

MUSEUM EXPANSION AMPLIFIES THE STORY OF A RURAL COUNTY. PG. 5



COUNTIES MAKE THE CASE FOR PERMITTING REFORM. PG. 6



AS COUNTY MEETINGS GO DIGITAL, PRODUCTIVITY SOARS. PG. 11

LUCC focuses on tackling housing affordability shortage

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

County officials representing large urban areas across the country traveled to Washington D.C. April 23 to discuss data-driven approaches to expanding housing supply and affordability at a think tank and relay local housing needs to federal agency staff and members of Congress at NACo's Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) fly-in.

"Housing, especially housing supply and affordability, is one of the most pressing challenges facing our respective metropolitan areas," said LUCC Chair Adrian Garcia, who serves as a Harris County, Texas commissioner. "It's a core constraint, not only on quality of life, but also on economic growth and workforce ability."

Best practices

Edward Pinto, senior fellow and co-director of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) Housing Center, outlined three ways local governments can increase housing supply:

- Allow houses to be built on smaller lots, increasing the amount of starter single family homes and townhomes
- Allow lot split flexibilities on existing lots, enabling a variety of dwelling types and sizes to exist on one property

(such as duplexes, ADUs and townhomes)

- Expand flexibility to build homes near jobs

"The three most important things in housing affordability are small lot, small lot, small lot," Pinto said. "Small lots cost less; you get smaller homes on small lots."

Local governments should encourage the construction of small residential properties — specifically single-family buildings that contain between one and four separate dwelling units, according to Pinto.

"That is the way that you actually make housing affordable," he said. "... The first home I bought in 1975 [was] 1,400 square feet, three bedrooms, on a 4,800 square foot lot. We don't build those houses anymore. They're illegal. You need to activate that."

Into the early 20th century, it was common to have multiple types of residences — small, large, duplexes, triplexes, townhomes — mixed in the same neighborhood as doctor's offices, grocery stores and other commercial properties, Pinto said. And not just in urban areas, but in smaller cities, as well, he noted.

That ended when Herbert Hoover, who was the U.S. Secretary of Commerce at

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Huge plumes of smoke blanket swaths of Georgia as crews battle rapidly growing wildfires. A record drought fueled wildfires across the region that flared up two weeks ago and continued to burn last week. Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp declared a state of emergency in 91 counties. The wildfires burned more than 55,000 acres in Clinch and Brantley counties. Photo courtesy of the Georgia Forestry Commission

Counties eye potential Medicaid reimbursement remedies

by **Naomi Freel**

The problems San Joaquin County, Calif. faces in meeting residents' behavioral health care needs have been brewing for 60 years.

Supervisor Steven Ding has spent years pushing to reform a rule, known as the Medicaid Institutions for Mental Diseases

(IMD) exclusion, that he says overwhelms first responders and strains county budgets. And he's finally seeing some potential for improvement.

"You work on this day after day after day, and nobody knows what you're talking about," Ding said. "Then finally, you find an opening."

The IMD exclusion, written into law in 1965, prohibits federal Medicaid funds from being used to reimburse care in mental health or substance use disorder treatment facilities with more than 16 beds. The rule was created during the deinstitutionalization move-

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After 2025 fires, Los Angeles County and local partners join forces to rebuild

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

In the weeks following the Palisades and Eaton fires, which burned more than 38,000 acres and destroyed about 13,000 homes across Los Angeles County, Calif.,

there was an outpouring of support.

American Red Cross mobilized nearly 1,900 volunteers and helped provide shelter, food and financial assistance to those affected by the fires. Lady Gaga, Green Day and other big-name acts came to-

gether for the FireAid benefit concert, which raised more than \$100 million for relief and rebuilding efforts. Individuals cleared debris, fostered pets of families who were forced to evacuate, served hot meals

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Counties must ensure IMD exclusion is understood

From MEDICAID page 1

ment to shift responsibility for large psychiatric hospitals away from the federal government and toward states and local governments. The regulations governing it have not been revised since 1988.

