities and

cognitive disabilities that we need to provide services for, not create barriers to accessing those services."

Throughout the last few years, accessibility compliance has dominated the DuPage County, Ill. IT department's agenda, and Web Services Manager Debra Deacy said she hears the same from peers around the country.

"It's a part of everything we're doing," she said. "It's been that way for the last few years."

The final rule has not been accompanied by any federal funding to help meet the \$1 billion estimated cost of compliance by all counties. County IT departments are taking on the added tasks of updating their web content and often contracting with vendors to help meet those needs, all while managing their daily IT workload.

"What we're hearing from our members is a lot of confusion and a lot of gray areas," said Jennifer Chapman, president of the National Association of Government Web Professionals and senior communications manager for Johns Creek, Ga. "Governments are facing challenges with their staffing, their funding and some of our third-party providers."

See ADA page 5



From his perch in a helicopter, Rick Blangiardi, mayor of the City and County of Honolulu, assesses the damage from recent storms that dropped 20-plus inches of rain over several days, leaving the county suffering its worst flooding in 20 years. With significant rain falling earlier in the month, the recent rain pushed total damages to surpass \$1 billion. Photo courtesy of the City and County of Honolulu

States start to give rounding guidance as pennies fade away

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Alishia Topper put herself in her residents' shoes — let's assume they are penny loafers.

If she was walking into the Clark County, Wash. treasurer's office to pay her property tax in cash, she had already demonstrated that she didn't

want to pay the surcharge necessary to complete the transaction electronically. So, she probably wouldn't want that total to be rounded up to the next nickel, meaning she'd pay up to 2 cents more.

"Most people who come in to pay property taxes or most taxes are not interested in paying a penny more. So,

rounding up didn't sit well for me or my office," she said. "We did research on symmetrical rounding (even totals are rounded up, odd totals are rounded down) and we didn't like that."

She is in this predicament, as the county treasurer, because

See PENNIES page 3

BASICS Act would expand county access to federal formula funds

by **Andrew Nober**

Deep down in Louisiana — about three hours from New Orleans — Rapides Parish is a sportsman's paradise that also boasts impressive cultural amenities.

"We have a really nice theater downtown," said Matt

Johns, long-time Rapides Parish resident. "The Coughlin Saunders Performing Arts Center. And you can get into some stuff there that is as good as what you would see in other larger cities."

Johns isn't just proud of his home parish — he's working every day to plan for its future

and make it an even better place to live and work. Johns leads the Rapides Area Planning Commission (RAPC), the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) that coordinates transportation planning and development for a major

See BASICS page 2

BASICS legislation would help move county-led projects forward

From BASICS page 1

portion of Rapides Parish.

Johns serves both as the organization's CEO and as a commissioner on its board appointed by the Rapides Parish Police Jury. RAPC also plans for economic development, which Johns says goes hand in hand with the transportation work that RAPC does.

However, Johns notes that there is often difficulty managing economic development priorities with other transportation needs.

"We have to spend money on necessities before we can do amenities," Johns cautioned.

That can create tradeoffs for the parish transportation network and stretch RAPC's ca-

capacity. Even when they know projects will spur economic development, RAPC must put upkeep at the top of their priority list.

We are 'chasing this unicorn that keeps getting more and more expensive the longer we wait.'

— Matt Johns, Rapides Parish, La. MPO/CEO

"We can't let the existing network crumble to spend some money on potential economic development," he said.

That means projects like ex-

tending Sugarhouse Road in Rapides Parish, which Johns says has been on RAPC's planning radar for more than two decades, must wait.

"If we had the funding to do it, we could have programmed it, paid for it and been done with it, rather than chasing this unicorn that keeps getting more and more expensive the longer we wait," he said.

This feedback loop of expensive projects leading to delays, which in turn drives prices up even further, is a constant issue facing local leaders. Johns also noted that this situation is exacerbated by significant cost increases in the transportation space.

"In the 1980s, you could build a good amount of roadway for \$3.5 million," he said. "Now \$3.5 million might get us one mile of overlay and a couple of intersections, maybe a piece of the sidewalk."

In facing these challenges, Rapides Parish is far from alone. Local and regional transportation planners map out projects years in advance, but without adequate funding, they often must sit on the shelf. Nationwide, counties own 44% of public road miles and 38% of bridges, but, under current transportation funding programs, local governments receive a much smaller share of federal formula funding — just 14%.

New legislation in Washington could change that and give counties nationwide more access to federal formula funding. In February, Reps. Kristen McDonald Rivet (D-Mich.) and Rob Bresnahan (R-Pa.) introduced the Bridges And Safety Infrastructure for Community Success (BASICS) Act (H.R. 7437).

This bipartisan legislation

would grow the share of overall formula transportation funding that is "sub-allocated," or made available for organizations like RAPC to use for locally selected projects.

This would include new access to formula funding for bridges and safety infrastructure.

This increase in capital funding would help move county-led projects forward in places across the country. The BASICS Act also includes process reforms to ensure that local governments — in conjunction with transportation planning organizations like MPOs — can better handle and implement federal dollars.

Johns says that his board of directors likes to call this process "[beating] the snakes out of the weeds," ensuring that projects have gone through all the necessary steps to proceed quickly with construction.

The BASICS Act has a clear, albeit steep, path forward: Being included in the next surface transportation reauthorization bill. Every five years, Congress passes a bill to reauthorize surface transportation programs through the Department of Transportation.

This bill not only sets topline spending levels for roads, bridges and more, but it also dictates how that money gets spent and by whom. The current surface transportation law, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, is set to expire at the end of September, meaning Congress is actively working to draft and pass the

next bill.

NACo and many of its peer organizations have made the BASICS Act their top priority for that bill. In February, more than 70 organizations representing local governments in all 50 states sent a letter to committee leaders in the House and Senate asking them to include the BASICS Act in their respective reauthorization proposals.



Rivet



Bresnahan

As Congress moves forward with developing the next surface transportation reauthorization bill, NACo is encouraging counties to weigh in with their representatives.

"Members of Congress want to know that the bills they support in Washington will benefit their communities back home, said Ben Gilsdorf, NACo Associate Legislative Director for Transportation. "County leaders should tell their representatives that supporting the BASICS Act is how to ensure that the next bill works for their district and their residents." 

Nober is a legislative assistant in NACo's Government Affairs department.

Scan the QR code to access a template letter and other resources that counties can use to help advocate for the BASICS Act with their congressional delegations.



SNAP/STATS



Tornado Season

Annual average:.....	1,225
No. in 2025:	1,559
Most active:.....	March-June
Least active:	November
F5:.....	One reported in North Dakota in 2025
F4:.....	Five reported in Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky and Louisiana

Source: NOAA/National Centers for Environmental Information

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SALUTE TO COUNTY LEADERS: Mary Ann Borgeson

Mary Ann Borgeson has spent nearly 32 years as a member of the Douglas County, Neb. Board of Commissioners and will leave office at the end of the year. After serving as chair of the Health Policy Steering Committee, she was elected and served as the NACo president from 2019-2020, leading the organization through the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and serving as a confidant to many county officials who were facing extraordinary pressures as public health, human services, public safety and other stresses mounted across the country.

When did you know county government was your calling?

Not until I got there. When I was working to get mental health on the county agenda, and once I realized county

government was a place we could make a difference in the lives of people who had nowhere else to turn, I knew I found a place where I could put my energy and efforts.

What's your proudest achievement in Douglas County?

Being the first woman on the Douglas County Board of Commissioners and serving as the president of NACo.

What did you learn from NACo that you brought home to Douglas County?

That counties matter.

How did you change as a county leader over your tenure?

I'm more compassionate, more intentional. I helped 166 individuals who came to Douglas County from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina.



Former NACo President Mary Ann Borgeson greets Beaufort County, N.C. Commissioner Ed Booth during the 2026 Legislative Conference Board of Directors meeting. Photo by Denny Henry

A lot of them left their homes, some with just a trash bag of their possessions and came to a place they had never been before.

Why are you optimistic about the future of county government?

"It's the government that's

closest to the people, that understands what the needs are within each one of our communities. You have people who live in their communities and work in their communities among the people they represent. I think that they keep that in the forefront of their service. It will always be

the best form of government there is for the people.

What advice do you have for your successors?

Don't let partisan politics play into any of your decision-making. Listen to the people. And lead with your heart. **CN**

State legislation on regulating pennies could clarify confusion for county treasurers

From PENNIES page 1

the county's bank notified her that it wouldn't be able to fulfill its request for pennies this year. That follows the Treasury Department's discontinuation of penny production last fall, following a nearly twofold increase in production price over the last 10 years.

Clark County would round down, for the time being. In 2015, the county processed almost 4,300 cash transactions totaling almost \$1.8 million. Those cash transactions made up 8% of the total property tax payments.

"There still is a portion of the community that don't want to pay fees and they want to pay cash. And we will accommodate that," Topper said.

Although the U.S. Treasury reported that the move would save the U.S. Mint \$56 million in annual savings, it's adding

uncertainty for businesses and governments that accept cash. Although the Federal Reserve estimates 114 billion pennies are in circulation, there's been no federal guidance on how governments should handle transactions. The Federal Reserve Bank of

Richmond noted that consumers could end up paying a "rounding tax" if transaction amounts are skewed toward values that round up.

A National Conference of

State Legislatures report cautioned that "while the fiscal impact of rounding might be limited for state revenue, retailers and consumers, the absence of a regulatory framework introduces legal risks and potential confusion among stakeholders."

Topper looked with envy at stronger national direction elsewhere.

"In Canada, there was a



Topper



huge nationwide campaign around the discontinuation of that coin, and they even had coin exchanges and marketing campaigns," Topper said. "In this scenario, it was the banks, notifying those of us who handled cash tender that, 'Hey, we don't have this option for you

anymore. Sorry."

State governments are taking up the issue piecemeal. Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson recently signed a bill giving state retailers the option to round cash purchases up or down. Indiana Gov. Mike Braun signed a similar bill, and Oregon's Legislature

passed a rounding option bill, too.

"Hopefully that will get rid of a lot of the ambiguity and a lot of the differentiation between what we're going to do here in Clark County versus what you might do in Cowlitz County, which is just north of us," Topper said. **CN**

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26



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April 24 deadline looms for counties with 50,000+ residents

From ADA page 1

Streamlined content

Coleman estimates that Chesterfield County is 99.7% compliant with the new standards, and he attributes that to the progress his county has made in reducing the use of PDF files on its site. Starting at 18,000 files several years ago, that library is closer to 2,000 documents today.

The PDF format is unwieldy, often static and generally ill-adapted for mobile devices. The solution, Coleman said, has been converting those files to a web form or HTML, which not only is more readable by accessibility devices, but can update the information users input to a county database for immediate feedback.

“A PDF is essentially a paper record, and that doesn’t serve the same purpose online,” Coleman said.

DuPage County has taken a similar approach, but IT leadership has had to sell that policy to other employees.

“We tried to explain to our departments and elected officials that the website is not a file cabinet where you keep everything,” Deacy said. “If you need to put a PDF online, you have to have a good reason. Otherwise, we’re going to put everything in HTML.”

Coleman and Deacy both serve on the National Association of Government Web Professionals’ Board of Directors.

The counties that are in the best position as the deadline nears have looked at the process as more than a mandate.

“I haven’t met a member who is not extremely passionate about this,” Chapman said. “We all want to do this; we want to help people with disabilities access gov-



ernment services.”

Counties that were already in the process of transitioning to a new website when the final rule was issued have had a head start, because their web content audits have served dual purposes, giving those county IT departments a head start.

DuPage County took the opportunity to debut a new website to reorganize how it presented webpages, pivoting to a more user-centric approach. Its previous website was in service for 12 years.

“We used to organize our website by department, and now it’s based on task,” Deacy said. “When people come to our website, they probably don’t know that they need to go to the clerk’s office or the recorder’s office, they just know what they need to accomplish and we help guide them that way.”

Impetus for action

When the final rule was published in April 2024, Coleman used it to pick up momentum internally.

‘I haven’t met a member who is not extremely passionate about this.’

– Jennifer Chapman, National Association of Government Web Professionals

“It gave us some teeth to take back to our county attorney’s office and say ‘This thing we’ve been trying to do — accessibility or digital equity — it’s real now. And now there are consequences if we don’t do it,’” he said.

Counties that are not in compliance could open themselves up to civil rights complaints, investigation and enforcement by the Department of Justice, litigation or reputational harm. Those counties could also incur greater remediation costs as time goes on.

Coleman added that as his county sees an increase in

access by mobile devices, approaching web design with that in mind, joined with accessibility standards, can go a long way to “future-proofing” a county’s website. And it shows up in other ways.

“A lot of these measures that make our content more accessible to people with disabilities also makes it more readable for AI large language models,” he said. “We’re a verified source of information, and now we’re a place models will go for easily read content.”

Final stretch

With less than a month to go until the largest counties hit their deadline, an extension from the Department of Justice seems unlikely, though the department has signaled that it will release an interim final rule seeking to reduce the cost of implementation to counties.

For counties that are in a good position regarding the deadline, their work will not stop there. Deacy maintains a county-wide accessibility task force that meets regularly to stay focused on each department sharing responsibility to making advances in accessibility.

“This is an ongoing effort because we have 100 web ed-

itors throughout the county who update that content every day,” she said.

Almost two-thirds of counties nationwide have a little more than a year, and likely fewer IT staff, to meet the same standards by April 26, 2027.

For staff like Deacy, getting county elected officials on board helped galvanize county staff toward working to meet the deadline.

“I think having county leadership buy-in is crucial so they can be supportive and give that authority to what you’re doing,” she said. “I have talked to other organizations where the leadership wasn’t even aware or just became aware in the last month.” **CN**

The NACo Tech Xchange offers resources and guidance for counties meeting ADA web accessibility guidelines: www.naco.org/page/county-tech-xchange. Scan the QR code to access a NACo Tech Brief on Digital Accessibility and an ADA Compliance Guide.



Chapman



Deacy



Coleman

20
26



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State-led property tax reform threatens county services

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Counties in states enamored with property tax reform and reduction are guarding against both fast and slow removal of their prime revenue source.

While the latter might seem more manageable, state association leaders say it would end up being just as difficult to fight.

“My hypothesis is that this ‘death by a thousand cuts’ relief effort that the Legislature is doing is actually going to cause long-term damage,” said Cheryl Subler, executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, during a Feb. 22 panel at the 2026 Legislative Conference. “In about 10 years, we are going to have to come right back and look at property tax reform again.”

But “relief” means cuts to county funding, and proposals rarely come with a revenue replacement. The cuts take the form of a variety of homestead exemptions for different groups, slowly shifting the tax burden away from some property owners and onto others, building dissatisfaction with the current system.

“We have a grassroots initiative in Ohio where petitions are being circulated to put on the ballot,” Subler said. “The question of ‘AxOHTax,’ no property tax in Ohio. So that has everybody scared to death.”



Association of Indiana Counties Executive Director David Bottorff said the sudden increase in home prices earlier in the decade after years of stability threw homeowners and assessors alike.

“We were seeing housing values go up 20%, and assessed values shot up way faster than the system was designed to handle,” he said. “It’s hard to convince people who



Cheryl Subler, executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, implores counties to be proactive in telling their legislators how state-led property tax reform can threaten county revenues and services. Florida Association of Counties Executive Director Ginger Delegal is to her right. Photo by Denny Henry

are emotional about the issue that property taxes are a business.”

Between 2020-2025, 115 legislative actions passed in 34 states, all of which combined to reduce revenues by \$12 billion annually.

Because they don’t pay into state coffers, “there’s no skin in the game for state and federal policymakers,” said Jonathan Harris, NACo associate research director, noting that it makes property taxes legislative targets.

“A lot of these factors in rising property tax bills are outside of the control of county governments,” when property values and inflation have driven the 150% increase in property taxes over 13 years, while housing prices increased 35%, adjusted for inflation.

Harris noted that although the public generally has a more favorable view of local government, it’s hard to untangle the various taxes they pay and where they go.

“In Florida, the people who are screaming right now... are first-time home buyers and other new homebuyers,” said Ginger Delegal, executive director of the Florida Association of Counties. “And then to a lesser degree, because of

politics, is the business community, because it shifts to them. We’ve created this problem ourselves with a lot of the exemptions and reform measures that we started doing 30 years ago. It’s an economic reality and the map and the economy catch up to you.”

Almost half of Florida’s 67 counties are fiscally constrained, setting a frightening prospect if a revenue replacement isn’t part of negotiations to eliminate property tax.

“It would wipe them off the map,” Delegal said.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has supported property tax cuts and may add the topic to a special session in April after the subject didn’t move during the regular legislative session.

Consultant Tim Boncosky, who served in two county assessors’ offices, saw popular sentiment hit a boiling point in 2024, when Jackson County, Mo. voted overwhelmingly to recall a popular county executive and then change its assessor’s office in three weeks, following an outcry over reassessments.