The intent may have made sense at the time, but its effects today do not. Medicaid is the single largest payer of behavioral health services in the country, accounting for roughly 24 percent of all spending on both mental health and substance use disorder treatment. When a county-run facility exceeds 16 beds, it loses access to Medicaid reimbursements entirely, regardless of how well the facility is run or the number of people needing treatment.

Some larger counties have found workarounds, building multiple small, separate facilities on the same campus to stay under the federal bed cap. But doing so comes at a steep

price — significantly higher construction, staffing and operational costs that most counties simply cannot afford. For most, the choice is a stark one: Shrink to fit the cap or go without Medicaid reimbursement.

San Joaquin County was left with no choice but to shrink. For years, the county operated a 40-bed psychiatric health facility before the fiscal reality caught up. To qualify for the much-needed Medicaid reimbursement, the county reconfigured the facility down to 16 beds in 2023, from 40.

“You either have the money to pay for it, or you don’t. And so, it was a decision made fiscally, and with our brain,” Ding said, “but definitely not with our heart.”

Reducing beds did not reduce the need for care. Ding described what plays out routinely in San Joaquin County when someone in behavioral health crisis can’t access one



(From left:) San Joaquin County, Calif. Health Care Services Director Genevieve Valentine and Supervisor Steven Ding and David Wetmore of Capri & Clay meet during the 2026 NACo Legislative Conference with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Congressional Liaison Officer Geoffrey Smith, an unidentified staffer, former U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness Executive Director Robert Marbut and Deputy Assistant HUD Bryan Horn. Photo by Nichole Goehring

of the now-limited beds. A first responder is called to a local business where a person in mental health crisis hasn’t broken any laws and has nowhere to go. The officer’s options are limited. The person is taken to a local emergency room not designed to provide sustained behavioral health treatment, where the officer must stay — often for hours — until a temporary bed is found. Without grounds for a legal hold, the person is eventually released, and the cycle starts over.

“If you’re that 25-year-old officer, why even try?” Ding said. “They know there’s nowhere to take them...They know the system is broken.”

The alternative is the street, where untreated mental illness and substance use disorders worsen over time, creating challenges not just for the individuals involved but for the surrounding community as well.

“There is nothing humane about leaving people on the street,” Ding said. And the costs, he argues, are not just moral ones. When counties can’t provide treatment, they pay anyway, through uncompensated health care costs, jails and law enforcement, cleanup operations and lost economic activity.

“If you figure out how much

money we’ve spent per individual in the state of California — hundreds of thousands of dollars — with no results,” Ding said, “we haven’t fixed a thing.”

He also laid out what enacting IMD reform could mean for county and federal budgets. “We have a process here that, if allowed to be fixed, we know what our set costs would be,” he said. “On paper, it’s a no-brainer. The impacts on hospitals, probation departments and general funds — the list goes on and on.”

Congress has several proposals on the table. Ding and the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors adopted a position in unanimous support of H.R. 1201, the Increasing Behavioral Health Treatment Act, when it was introduced in 2023. This legislation, which would eliminate the IMD exclusion for adults with severe mental illness entirely, was reintroduced in 2025 as H.R. 4022 for the 119th Congress.

Another option, the Michelle Alyssa Go Act (H.R. 5462), would raise the reimbursable bed cap to 36 from 16. For San Joaquin County, even that incremental change would allow the county’s Stockton Children’s Home — which serves individuals up to the age of 24 — to double its capacity. It

would also enable the county to complete its approved \$261 million BeWell behavioral health campus without having to find workarounds for federal restrictions.

“It literally would double the impact,” Ding said.

Ding’s message to county officials who haven’t yet engaged on this issue is simple: Start now and stay involved.

“When I was going office to office on the IMD exclusion — after we had the NACo [IMD] resolution pass — most of them had no idea still what I was talking about,” he said. “Which means we’re not talking about it enough. Your participation in NACo doesn’t end when the conference ends. That’s the starting point.”

As counties across the country mark Mental Health Awareness Month this May, Ding hopes the moment serves as more than a symbolic occasion. For residents in counties like San Joaquin, the path to meaningful behavioral health care hinges on reforming federal barriers like the IMD exclusion — and the county officials working to change them. **EN**

Freel is an associate director for grassroots and legislative advocacy in NACo’s Government Affairs department.

SNAP/STATS

Mental Health Awareness Month

- Adults with mental illness:20%
- Youth impact:20%
- Anxiety disorders: 48 million
- Workplace stress:57% of employees
- 2026 outlook:48% more stressed than in 2025

Source: National Council for Mental Wellbeing

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

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Online address www.countynews.org

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CEO INSIGHTS | BY MATTHEW D. CHASE

Reflections on Federalism at America 250

Counties are where federal policy stops being policy and starts being real.

When Congress passes a law, counties implement it. When a state shifts priorities, counties adapt. When our communities face a crisis — an overdose epidemic, a housing shortage, a wildfire — county officials show up first and stay longest.

Counties are where federal and state policy stops being policy and starts being real. We are not a delivery mechanism for decisions made elsewhere. We are where American governance actually lives.

As America reflects on 250 years of self-governance, the growing conversations about the health of today's federalism almost always runs on two tracks — Washington and the states. Counties are the forgotten tier. That has to change.

The oldest governments in America

Counties predate the republic, dating back to 1634. We were governing before

there was a Constitution to govern under. For 250 years, counties have been the connective tissue between distant decision-makers and the lives people actually lead.

This role is being increasingly tested and stressed. Federal and state preemption of county authority is growing. Responsibilities keep devolving to counties without matching resources. The issues on county leaders' desks — behavioral health crises, housing shortages, infrastructure demands, eroding public trust — aren't new. What's different is the scale and the pace, all at once.

Federalism was built for this

Our Founders understood something we sometimes forget: The distribution of power across federal, state and lo-



cal levels was intentional. A safeguard. A feature, not a bug. Counties are that system's most direct expression — close enough to know what residents actually need, account-

able enough since constituents can find their local officials at the grocery store or the ball game.

Our nation's intergovernmental framework requires honest, open dialogue across levels of government. For generations, that dialogue was assumed, even when contentious. Today it must be smartly pursued. Demonstrated. Earned. NACo exists, in part, to make sure it happens at the federal level.

The promise at 250

America at 250 is a moment to celebrate what this system has produced — and to be honest and forward-thinking

We Are Counties

Every day, across 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs, county officials are making the decisions, delivering the services and building the community infrastructure that makes American life possible. We Are Counties is NACo's initiative to tell that story — to intergovernmental partners, community leaders and the American public. Join us in amplifying the county voice as we celebrate, reflect and improve upon America at 250. Visit NACo.org/WeAreCounties.

about where it is fraying.

The challenges at the county level are real. But so is the resilience. Every day, in our 3,069 counties, including our parishes in Louisiana and our boroughs in Alaska, local officials are grinding away on the unglamorous, essential work of making democracy function — governing across partisan divides, solving problems with limited resources, maintaining public trust even as trust in institutions erodes everywhere else.

That is not a small thing. That is the thing. And it is something we should never take for granted. It is like a muscle that must be exercised,

nourished and cared for.

Counties are not an afterthought in American federalism. We are its daily expression. Our obligation — together — is to make sure that reality is understood, respected and acted upon.

Stronger counties mean a stronger America. At 250, that truth is worth fighting for.

Matthew D. Chase is CEO of the National Association of Counties (NACo), the only national organization serving America's 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs. We Are Counties is a new NACo initiative spotlighting the essential work and issues facing counties.

House passes farm bill

The House of Representatives passed the Farm, Food and National Security Act of 2026 on April 30 on a 224-200 vote.

With House passage secured, eyes move toward the Senate as they work on their version of the 2026 farm bill. The timeline for Senate Agriculture Committee action on its own version of the 2026 farm bill remains unclear, but House passage adds pressure to expedite the process.

Lawmakers still face a long road before a final farm bill can become law. Major obstacles remain, including competing legislative priorities for the remainder of the year, ongoing disagreement over provisions already addressed in

H.R.1, political pressures tied to the 2026 midterm cycle and the approaching Sept. 30 expiration of the 2018 farm bill extension.