“My message here today to the county supervisors and commissioners — love your assessors, stick together, because they’re not the enemy,

OK? Values go up, tax rates change,” he said. “The real issue is trying to educate the legislatures and the assemblies”

‘The real issue is trying to educate the legislatures and the assemblies.’

— Tim Boncosky,
consultant

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott has proposed limiting property tax increases to 3% and requiring a two-thirds vote for increases.

“There really is no other source of revenue to replace this revenue — our counties are losing,” said Texas Association of Counties Executive Director Susan Redford. The state collects \$84 billion in property taxes annually, with counties receiving \$15 billion compared to school districts, cities and special districts.

“We are such a small piece of that pie, but we don’t have the other sources of revenue that they do, which really puts us in a bind,” Redford said.

Kevin Leonard, executive director of the North Carolina

Association of County Commissioners, pointed out that reductions in property tax constrain counties’ ability to perform their statutorily mandated duties.

“The exemptions and exclusions legislation that’s been introduced, that’s truly the warning signs,” he said. “If you’re sitting in the audience and this hasn’t come to you yet, but your legislature has introduced what I call an avalanche of exclusions and exemption bills...that’s the warning sign that you really need to pay attention to.”

The association executives agreed that taking an assertive approach to articulating the local benefits of property taxes and describing the vice that state-led reform was placing on counties’ ability to deliver services was necessary to fight the erosion of that funding.

“You all have a bully pulpit,” Delegal said. “You have cameras at your meetings. Tell your story now, because the one thing that is slowing it down — I’d love to tell you it’s the state association, but it’s not — it is our members who have taken up the baton and the mantle to take the time to tell their story.”

County officials urged to use storytelling to strengthen advocacy, public trust

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor



County officials and public affairs leaders emphasized the need to pair data with human stories to improve advocacy efforts and public understanding of local government services, during a discussion hosted Feb. 24 by NACo and the National Association of County Information Officers (NACIO) at the 2026 Legislative Conference.

NACo President J.D. Clark of Wise County, Texas, opened

the discussion, noting that while counties are equipped with strong research and data, those tools alone are not sufficient to reach policymakers or residents. He stressed that statistics must be combined with real-life experiences to illustrate their impact.

“If we just present a page of statistics, it won’t resonate,”



NACo President J.D. Clark discusses the importance of storytelling at a NACo-NACIO workshop on the topic. Photo by Denny Henry

Clark said. “But when you connect those numbers to a single resident’s story — how a program affected their life—that becomes memorable and meaningful.”

Clark also noted the growing challenge of misinformation, particularly on social media, which county leaders must actively counter with clear and accurate narratives.

NACIO President Schuyler Harding, a director of communications and external affairs for the ACCG, said storytelling plays a key role in helping residents understand services they often take for granted. These include public safety, health services and sanitation.

“People experience these services every day, but they

don’t always see the county’s role behind them,” Harding said. “Storytelling helps connect those dots and reinforces their importance.”

NACo Chief Public Affairs Officer Lori Dicker highlighted the role of strategic communications in blending storytelling with data to reach diverse audiences. She described the newly launched “We Are Counties” campaign as a public affairs effort designed to both inform and spark dialogue.

“This is about creating conversation starters,” Dicker said. “We’re not just sharing information — we’re engaging communities in understanding the impact of county government.”

Chatham County, Ga. PIO Catherine Glasby underscored the importance of humanizing government interactions. She encouraged counties to spotlight employees and personalize services to foster stronger connections with residents.

As part of outreach efforts, Glasby noted that some counties are preparing campaigns tied to National County Government Month in April, including initiatives that feature employees explaining why they chose public service.

Lorna Virgili, who hosts a weekly Spanish-language program for Montgomery County, Md., outlined how partnerships with community organizations help expand outreach. Through an Office of Community Partnerships, the county works with liaisons representing various demographic groups to distribute information and gather feedback.

Montgomery County will also mark its 200th anniversary this year with a series of programs aimed at highlighting its history and community impact, with an official campaign launch scheduled for April.

Officials agreed that combining data with authentic storytelling is essential to building trust, improving communication and ensuring residents and policymakers understand the full scope of county government work. **CN**



NACIO President Schuyler Harding discusses the importance of storytelling at a NACo-NACIO workshop on the topic. Photo by Denny Henry

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NACo: H.R.1 reshapes Medicaid, SNAP administration for counties

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

NACo legislative staff shared how SNAP and Medicaid reform implementation following H.R. 1, which includes changes to eligibility, financing and administrative requirements, will affect counties, in a Feb. 22 workshop at the NACo Legislative Conference.

H.R. 1 is one of the most significant restructurings of the healthcare safety net program in recent years, and the changes will shape both how counties administer programs and how they plan for the future, noted Hennepin County, Minn. Chair Irene Fernando.

“We are aware that there are many paths that people find themselves in,” Fernando said. “The path that we share, the moment that we share, is that we care for our residents deeply. We need sustainable systems in order to advance our shared goals, and all of our futures are entwined in a different kind of way, because of the effects of H.R. 1.”



V. Fixmer-Oraiz, Johnson County, Iowa supervisor, asks a question during the workshop on H.R.1.
Photos by Leon Lawrence III

of the Federal Poverty Level, will now have to pay essentially a co-pay of up to \$35 for services provided under Medicaid, with exceptions, some of which include primary care, mental health and substance use disorder services. Washington, D.C. and 40 states have adopted and implemented Medicaid ex-

implementation, which is a positive, Bryant noted.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reserves the right to pull back Medicaid funding if a state has an error rate of 3% or higher, which will remain the case, but H.R. 1 expands the definition of an error rate to include cases with insufficient documentation, according to Bryant.

“Basically, they’re trying to recoup money for eligibility errors based off the state,” Bryant said. “So, we have a lot less flexibility when it comes to making errors in terms of eligibility verification in Medicaid.”

Counties need to assess their resources, fiscal impacts on health systems and data and information and technology infrastructure needs ahead of implementation, Bryant noted.

“You must also be aligning your data IT infrastructure with your states,” she said.

“Because there’s going to be a lot of state, county and federal reporting, so just making sure all those data systems can work together is going to be a key priority.”

HHS is set to release full formal guidance around implementing work requirements in June, which will apply to adults ages 19 to 64

in states with Medicaid expansion.

“Which is a bit of a tight timeline, seeing as work requirements are being implemented January 1 of next year, essentially,” Bryant said. “So, some states have already done the planning process and putting systems in place to fulfill that requirement.”

Individuals in non-expansion states who have a Section 1115 demonstration waiver can still be subject to submitting work requirements, she said.

“When this first came out, non-expansion states were like ‘Phew, we don’t have to do that,’” Bryant said. “But do take a look at your waivers and see if you are meeting the requirements for covering expansion populations, so that you can fulfill the work requirement requirements under H.R. 1 with that population.”

Numerous groups are excluded from work requirements, including former foster youth, American Indians and Alaska Natives and individuals with significant medical needs. Notably, individuals who follow TANF and SNAP work requirements will not have to submit separate work requirements for Medicaid, she noted.

“We’re happy to see this,”

Bryant said. “Because one of our biggest goals with implementation is streamlining requirements between Medicaid and SNAP, so it’s less confusing to implement.”

States need to verify work requirements a minimum of twice each year but can grant beneficiaries the flexibility in which months they meet the requirement between rules, according to Bryant.

“If an individual says, ‘I can’t work this month, but that month I’ll be working because I’ll have more hours,’ states have the ability to grant that for that individual,” she said.

SNAP

Counties in 10 states are responsible for administering benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the largest food assistance program in the country. The federal government has historically covered 50% of the administrative cost of SNAP benefits, but H.R. 1 decreases that federal share to 25%, meaning that states and counties will now have to take on 75% of the administrative costs of the program, said Emma Conover, NACo’s associate legislative director for Human Services and Education.

Benefit cost share is another new feature of the SNAP program under H.R. 1 that dictates that states will have to pay in accordance with the error rate that has been calculated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, she said.

States with payment error rates above 6% will pay cost share that covers anywhere in between 5% to 15% of benefits. Cost shifts for payment errors occurs for both over- and underpayment, Conover noted.

“If your state distributes \$2 billion worth of benefits and they have an 8.5% error rate,” she said. “They would be responsible for paying \$200 million of the benefits that were originally administered by the federal government.” **CN**



Kenosha County, Wis. Supervisor Sarah Kirby asks how counties can estimate their potential exposure to H.R. 1 changes.