The House bill contains several provisions with meaningful implications for county governments. Among the most notable provisions, the bill would:

- prioritize funding for rural childcare through existing rural development programs
- modernize key broadband initiatives
- enhance agricultural conservation efforts
- improve rural workforce development programs and
- expand public lands management tools and authorities that counties often rely on to address wildfire risk and treat



landscapes.

Although it expands eligibility and program access in some areas, it does not provide corresponding new funding for rural development programs, which could wors-

en existing oversubscription and make it more difficult for counties to compete for limited federal resources.

The bill also includes language preempting state and county authority over pesti-

cides, raising concerns about local flexibility and the ability of county governments to respond to community-specific land use, public health and environmental considerations.

LUCC members hear proposals for housing solutions

From LUCC page 1

the time, appointed a zoning commission to develop a model zoning statute for the states to pass. That statute was based on a Baltimore city ordinance that led to economic segregation, Pinto noted.

In 1910, Baltimore passed the country's first racial-zoning ordinance, making it illegal for Black people to live in predominantly white neighborhoods, and vice-versa. In 1917, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down racial zoning, declaring it unconstitutional to refuse to sell a home to someone because of their race, so

the city then moved to control how land could be developed and used, requiring lots and homes to be a certain minimum size.

"They came upon economic segregation ... That's why they focused on single-family, detached [homes]," Pinto said. "They now could set lot sizes. They could set side yards, front yards, backyards ... and they knew there was lots of research that showed that that would just drive the prices up, out of the reach of the people they didn't want living there."

Over a century later, it's these restrictive zoning ordinances that continue to pre-

vent the expansion of housing supply and affordability, Pinto said. In the United States, 38 million people between the ages of 25 to 65 qualify as low-wage workers, meaning they make less than \$40,000 a year working full-time. Low-wage workers usually can't afford to rent one- or two-bedroom units in high-rise buildings. So, if the goal is to expand affordable housing, those types of developments shouldn't make up such a large share of new construction, he said.

"Of the 40% of low-wage workers that are in rental households, 60% of them live in single family-1 to 4 — the exact things that were being built in Los Angeles that [the Federal Housing Administration] stamped out back in 1935," he said.

"And the reason is because you can spread the cost ... across more than one wagger easily, either you're married, you have roommates, whatever, you're able to spread it, but it's very hard to do that in a one-bedroom apartment."

If counties do rezone land to maximize housing supply, they need to make the replating process as simple and inexpensive as possible, so that it's not dragged out, Pinto said.

"If you're just taking 8,000 square feet, and you're dividing it into four, 2,000 square foot lots, that should be drop dead simple," he said. "If it isn't drop dead simple, you need to make it drop dead simple."

Federal housing priorities

In December, the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) finalized its housing target goals through 2028, which outline that a certain percentage of acquisitions that the enterprises make must support low-income households in low-income areas and multi-family housing, according to Leda Bloomfield, associate director of FHFA's Office of Housing, Community Investment and Inclusion.

"We want to make sure that you're providing liquidity not just for the class A new construction, but also for starter homes and homes where



LUCC members pause for a photo near the U.S. Capitol while visiting Washington, D.C. for meetings on housing. Photo by Rich Wills

we think the vast majority of Americans and families are," Bloomfield said. "Thinking about, how do we achieve the American dream, to get them into those kinds of housing? And making sure that we support the spectrum of borrowers there."

FHFA announced April 22 that it's implementing VantageScore 4.0 and FICO 10T for mortgage underwriting, according to Daniel Fichtler, principal readiness adviser for FHFA's Division of Conservatorship Oversight and Readiness. They are modern, trended-data credit models approved by the FHFA for mortgage underwriting by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and FHA replacing older static models. Both analyze 24-plus months of credit behavior, including rent/utility payments, to better predict risk and expand homeownership opportunities.

"They use what's called trended credit data, which is more accurate, more reliable," Fichtler said.

"And they also do things like better account for rent payments — those types of obligations that aren't always as visible on the credit bureau side, but that can give a better picture of certain borrowers' credit worthiness.

"We think this is going to

be a really important development, because it both improves access and improves safety and soundness."

The 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act, bipartisan legislation the Senate passed in March, would modernize locally administered housing programs and cut artificial costs from regulatory barriers, according to NACo.

If enacted, it would be a "very important step that's going to help Americans access quality, affordable housing," said Geoffrey Smith, general deputy assistant secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations.

HUD will continue to work with Congress to expand the housing supply, streamline regulations and lower housing costs for all Americans, Smith said. Deregulation is a "top priority" for the department, he noted.

"HUD is taking bold action to help American families with thoughtful proposals to increase housing and opportunity zones, promoting the value of manufactured housing and addressing just the mountain of red tape out there builders are dealing with right now," Smith said. **CN**

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Museum expansion amplifies a rural county's story

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The Carter County Museum has all sorts of “good bones.”

Now in its 90th year, the museum is Montana's oldest, and its organizational structure has put it in a strong position to grow. The former auto garage in Ekalaka that houses its collections is marking 100 years in 2026 and is primed for a major addition this fall. The dinosaur fossils on display draw visitors and researchers from around the world and complement the artifacts tracing human migration and local history.

All converge to amplify Carter County's story like a bull-horn over the badlands and prairies that eastern Montana shares with Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota. The museum's leaders are pushing to be more than just a repository of the past.

“I've always felt that rural museums have an opportunity for a real impact in their communities, not only to be a kind of force of orientation for visitors that come through, but also a real resource for locals,” said Sabre Moore, the museum's executive director. “Not just for history, but for community. We host sewing soirees, craft workshops, a local lecture series and a book club. We do quite a bit here as a community center, not just as a museum.”

Moore, originally from Wyoming, is here because her husband, Carter County native Nate Carroll, recruited her and several friends from Montana State University in 2013 to volunteer for the museum and launch what became the annual summer Dino Shindig. Carroll is now the museum's curator.

Since Moore took her job 10 years ago, visitation has increased 300%, bringing in 5,500 visitors in 2025. Counting outreach to other museums, conferences and online programs, 150,000 people are likely viewing some information from the Carter County Museum.

In addition to its dinosaur fossils, the museum maintains



A Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton, nicknamed “Wyrex” on display at the Carter County Museum in Ekalaka, Mont.



The Carter County Museum moved into what was once an automobile garage, which residents of Ekalaka worked to renovate. Its collection was previously displayed in a high school basement.

collections of human history, including exhibits on tribal history, the Tooke Bucking Horses, local veterans, the Civilian Conservation Corps and homesteaders. Carroll is developing an exhibit showing how Carter County's borders formed.

“We used to be part of Custer County before we were carved up into Fallon County and then carved up into Carter,” he said. “As a paleontologist and geologist, that line between Carter and Fallon now curiously follows oil reserves. How we draw lines and how we define county is in a lot of ways the history of resource allocation.”

He's seen how the long-extinct species that were native to Carter County have shaped its future beyond its boney collection, and how geology has driven land use.



Curator Nathan Carroll poses with the Carter County Museum's field vehicle, purchased in the 1960s.

“A lot of things about whether you raise sheep or harvest barley on your ranch is in some ways kind of dictated by whether or not there's a sea reptile or a primitive primate beneath you,” he said. “When you're working in a museum that is placed-based, you just

have all these really fun cross-overs. We're going to have a map of where all these digs happened and whose ranch they took place on.”

Big things coming

Soon after dinosaur fossils were discovered in the West,

they were exported to museums in cities like Chicago and New York. After watching so many natural resources leave town, two Carter County legislators passed a bill allowing Montana counties to fund museums, in hopes of stemming that flow. The counties own and insure the buildings and property and employ the staff, while nonprofits like the Carter County Geological Society own the collections, the gift shops and all outreach activities and events. Moore reports to both the geological society's board of directors and the county commissioners each month and manages two budgets.

The museum's looming expansion is funded by a combination of private fundraising, private fundraising and \$1 million in Payments in Lieu of Taxes funding that the Board of Commissioners allocated. In early April, the state announced a \$1.25 million grant to the museum that could grow to \$2.7 million.

Commissioner Pamela Castleberry said the county's support of the museum's growth reflected its position in the county's identity.