Medicaid

Shifts to cost-sharing requirements, retroactive coverage, error rate enforcement and work requirements for Medicaid outlined in H.R. 1 will affect counties and their budgets, according to Blaire Bryant, NACo legislative director for Health.

Individuals enrolled in Medicaid and in the expansion population, meaning their income is up to 138%

pansion.

H.R. 1 also reduces retroactive coverage from three months down to two months, and down to one month for the Medicaid expansion population. Medicaid retroactive coverage allows patients to cover medical bills for a period prior to their application, if they meet all eligibility requirements during that period. There is federal funding attached to the provision for



Edwards calls for reform after western North Carolina disaster

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards (R-N.C.) said lessons from a devastating storm in western North Carolina highlight the need for major changes to the federal disaster response system.

Speaking to local officials and emergency leaders, Edwards said the region's mountainous terrain made Hurricane Helene, which struck in 2024, particularly destructive. While coastal hurricanes often bring storm surge, the mountains saw nearly 30 inches of rain in a single day.

"That water eventually ran into rivers and streams that

rose about 40 feet," Edwards said. "These weren't gentle rises. They were swift, hard walls of water."

The flooding washed out bridges, damaged infrastructure and cut off entire rural communities. In some counties, a single destroyed bridge isolated residents. Damaged wastewater systems also halted economic activity.

Despite those challenges, Edwards credited local leaders and volunteers for helping communities recover.

"What brought western North Carolina back were strong community leaders, strong nonprofits, good neighbors and folks coming from across the country," he said.



Rep. Chuck Edwards (R-N.C.) calls for reform to disaster response during a policy summit on disasters. Photo by Denny Henry

Edwards said the experience revealed significant problems with the federal disaster response system, particularly the process for receiving assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

He supports reforms included in H.R. 4669, a bill designed to make disaster recovery faster, more flexible and more accountable to local

communities.

"You shouldn't have to spend more time documenting a disaster than responding to it," Edwards said. "And you shouldn't have to wait years for reimbursement while local governments carry the financial burden."

The congressman said the legislation would simplify FEMA's application process and



improve how aid is delivered to communities after disasters.

Edwards also suggested restructuring FEMA so it is no longer housed under the Department of Homeland Security.

"Homeland Security should be focused on threats like terrorism, drug trafficking and illegal immigration," he said. "FEMA should be focused on helping communities recover from disasters."

In addition to policy changes, Edwards outlined three lessons local governments should consider for future disasters.

- First, communities need clear early warning systems that residents understand. Edwards said the National Weather Service provided ac-

See **EDWARDS** page 17

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County leaders seek voice, flexibility in federal transportation funding

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

County priorities for Congress' upcoming surface transportation reauthorization include securing direct federal funding for local governments, enhancing infrastructure safety and implementing permitting reforms, as outlined in letters NACo has submitted to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Ahead of the expiration of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) this fall, transportation experts discussed the future of federal transportation policy at a NACo Legislative Conference policy summit on Feb. 23.

"While we're pushing as hard as NACo for changes in this next bill that facilitate more county investment, we

'Our goal was to bring people in, especially those that hadn't traditionally been captured within the matrix of federal highway.'

– Tony Frye, FHWA

also recognize that the best possible outcome for reauthorization is a bill that works well for counties as well as cities and states, so that the system works for the people we serve," said Converse County, Wyo.



Chairman Jim Willox, who serves as chair of the NACo Transportation Policy Steering Committee.

A strong highway system relies on strong roads, and county roads are critical and vital to that, Willox said. He shared a story of another Converse County commissioner who is a cattle rancher. When he delivers cattle to market, he drives on six miles of gravel county road, eight miles of paved county road, four miles of state highway, 50 miles of interstate, 35 miles of U.S. Highway and three blocks of city road.

"If any part of that system fails, his cattle don't get to market, beef doesn't get delivered and his economic viability is impacted," Willox said. "You can take any commodity, any idea, any work commute and put that same system together, and any failure means that we haven't accomplished what we want as a society in America to get goods and people from point A to point B."

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is working to streamline permitting, so that localities can complete transportation projects quicker and more cost-effectively, said Tony Frye, FHWA associate administrator for Highway Policy and External Affairs.



Tony Frye (left) discusses Federal Highway Administration priorities. Photo by Denny Henry

"We need to deliver products faster, simply because products will be more expensive as the inflation rate climbs," Frye said. "So, a project that today is really expensive was a little bit less expensive last year and 10 years ago."

"So, [we're working to] help you all deliver for your communities in a way that's both manageable, but gets the job done so that you can see the benefits of it sooner."

Receiving local input and hearing what is and what is not working on the ground is essential to FHWA's work, so the division has brought together local, regional and tribal stakeholders in a series of roundtables, including a Re-

quest for Information (RFI) for the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization, according to Frye.

"Our goal was to bring people in, especially those that hadn't traditionally been captured within the matrix of federal highway," Frye said. "To make sure that people were being heard and that we got the ideas."

Localities should take advantage of both discretionary and formula grant opportunities, according to Johnson County, Kan. Chairman Mike Kelly. Discretionary transportation grants are competitive funds for specific projects, while formula transportation grants are federally mandated funds distributed based

on criteria such as population, land area and ridership. A "radical" amount of communication is necessary to be successful in competitive grants, Kelly noted.

"A discretionary grant may take a little bit more time, but it gives you an opportunity to accelerate the vision," he said. "For some communities, the formulaic grants are great — it provides stability to a program that you need to continue."

"I think there's a healthy balance between the two, but I think providing that continued discretionary opportunity allows for innovation and enhancement in a unique way, and we definitely continue to advocate for that." **CN**



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Data centers challenge energy markets, perceptions

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Data center proliferation lies at the confluence of technology, energy and image. Answering questions about this new industry can go a long way toward helping county officials grasp what will only be more imperative going forward.

Though Loudoun County, Va. has experienced dense data center growth over the past three decades, for the rest of the country, the concept of a large, sparsely staffed building that puts demands on utilities is newer than the novel coronavirus.

"I think it's important for people to understand that this is a new industry," said Kevin Gundersen, head of public affairs for Digital Realty during a Feb. 23 summit on data centers. "Our company is 25 years old. I just came from a 50-year-old company," in the chemical engineering industry that has firms nearly three times as old. "There's an industry arms race trying to build up this next stage of critical infrastructure."

Governments on the local, state and federal levels have moved quickly to adjust to the needs and potential that this computing power presents. Chief among them, the demand for electricity, both to power thousands of servers and in many cases, cool them. In 2025, the Trump adminis-



White House advisor Peter Lake explains a multi-state agreement with an electricity market that aims to limit rate increases for the next five years. Photo by Denny Henry

tration debuted the National Energy Dominance Council to develop policy recommendations from a cross-section of federal agencies for maximizing domestic energy output. Energy demand and its consequences on rates have become a priority issue across the country, with worries abounding about rate increases, rolling blackouts and brownouts to manage demand.

"When it comes to power grids, reliability is always first," said Peter Lake, senior director for power on the National Energy Dominance Council. "Affordability is a close second."

Catherine Jereza, assistant

secretary for the Office of Electricity at the Department of Energy, sees data centers as a potential net positive for energy prices.

"We think that data centers can be good for the grid. It's a large load, that large scale brings the opportunity to reduce costs over the long haul, because when you have a large, steady load... if we can look to level that out a little bit with the data centers, then that can help with reducing the costs over the long term," she said.

In January, a bipartisan group of 13 Mid-Atlantic governors signed an agreement with PJM Interconnection,



which operates the largest wholesale electricity market, to extend its capacity market price cap through 2030 and develop \$15 billion in new power generation projects. That will insulate ratepayers from rising demand by data centers for electricity, which is necessary for both operation and cooling.

"Not only was the court tenet of this unprecedented deal, that we will build big infrastructure in America again," Jereza said. "We will build the baseline power that we need to meet this economic growth, not only from data centers, but from manufacturing, re-industrialization of America. But because these technology companies are paying, or driving so much of that demand, they are very supportive of making sure they pay their fair share."

"I think it's very fair if a tech company or a data center, developer, comes to your local territory, points to that PJM deal that the president laid out, and says 'We expect you to meet those same standards.'"

It's an approach favored by Tony Clark, executive director of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners and a former chairman

of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), as other energy markets face the same demands.

Policy recommendations for managing the power demand are specific to different regions, given the variety of ways resource authority is vested in different states.