“We have people in this community who kept triceratops skulls in their living rooms because there wasn't anywhere to put things,” she said. “The

Counties make the case for permitting reform

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Land ownership maps in Duchesne County, Utah look like a checkerboard, and Commissioner Greg Miles is done playing games.

The mixture of state, federal, tribal and private lands — and the way they wound up like that — may be noteworthy for their complexity, but the complications that the situation poses has put his county at a disadvantage for years.

“In the checkerboard, we have some agencies that are state and some that are federal, because the Ute tribe wants the federal government to be in charge on EPA issues on their lands, and the state wants primacy on their state-owned lands,” Miles said during an April 20 Capitol Hill briefing. “We have this battle of ‘does Utah EPA have regulation, or does federal air quality?’ It’s very complex.”

Those exotic maps look a lot uglier when trying to obtain permits for a range of projects.

“When you look at all these different landowners, permitting becomes a nightmare,” Miles said.

Which makes it harder for counties to budget.

“Counties are expected to plan responsibly for infrastructure, budgets, community impacts, but long and unpredictable federal timelines make that plan far more challenging than it needs to be,” said Triston Rice, Natural Resource policy analyst for the Wyoming County Commissioners Association.

“Even after years of study and a formal decision, a project’s future remains unclear and making it difficult for local governments to plan with confidence. It’s not just about how long it takes to complete a review, but whether the review is durable enough to withstand legal scrutiny and provide certainty once a decision is made.”

Custer County, Mont. Commissioner Jason Strouf and Yavapai County, Ariz. Supervisor Nikki Check joined Miles and Rice to share their coun-



Yavapai County, Ariz. Supervisor Nikki Check (center) answers a question during an April 20 Capitol Hill briefing as Duchesne County, Utah Commissioner Greg Miles (left) and Custer County, Mont. Commissioner Jason Strouf look on. Photo by Charlie Ban

ties’ experiences, illustrating how legislation like the SPEED Act, which the House passed last year, could simplify infrastructure projects, saving time and money, by reforming permitting laws.

Although Miles took some solace in a recent U.S. Supreme Court victory for the Rural Utah Infrastructure Coalition, of which Duchesne County is a member, he noted that counties, particularly rural counties, are fighting asymmetric battles all the time. In that case, the court found that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) only requires the environmental impact statements of government agencies to consider impacts that they have regulatory power over, limiting NEPA’s scope. The coalition was seeking a permit to build a rail line to ports and refineries to transport oil out of a remote basin.

“I think for counties with limited budget money, it’s really tough,” Miles said. “We don’t have the resources, we don’t have experts at our fingertips like federal agencies do. For us to be able to tackle something like that, to that magnitude, it’s tough.”

Strouf decried the permitting required to repair infrastructure that is already in place. A culvert recently col-

lapsed under a Custer County road, requiring a partial repair on land that abuts federal territory, requiring a federal permit.

“Literally feet is what we’re talking about,” Strouf said. “And that difference in feet means the difference of our road crew being able to go down there within two to three days and fixing that culvert and keeping that road open versus potentially having to shut that road down or having another water event that completely washes out that 70-foot culvert where now we don’t have an option but to shut the road down.”

‘When you look at all these different landowners, permitting becomes a nightmare.’

— Greg Miles,
Duchesne County, Utah

Essentially, the county must pursue federal approval to replace existing infrastructure.

The SPEED Act would allow counties to become cooperating agencies, which could allow them to better serve the public as an ancillary to the lead agency offering technical

support, expertise and local input when federal agencies are in charge.

“We know what’s best for our constituents, because our constituents tell us what is best for them,” Strouf said about the prospect of participating agency authority.

Check noted that a new transmission line in the Coconino National Forest will be limited to federal land, but the project has become one of the most commented-upon topics in Yavapai County, and she and her colleagues are left in the dark about it.

“The county wasn’t at the table, but my constituents were asking me to interject and to try to navigate some of these conversations,” she said. “Had I been there from the beginning of that process, it would have been much easier to identify community concerns, challenges and opportunities as far as the best end results there.”

Miles agrees that cooperating agency capability will be particularly useful given various functions counties fulfill.

“Counties are unique in the country because often you have an executive and legislative function in one body,” he said. “We represent the people, citizens of our cities and so we have an obligation to speak for them, too.”