"FERC jurisdictional markets are incredibly complex, getting into a particular docket, a case in front of FERC, can be one of those in-for-a-penny-in-for-a-pound sorts of things. It can be very difficult for any individual, local government to get involved with," Clark said.

"I think by banding together, with your governors, with your state public utility commissions and others, you can have a real impact in some of those markets."

Blank slates

As communities in many states face debates over land use regulations allowing data center development, Gundersen said data centers are only now starting to face a skeptical audience and articulate their function.

"A data center is the physical manifestation of all these [internet-based] things that we use," he said.

"That could be a hospital system in Atlanta, that we serve that allows real-time x-ray imaging, real-time MRI for people that are coming to emergency rooms." 

SPONSORED CONTENT

Nationwide Retirement Solutions Earns Continued Recognition for Service Excellence

Nationwide Retirement Solutions has once again been recognized by DALBAR, the financial services industry's leading independent evaluator, earning the 2025 Customer Experience Excellence Award for the sixth consecutive year. The organization also received DALBAR's Plan Participant Service Award for the 12th year in a row, reinforcing its long-standing commitment to delivering exceptional ser-

vice to retirement plan participants.

These awards recognize strong performance across service, communication, and digital engagement, including call center support for retirement plan participants. Nationwide also earned an EXCELLENT designation for Mobile Sites Retirement Plans, highlighting its ability to support participants consistently across phone, online, and mo-



bile experiences.

This continued recognition reflects Nationwide's focus on

creating clear, responsive, and participant focused service experiences for public-sector employees nationwide.

Supporting County Employees Nationwide

Nationwide Retirement Solutions helps secure financial futures for approximately three million participants in 30,000 retirement plans, representing \$250 billion in

assets, across full-service recordkeeping, investment solutions, and pension risk transfer. Nationwide remains No. 1 in public 457 plans based on number of plans, with an average client tenure of 29 years.

For counties, consistent, high-quality participant service plays a critical role in employee confidence, engagement, and long-term retirement readiness. Nationwide's continued recognition by DALBAR reflects an ongoing focus on supporting public employees through reliable service and accessible retirement resources.

HUD seeks cross-agency approach to homelessness

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has shifted away from its previous Housing First model and moved toward prioritizing more transitional housing with wraparound services to tackle homelessness and promote “self-efficiency,” according to Ronnie Kurtz, HUD’s assistant secretary for community planning and development.

“We are acutely aware that D.C. is not where the action happens, it happens in your local communities and in your counties,” Kurtz said Feb. 22 at a NACo Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) meeting.

“So, the quicker that we can get our funds out of headquarters and down to you all at the local level, the more quickly we can have an effective impact on what’s going on there,” he said.

Partnership between counties and HUD is essential, as federal housing policy shapes

the tools counties depend on to deliver results on the ground, from continuum of care funding to disaster recovery resources, said Los Angeles County, Calif. Supervisor Kathryn Barger.

“Across the nation, our counties are on the frontlines of addressing two deeply connected challenges, housing affordability and homelessness,” Barger said. “Every day, we are working to stabilize families, expand access to affordable housing and ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness can connect to services that they need. None of this work happens in isolation.”

In the aftermath of the Eaton and Palisades fires, HUD quickly provided resources to Los Angeles County, including activating Rapid Unsheltered Survivor Housing (RUSH)



Ronnie Kurtz, HUD assistant secretary for community planning and development, discusses housing policy Feb. 22 with county officials at the NACo Legislative Conference. Photo by Denny Henry



grants, Mega Waivers and the Emergency Solutions Grants program, Barger noted. The assistance allowed the county

to deploy emergency housing vouchers and reuse funds already allocated to it through other programs to address disaster issues as quickly as possible.

It’s going to take cross collaboration to ensure the United States is “attacking [homelessness] from all directions,” Kurtz said, noting that HUD is working closely with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Labor to streamline programming. HUD has also streamlined the environmental review process for Community Development Block Grant funding, so counties don’t have to go through the process again with HUD if it’s already been approved by another agency, according to Kurtz.

“A lack of affordable housing is one driver of homelessness,” Kurtz said. “But mental

health problems, substance abuse and lack of available job training are also drivers of that.”

A federal court preliminary injunction issued in December halted HUD’s new Continuum of Care program Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFOs), pausing the department’s ability to cap funding for Permanent Supportive Housing.

The NOFO changes would “prioritize competition among new mental health service providers that focus on drug addiction treatment and that hope to use federal programs not as a hammock, but as a trampoline back to self-sufficiency,” Kurtz said.

“... I think this is a unique opportunity we have here in this country to increase the capacity to address the homelessness issue by increasing the amount of people who are going through the system and getting back to self-sufficiency and also increasing the amount of people who are providing the services.”

Proposed bill ties Social Security funding to public lands activity

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Not everyone understands public lands policy, but eventually, everyone comes to understand Social Security.

Rep. Paul Gosar (R-Ariz.) is betting on that by sponsoring the Land and Social Security Optimization (LASSO) Act. The bill would require that 10% of revenue generated by the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service public lands would be directed to the Federal Old-Age & Survivors Insurance Trust Fund. The trust fund pays Social Security benefits to retirees and their families and to survivors of deceased workers.

“This bill includes language that does not affect local or state revenues and maintains the predictability of these payments that are going to counties, that are going to local

governments, tribal governments, without affecting PILT and Secure Rural Schools,” Macayle Fuchs, Gosar’s legislative director, told members of the Western Interstate Region (WIR) Feb. 22 during its meeting.

The PILT (Payments in Lieu

of Taxes) and Secure Rural Schools programs compensate counties for untaxable public land, including the lands specified in the bill. The Western Interstate Region represents counties in Western states that include significant portions of federally

managed land.

“We’re facing an affordability crisis in the United States and in the West; we know how to manage our land. D.C. does not,” Fuchs said. “By tying the success of public lands to such a vulnerable asset as Social Security, the congressman (Gosar) hopes the LASSO Act will encourage expedited permitting, encourage NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) reform, or Endangered Species Act reform.”

She said that the Congressional Budget Office estimated that the activity on eligible public lands in 2023 would have generated at least \$2 billion under the LASSO Act, which would have cut the Social Security shortfall by 3%.

“It’s not the end-all, be-all solution to Social Security insolvency or the end-all, be-all solution for public land management,” she said. “Through this bill, the more money that’s

generated off of public lands or from the multiple use of public lands, whether that’s recreation, energy development, grazing...the more money that’s generated from these public lands, the more money is deposited into Social Security, ultimately giving Americans a direct incentive or a direct revenue stream, a direct hand in the cookie jar to secure their own Social Security.”

The region will meet May 5-8 in Maui County, Hawaii for the WIR Conference, which will include programming on disaster recovery and the county’s continuing recovery from the 2023 Lahaina fire that devastated a region of the county, killing more than 100 people, destroying more than 2,000 homes and causing \$5.5 billion in damage. WIR also announced that its 2027 conference would be held in Douglas County, Nev.



Macayle Fuchs, legislative director for Rep. Paul Gosar (R-Ariz.), assures the Western Interstate Region members Feb. 22 that at two pages, the LASSO Act would be clear to all. Photo by Denny Henry

Speaker's staffer: Capitol Hill visits matter

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Organizing matters. So does showing up. Eric Schmitz should know.

From Mardi Gras celebrations to the National Prayer Breakfast — both of which took place in the same room as the Feb. 21 Rural Action Caucus meeting that he was addressing — as coalitions director for House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.), Schmitz is the staff member handling meetings with every type of group seeking a meeting with House leadership. And he said that despite the bevy of opportunities to interact with congressional offices, which have only increased with the proliferation of video call technology, meeting in person matters.

"I have found in the groups that I meet with, whether they're rural communities, industry lobbyists, activists



Eric Schmitz, coalitions director for House Speaker Mike Johnson, details President Trump's executive orders that were codified in H.R.1. Photo by Denny Henry

or grassroots groups, meeting their members, talking to your members, talking to your delegations, building relationships, finding the policy experts on these issues, real-

ly matter because those who show up, those who are tenacious...their efforts will be reflected in federal policy," he said. "There's a reason people come here."

He encouraged county officials to keep visiting Washington, D.C. and meeting with congressional staff on their priorities — he highlighted the farm bill and permitting



reform. A member of Congress often maintains a busy schedule while visiting their district and their district staff are often more oriented toward providing constituent service, with the division of labor placing more emphasis on legislation to Capitol Hill staff.

"It's a different environment when you come to D.C. than when a member comes home and they're doing their district visits," Schmitz said. "You're able to find those policy experts that work in the committee staff, see what their relationships are."

He also recommended networking to build the very coalitions to which he is accustomed to working with, including NACo. **CN**

Expert warns Mid-Size County Caucus of rising cybersecurity risks as AI expands

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

County officials were urged to strengthen cybersecurity defenses and carefully manage the use of artificial intelligence during a presentation by Shannon Smith, director, Public Sector services for CAI, at a meeting Feb. 22 of the Mid-Size County Caucus.

Speaking to members of the caucus, Smith discussed how emerging technologies — including generative AI and large-scale data centers — are reshaping both opportunities and risks for local governments.

Smith, who previously served as CIO chief of staff for King County, Wash., said counties must prepare for increasingly sophisticated cyber threats. Many local governments still rely on aging technology systems, some decades old, which can make them vulnerable to attacks.

"Threat actors look for weak usernames and passwords, outdated systems and employees who might accidentally click a malicious link," Smith said. "Ransomware gets the headlines, but it often starts with those basic vulnerabilities."

Artificial intelligence is accelerating those threats, she said. Tools such as ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini allow attackers to automate phishing messages, refine scams and launch thousands of attempts in a short period of time at minimal cost.

"AI allows threat actors to move faster and learn from failed attempts," Smith said. "They no longer need large teams to run sophisticated cyber operations."

At the same time, Smith emphasized that AI can also strengthen government operations when used responsibly. She encouraged counties to focus on stronger password



Shannon Smith, director, Public Sector, CAI, speaks Feb. 22 to members of the Mid-Size County Caucus. Photo by Denny Henry

protections, multi-factor authentication and improved employee training about data security and AI tools.

Education about how staff use AI systems is particularly important, she said. Employees may unknowingly upload sensitive information into public AI platforms, creating potential data risks for government agencies.

Smith also encouraged regional collaboration between

counties, cities, private companies and universities to share cybersecurity information and best practices.

Beyond security, Smith highlighted the rapid growth of AI infrastructure, particularly large "hyperscale" data centers operated by companies such as Amazon and Microsoft. Demand for computing power is driving a surge in new facilities across the United States.

Data centers currently account for about 4% of electricity use in the country and could reach as much as 9-12% by 2030, she said. A single hyperscale facility can consume as much power as 100,000 homes and use millions of gallons of water daily.

While the expansion creates economic opportunities, Smith said counties must balance those benefits with infrastructure and environmental considerations.

She also urged local leaders to engage residents early when adopting AI technologies in public services.

"People want to know how their data is being used and whether a human is still part of the process," Smith said. "If you start those conversations early, you build trust and learn how your community actually wants to use these tools."

Smith concluded that while AI and cybersecurity challenges may seem daunting, thoughtful policies and collaboration can help counties adopt the technology responsibly while protecting public data and services. **CN**

BRIGHT IDEAS | MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLA.

Miami-Dade County ‘Zero Drowning’ Program Prevents Children’s Deaths

PROBLEM: Drowning is the leading cause of death for children ages 1-14 in Miami-Dade County.

SOLUTION: Teach children how to swim at no-cost and provide more community education around water safety.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

In Miami-Dade County, Fla. the leading cause of death for children ages 1-14 is accidental drowning. To help turn the tide against child drownings, the county is helping children learn how to swim and investing in community water safety education.

Through the “Zero Drowning” initiative, kindergarteners in Miami-Dade County Public Schools attend 30-minute swimming lessons for 10 days, at a municipal or partnering private swimming pool within 15 minutes of their respective schools. Participating in formal swimming lessons is associated with an 88% reduction in a child’s risk of drowning, according to a 2009 case-control study published in the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine.

County partners that helped make the initiative possible include Miami-Dade County Public Schools, The Children’s Trust, The Miami Foundation, United Way Miami, American Red Cross, Edu Foundation and the Templeton Family Foundation.

“We had a group of people — governmental, private, non-profit — that came together and said, ‘Enough is enough, we have to do something,’” said Jim O’Connor, chief of the Miami-Dade County Parks’ Office of Drowning Prevention.

There are usually three reasons why children don’t take swim lessons: Cost, transporta-



Children participating in Miami-Dade County, Fla.’s Zero Drowning initiative show off their drawstring backpacks.

tion barriers or having a parent or caregiver who doesn’t know how to swim themselves, according to O’Connor, who has been a swim instructor for 45 years and wrote his master’s thesis on accidental drownings in the United States.

“If a parent doesn’t know how to swim, they’re less likely to teach their children or have their children sign up for swim lessons,” O’Connor said. “So, we try to take care of the fear factor by providing education to the parent during the registration process to encourage them to sign up.”

Parents and caregivers of children participating in the program also receive education on water safety through the Zero Drowning initiative in the form of a 40-page PowerPoint that’s offered in English, Spanish and Haitian-Creole. The program, which is completely free for participants, has a 100% parent satisfaction rate, according to a county survey.

One parent wrote in their survey response: “[Zero Drowning] has greatly improved my child’s confidence, especially in water-related activities. He’s become much

more confident going to the pool. Thank you for the program.”

Other survey respondents said, “My daughter learned how to swim, and lost her fear of the water” and “[It was a] beautiful experience, tons of joys. The instructors were great.”

‘It’s been a priority for us to reach as many children as we can...’

— Jim O’Connor,
Miami-Dade County Parks

Miami-Dade County Public Schools provides its buses as transportation to the swimming pools, and the county provides transportation for 4-year-olds enrolled in Head Start. More than 100 schools and child care centers have participated.

The initiative focuses on kindergarteners because “they’re at a little bit higher risk of drowning than the older kids, and their test schedule isn’t as intensive,” O’Connor said. “So, we work with the school calendar, and it’s really considered a

two-week field trip.”

Miami-Dade County has set a goal to reach 20,000 children through the Zero Drowning initiative by 2027, and plans to sustain that level for future generations, O’Connor noted.

To date, it’s reached roughly 4,000 children and is on track to have roughly doubled the number of children participating each year since its launch in 2024, according to O’Connor. This summer, the program will expand into summer camps, as well.

As part of the initiative’s broader goal to improve the dissemination of water safety education, the county launched a website that provides safety tips and information on the program. It also acts as an interactive hub for people to get connected to municipal and private swim providers, O’Connor noted.

“One of the common questions we always get is, ‘I don’t have a 4-year-old or a 5-year-old [child], but I have an 8-year-old who wants to take swim classes,’” O’Connor said. “So they can click on a map and find swim lessons in areas where they live, and then go

to the municipal governments or the private swim providers that are our partners and sign up directly on their website.”

Zero Drowning is aiming for 15% of the participants it serves to be children with disabilities. In its second year, it’s nearly met that goal, O’Connor noted.

Children with autism are up to 160 times more likely to drown than their neurotypical peers, according to the National Autism Association. While there’s typically six neurotypical children for every swim instructor, when there’s a child with disabilities, the accommodation could switch to teaching them one-on-one, depending on need, according to O’Connor.

“These children are naturally attracted to the water,” O’Connor said. “It’s very soothing, they tend to wander. So, that’s why it’s really been a priority for us to reach as many children as we can — not just with autism, but disabilities as a whole.”

Since Zero Drowning’s launch, child drowning deaths have gone down in Miami-Dade County, as the state of Florida’s deaths have continued to rise, according to O’Connor. In 2025, a record-breaking 112 children died due to drownings throughout the state.

“We want to teach as many kids as we possibly can across the county,” O’Connor said. “... And the reason why [Zero Drowning] works is because it really is a partnership, between governmental, non-profit and private [stakeholders] trying to bring everybody together for a common cause and then having the right people in the right leadership that can be our champions.”

Miami-Dade County’s Zero Drownings initiative was the 2025 NACo Achievement Award “Best in Category” winner in Children and Youth.

WORD SEARCH

NODAWAY COUNTY, MISSOURI

Created by Mary Ann Barton

W D L H A Z Z A P X Y A C H A Y P C Q P
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ABBEY: The county is home to a Benedictine monastery that operates Conception Seminary College, which trains priests.

AQUATICS: The Maryville Aquatics Center features water slides, splash attractions and a crystal pool.

CARNEGIE: Author Dale Carnegie, whose book "How to Win Friends and Influence People," grew up on a farm in the county. The book has sold 30 million copies worldwide.

COURTHOUSE: The first county courthouse was built in 1846 for \$250. The current courthouse, built in 1883 with Italianate features, was renovated in the 1970s.

CROPS: The county is an agricultural center known for growing soybeans, corn, wheat and oats.