That’s not to say that local coordination with the federal government is doomed. Following floods that wiped out roads near Yellowstone National Park in 2022, the National Park Service and Federal Highway Administration worked smoothly with state and local governments to rebuild the roads, improving them in the process.

“Rather than simply rebuilding the road in place, which in many areas was no longer viable, they identified and constructed a new alignment, a higher ground, in some cases relocating the road entirely away from the river corridor. It required engineering, environmental review and real time decision-making across the agencies. Despite that complexity, the process moved quickly,” Rice said. “From a county perspective, what stands out is not just the speed, but the clarity and coordination. There was a fine path forward, consistent communication and alignment across agencies. Local communities knew what to expect and could plan accordingly. And importantly, decisions proved durable. The project moved from analysis to implementation without being stalled in prolonged uncertainty.” **CN**



Snohomish County, Wash. Emergency Management Director Lucia Schmit asks a question of FEMA Associate Administrator Victoria Barton April 29 during the NACo Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force Fly-in in Washington, D.C. From left: Brunswick County, N.C. Commissioner Frank Williams, Baltimore City, Md. Councilmember Sharon Green Middleton, Schmit, Lake County, Calif. Supervisor Jessica Pyska, Rogers County, Okla. Commissioner Ron Burrows and Ramsey County, Minn. Emergency Management and Homeland Security Director Judd Freed. Photo by Charlie Ban

ADA web deadlines get one-year extensions



Counties will get an extra year to meet deadlines for bringing their website and social media accounts into compliance with accessibility standards.

The U.S. Department of Justice released a new Interim Final Rule (IFR) on its implementation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) web-based accessibility requirements for state

and local governments.

The rule provides new guidance to reduce the cost of compliance.

Grants all state and local governments a one-year extension from their original compliance date:

- Counties with populations over 50,000: April 24, 2027
- Counties with populations at or below 50,000: April 28, 2028



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SALUTE TO COUNTY LEADERS:

Larry Waters

After a few years as a teacher and principal, Larry Water was elected executive, later renamed mayor, of Sevier County, Tenn. in 1978 when he was 25. He will conclude 48 years as county mayor when he leaves office at the end of the year, making him the longest serving county mayor in Tennessee history. During that time, the county's population tripled, and Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge have thrived as tourism destinations, thanks to their proximity to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Waters' long involvement with NACo included participation in the Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force.



Sevier County, Tenn. Mayor Larry Waters has served 12 terms, with his first starting when he was 25 years old. Photo by Charlie Ban

When did you know county government was your calling?

I studied public administration at the University of Tennessee, so I was always interested in government. I was elected right about when we changed our forms of county government in Tennessee, so the first few years, everyone was getting a feel for how things would work. But by the end of my first term, I started seeing some progress in the

things we were trying to accomplish in the county, and I knew I wanted to keep doing this work.

What is your proudest achievement in Sevier County?

Establishing a culture of cooperation, either with the county commission, other officials or city officials. I meet with all of them constantly and we don't always agree,

but we can disagree on one issue and be able to work together on something else.

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

I've been involved in NACo from my first year in office, and the relationships I've built with other county officials have really helped me.

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

I don't let things bother me. Early on, I figured out I'd have to handle criticism and disagreement. Talking to people who are upset or passionate about their community is a major part of the job, and if things get heated, I remember that they felt strongly enough to bring this up to me, so it's important.

Why are you optimistic about the future of county government?

I see the quality of people who are continually coming into county government, and many of whom are elected, and the passion they have, and the knowledge they have, and I see improvements all the time. There's new energy, new ideas and a new standard for what the public expects from its leaders. But there's a lot of responsibility now in the county government, more than there's ever been.

What advice do you have for your successors?

Participate in organizations like NACo, your state association or local groups and learn anything you can. Make sure you get out of your county and see what other people are doing, learn from other folks and share what you've done. Someone has already made the errors and learned from them, so you don't have to. **CN**

Montana frontier county museum expands with local, state and private funding

From MUSEUM page 5

story of Carter County comes out again every year when a different family's ranch is celebrating 100 years — there's so much history here. Every time I go there, I marvel at something new, someone's contributions, whether they found fossils or worked in the museum when it was in the high school basement, or helped build the current museum."