DERBY: The county is home to Ben Jones and Jimmy Jones who have trained six Kentucky Derby winners and two Triple Crowns.

HISTORY: The Nodaway County Historical Society operates a museum, a

one-room schoolhouse and an 1849 historic home.

HOMER: Writer Homer Croy often wrote about rural life in Missouri, including for more than a dozen films.

MARYVILLE: The county seat was named for Mary House Graham, who was married to a county official, Amos Graham.

NODAWAY: The name comes from an Algonquin term for "snake" or "enemy."

NORTHWEST: The county is in the northwest corner of Missouri.

PLATTE: The county was part of a six-county region purchased in 1836 from Native Americans, after Missouri has become a state in 1821.

POPULATION: The county population is 21,241, according to the 2020 Census.

TORNADO: One of the first recorded F5 tornadoes hit the county in 1881.

UNIVERSITY: The county is home to Northwest Missouri State University.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

JENNY WILSON
NACo Board Member
 Salt Lake County, Utah
 Mayor



WILSON

Number of years active in NACo: 17

Years in public service: 17

My first NACo event was: My first job in D.C. was NACo in 1989!

NACo committee(s): Board of Directors, LUCC Leadership Committee, Council on Immigration

Occupation: Mayor of Salt Lake County

Education: Bachelor's degree from University of Utah, Graduate degree from Harvard University

The hardest thing I've ever done: Managing a county during COVID.

One person (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Eleanor Roosevelt

A dream I have is to: Go on an African safari

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Produced a documentary film

My favorite way to relax is: Read, binge watch.

I'm most proud of: My two sons.

Every morning I read: News summary.

My favorite meal is: Dinner

My pet peeve is: Inefficiency; ignoring facts and data.

My motto is: Forward momentum.

The last book I read was: "Strong Ground" by Brené Brown

My favorite movie is: Documentaries and historic "look-back" films

My favorite music is: Many genres.

My favorite U.S. president is: John F. Kennedy

My county is a NACo member because: We rely on the connectivity to other counties, research and convening.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Trek on the Everest Basecamp Trail and climb the Grand Teton several times.



BEHIND THE SEAL

CAROLINE COUNTY, VA.

Caroline County, located in eastern Central Virginia, was formed in 1727 from parts of Essex, King and Queen and King William counties and named for the newly crowned British queen Caroline of Ansbach.



The county seal, outlined by the county's borders, features Queen Caroline's image with the county's founding date, as well as the 1835 Jeffersonian designed Courthouse in Bowling Green.

It also features a farmer plowing his tobacco field with two oxen and a sun setting over trees and the Rappahannock River, which runs through the county.

ON THE MOVE



Clark

NACo OFFICERS

- President **J.D. Clark** and Associate Membership Director **Grace Dunlap** attended the Police Jury Association of Louisiana Annual Conference in Calcasieu Parish.
- Clark also attended, with Membership Engagement Director **Tammy Tinchler**, the Iowa State Association of Counties Spring Conference in Polk County.



Holmes

NACo STAFF

- **Naomi Freeland** has been promoted to director of grassroots and legislative advocacy in NACo's Government Affairs department.
- Executive Director **Matt Chase**, Intergovernmental Affairs Director **Rick Hart** and National Director of Executive Relationships **Craig Holmes** attended the New York State Association of Counties Legislative Conference in Albany County.
- **Melissa Krouse** was promoted to Associate Director of Corporate Relations. She attended the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania Spring Conference in Dauphin County.
- **Jonathan Harris** was promoted to director of research in NACo's Research department.
- **Ricardo Aguilar** was promoted to director of data analytics in NACo's Research department.



Krouse

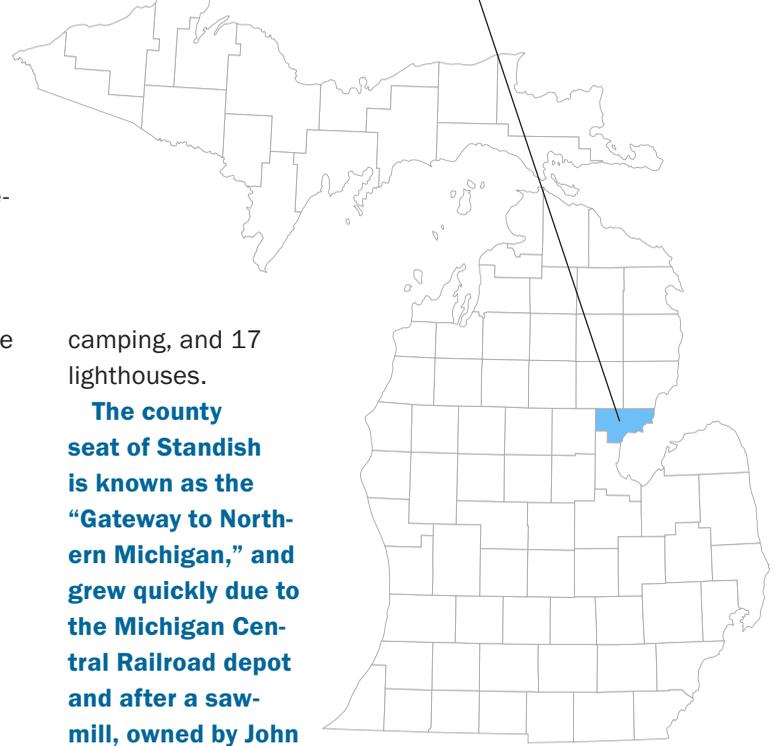


Aguilar

GET TO KNOW...

Arenac County, Michigan

by Meredith Moran
staff writer



Established in 1883, Arenac County, Mich. received its name from a combination of the Latin word for sand (arena) and the Native American word for earth (ac), which translates to “a sandy place for a good footing.”

Boasting a population of 15,087, according to the 2024 U.S. Census, the county features historic sites including the 1904 Maple Ridge Schoolhouse, the Saganing Eagles Landing Casino and Hotel and rich Native American history spanning more than 5,000 years.

The county is located along Saginaw Bay on Lake Huron, the second largest Great Lake and the fourth-largest freshwater lake in the world, making fishing, canoeing and kayaking popular activities.

Arenac County visitors can explore the Huron Shores Recreational Heritage Route, which extends from the county seat, Standish, to Mackinaw City. The route includes Thompson's Harbor and Negwegon state parks and forests, which offer opportunities for hiking and

camping, and 17 lighthouses.

The county seat of Standish is known as the “Gateway to Northern Michigan,” and grew quickly due to the Michigan Central Railroad depot and after a saw-mill, owned by John Standish, was established in 1871.

Standish is also known as the “Gateway to the Sunrise Side” because it marks the route's starting point along the shoreline of Lake Huron (which has the longest shoreline of any Great Lake, stretching across 3,827 miles with 30,000 islands).

Nearly half of the county is water, due to Saginaw Bay, a 1,143-square-mile inlet of Lake Huron that forms the space between Michigan's Thumb region and the rest of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan. Saginaw Bay has the largest contiguous freshwater coastal wetland in the country and is known

for its world-class walleye fishing.

Standish native Pat O'Keefe was a high school athlete, a college baseball standout and a minor league player before going on to become the winningest coach in Michigan high school baseball history. During his nearly 50 years coaching for Grand Ledge, he has more than 1,200 wins under his belt. O'Keefe is a member of several halls of fame, including the Michigan Baseball Hall of Fame.

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.

Disaster gives chance to fix broken system, Edwards says

From EDWARDS page 10

curate forecasts ahead of the storm, helping prevent even greater loss of life.

• Second, backup communication systems are essential. During the storm, widespread power outages knocked out internet service, cell towers and radios, making it difficult for counties to communicate with each other or with state officials. “We couldn't even tell people outside our counties how bad things were,” Edwards said.

• Finally, he urged local governments to ensure disaster assistance applications are accurate and transparent. Errors or inflated estimates

can delay aid and create additional scrutiny during the review process.

Edwards said more than 6,400 public assistance applications were submitted after the storm across western North Carolina.

The FEMA reform bill has passed the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee but has not yet been brought to the House floor. Edwards said lawmakers are waiting for recommendations from a presidential FEMA review council before moving forward.

“This disaster gives us an opportunity,” Edwards said, “to go back and fix a system that we know isn't working.”



Michigan Central Railroad Standish Depot dates to 1889 and is now a visitor center. Photo by Ian Poellet

CALIFORNIA

The **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** Board of Supervisors unanimously approved a motion to reform and better integrate mental health care within the County's homeless services system, with a focus on expanding field-based care for people experiencing **homelessness with serious mental illness**, the county said in a press release.

"For too long, people living on our streets with serious mental illness have been failed by disconnected systems that expect them to find their way to care — instead of meeting them where they are," said Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath.

"For too many people living on our streets, untreated mental health conditions are the root cause keeping them there," said Supervisor Kathryn Barger.

FLORIDA

Mixon Farms, a Bradenton property that opened in 1939 and operated for decades as a citrus attraction, held its first public market event Sunday after **MANATEE COUNTY** purchased the land in 2025, WWSB-TV reported. The county **bought the property** following the farm's 2023 closure, preserving it from

residential development and converting it into a community space.

Janet Mixon, a member of the Mixon family, said the sale to the county was the outcome the family had hoped for. "We are a part of a lot of people's memories," Mixon said. "This is what we prayed for. We were approached by developers

that wanted to do 350 townhouses here. We just can't let that happen."

MINNESOTA

- **HENNEPIN COUNTY** has established a \$2 million fund supporting small businesses that **lost significant revenue** during Operation Metro Surge. Applications are for one-time grants between \$3,000 and \$10,000. The grants will help cover up to two months of rent or commercial mortgage payments for small businesses in the county that faced financial hardship as thousands of federal immigration agents patrolled Twin Cities streets between December and February.

- **REDWOOD COUNTY** has a **bridge to sell you**, and it's only \$1, MPR News reported. The catch? Whoever buys it must repair it, move it, and then reinstall it elsewhere, a task that will certainly cost well over a dollar. Gold Mine Bridge is a steel Parker through-truss bridge. It is 191 feet long, stretching across the Minnesota River, connecting gravel roads and Redwood and Renville counties on either side of it. The bridge has stood there for more than 120 years and due to its rare

architectural design, it is eligible to be designated in the National Register of Historic Places.

MISSOURI

BOONE COUNTY Upward Mobility Early Grade Literacy Workgroup has launched

Raising Readers, a county-wide campaign to promote early childhood literacy and equip parents and caregivers with simple tools to build strong reading habits.

Grounded in the belief that

See NEWS FROM page 19



KENTUCKY

BUTLER COUNTY recently launched its very first **Special Olympics Program**, marking an exciting and meaningful milestone, Beech Tree News reported. While Butler County has had students participate in Special Olympics events in the past — such as bowling and swimming — this is the first time the county has established an official, ongoing Special Olympics program.

Looking ahead, the program will offer multiple opportunities throughout the year for individuals to participate in a wide range of sports. These include swimming, cheer, flag football, softball, track, basketball and bowling. Each program focuses not only on athletic development, but also on building confidence, friendships and community involvement.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



IDAHO

As March Madness tips off on the court, **BANNOCK COUNTY** is launching a bracket of its own, WDKY-TV reported. The Mosquito Abatement District has a new high-tech recruit — a **pesticide drone** — and they need help naming it. By reaching marshy areas trucks can't access, the drone stops mosquitoes at the source, helping prevent illnesses like West Nile virus.

"We wanted a fun way to introduce the public to this new technology," Dana Evans, mosquito abatement supervisor, said. Voting will take place on social media.



MARYLAND

CECIL COUNTY Department of Emergency Services paramedics now can treat patients with life-threatening bleeding at the scene — instead of having to wait until reaching the hospital — after joining the **Prehospital Whole Blood Program**, the *Cecil Whig* reported.

Two DES quick-response vehicles used by supervisors are now equipped to carry and administer whole blood in the field, the result of several months of planning that started in July. There are approximately 40 paid DES paramedics, including supervisors, and they are the only ones in the county who are trained and certified to administer the whole blood.

From NEWS FROM page 18

early literacy drives long-term academic success and well-being, the campaign aims to increase community interest, remove barriers, and expand opportunities for young children to develop literacy skills. Rather than creating new programs, Raising Readers connects and strengthens existing efforts across schools, libraries, nonprofits, childcare providers, and family-serving organizations throughout Boone County.

NEW YORK

• As part of her \$4.5 billion investment to deliver state-wide universal **childcare**, Governor Hochul recently announced the State will partner with **DUTCHESS, MONROE** and **BROOME** counties in a new State pilot program to help counties offer addition-



NORTH CAROLINA

A new “**bookmobile**” is launching in **BRUNSWICK COUNTY** to offer services in underserved and rural areas, *Port City Daily* reported.

“This new mobile library branch brings the wide variety of resources and services that we offer to the community,” Library Director Patricia Dew said in a release. “I am excited to reach community members who may not be able to make it to one of our existing branches.”

al childcare options in their communities. This pilot program will include a total of \$60 million in State funding, along with new investments from each of the three counties, as they expand childcare access with a particular focus on serving children 0-3.

• **OSWEGO COUNTY** is making a bid to open a new frontier in suburban development in Central New York, hoping to cash in on growth that’s expected to follow Micron Technology to the Syracuse area, *The Post-Standard* reported.

To unlock more than 30,000 acres for housing and industrial development, officials are pushing to **build a public sewage system** that would serve eight municipalities in southern Oswego County, a mostly rural area north of Oneida Lake.

PENNSYLVANIA

• **NORTHAMPTON COUNTY** Council recently voted “yes” on a **non-discrimination ordinance** that promotes the rights and opportunities of all persons to participate in the social, cultural, recreational and economic life of the county, the county announced in a press release. To provide stronger protections for more classes of people, the ordinance provides for the formation of a county human relations commission similar to the Human Relations Commission of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The commission will

and blessed a new ambulance bus that officials say could quickly expand the county’s ability to **respond to mass casualty incidents** across the Low-country, WCIV-TV reported.

They’re hoping they don’t have to use it often, but EMS crews said if it is needed, it can be up and running in just a few minutes and could save lives.

The specialized unit can transport up to 22 patients at once and will support emergency response efforts, evacuations and large community events. Originally the Charleston County Public Library’s mobile library, the vehicle has been converted into a fully equipped EMS unit with 12 patient beds, 10 seated transport positions, wheelchair tie-downs, onboard medical equipment and a Bluetooth-enabled blood pressure monitoring system.

TEXAS

HARRIS COUNTY has become the first Texas county with a comprehensive **labor consultation policy** — paving a way for county workers to advocate for higher wages

and improved working conditions, Houston Public Media reported.

The worker consultations policy was approved 3-1 by Harris County Commissioners Court.

VIRGINIA

• As Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger weighs whether to sign off on a measure that would **let voters decide to build a casino** complex in **FAIRFAX COUNTY**, local and state leaders have offered conflicting perspectives on whether the area needs it, WTOP reported.

“The idea that Tysons is struggling, therefore the state needs to come up with a gimmick to help it — Tysons is funding the state!” Board of Supervisors Chairman Jeff McKay said during a recent meeting. “It is places like Tysons that are funding the state.”

Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell, who introduced the bill that would allow for a casino in Fairfax County, said Tysons has had trouble attracting projects.

Do you have news to share? Please send your press releases and photos to Editor Mary Ann Barton at mbarton@naco.org.

receive and investigate claims of discrimination occurring in Northampton County and enforce non-discrimination requirements.

“The county has a vested interest in protecting the rights of all of its residents,” said County Executive Tara Zrinski. “Our strength as a county comes from the diversity of our residents, and we are committed to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to live, work, and participate in community life without fear of discrimination.”

SOUTH CAROLINA

CHARLESTON COUNTY emergency leaders unveiled



VIRGINIA

• **AUGUSTA COUNTY** is inviting residents and visitors to hit the backroads this spring and summer and discover the farms that anchor the region’s agricultural economy, Rocktown Now reported. The new **Farm Explorer Passport Program**, launched this year, is designed to connect the public with the producers, practices, and businesses that make the county one of Virginia’s agricultural leaders.

The initiative encourages participants to visit farms and ag-based enterprises across the county, collecting stamps in a passport as they go. Along the way, visitors can meet farmers, learn how local food and products are made and gain a deeper understanding of the diverse operations that support the region’s economy.



PENNSYLVANIA

• Narcan, hygiene items and other life-saving harm-reduction supplies will now be available for free at two **24/7 kiosks** in **LEHIGH COUNTY**.

Lehigh County Drug and Alcohol recently announced that its launched two 24/7 public health kiosks to reduce barriers to accessing naloxone (Narcan). The machines are fully funded through opioid settlement dollars with no taxpayer dollars used to support the project, according to a news release.

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Annual Conference & Expo

July 17-20

Orleans Parish/New Orleans, La.



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