The expansion will add 15,000 square feet to the current 5,000 square foot building and, crucially, add bathrooms, which will make the museum more enticing to school groups. It will include a planetarium and multi-use community space, paleontology lab and more exhibit space. The current museum can display roughly 12% of its collection, but Carroll hopes that will increase to nearly 80%.

This is all big news for Carter County, which is among the more remote communities in

a large state. Most trips to Ekalaka take at least an hour, and only recently have the major roads been paved.

Home is where the history is

Carroll grew up helping with paleontological digs in the area, building friendships with graduate students who traveled from the Los Angeles Museum. Upon returning home, he learned that any formal dinosaur scholarship would require lateral research and archival skills.

"To get to the dinosaurs, you have to get permission from folks who own that land," he said. "I didn't realize how much that was going to be part of my job or how much I would enjoy it, even going through land records or going through our photo archives."

Carroll notes that much of the land where fossils were unearthed remain in the same families' hands generations later.

"There are a lot of fun things about being in a community that has grown up with the museum," he said. "There are still quite a few folks around here who aren't that far removed from being involved with the digs."



He also feels his background helps make him a better educator.

"Growing up in a community, you kind of get an idea of what connections are the most effective teaching tool, like the best analogy to get this concept across," he said.

And his work keeps him connected to residents who demonstrate that there is a

living, growing community surrounding these long-dead objects.

"I often have family members who come in and want to see a fossil that Grandpa Bill found, or to see Grandma Gladys' shell collection," he said. "It's kind of rare to have a true community-built museum."

Although Ekalaka and Carter County are remote, Moore and Carroll are making sure the museum is connected. The museum is one of 15 on the Montana Dinosaur Trail, and the July opening of the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library in North Dakota brings the potential of new visitors. Ekalaka is relatively close, on a Western scale, to Devils Tower in Wyoming and the Rapid City and Deadwood areas of South Dakota and the Black Hills, with the Mount Rushmore and Crazy Horse memorials nearby.

In addition to returning to

the museum that fueled his youth, Carroll and Moore have seized an opportunity to do more in their careers than they could have imagined in metropolitan areas. Carroll can sleep in his own bed and still work in the field where fossils are uncovered every day, rather than leave his family for weeks at a time to do that work elsewhere. Moore has been able to work at a high level in her field at a much earlier point in her career than her peers. Together, they get to make substantial contributions to the county's history and build an amenity for a county that recorded its first population increase between 2010-2020 after eight decades of decline.

"I get to be involved with building a museum, which is a pretty rare experience for any young curator," Carroll said. "The fact that we're able to do these things is a credit to the county officials who set this in motion 90 years ago." **CN**

Non-profits, faith-based groups play critical role after disaster

From L.A. page 1

and volunteered to help in every way imaginable.

Nearly 16 months later, Los Angeles County continues to rebuild, and the community is still showing up for each other, according to Los Angeles County Chair Kathryn Barger.

“The strength that I’ve seen coming out of this community, neighbor helping neighbor, has been incredible,” Barger said. “And then, I look at the compassion and the resilience that still remains for each survivor ... We’ve got a community that is really uplifting each other, recognizing that we are far from done, but we’ve definitely turned that corner.”

The county is working to best support affected residents in a number of ways, including fast-tracking permitting to rebuild and providing financial assistance to workers, nonprofits, small businesses and displaced homeowners and renters. As of April 23, more than 3,100 rebuild applications have been submitted, more than 2,200 permits have been issued and roughly 1,500 homes are in the process of being rebuilt, according to Barger.

For recovery efforts to be successful, it can’t just be local governments working to repair and rebuild, Barger said. Nonprofit and faith-based organizations have played a critical role in Los Angeles County’s recovery process, and counties should be highlighting their work, she noted. Following the fires, Barger formed a nonprofit, the Altadena Recovery and Rebuild Corporation, to connect government, nonprofits and religious organizations and ensure that any gaps in recovery work are filled.

“With all these disasters, the assumption is government is going to come in and take care of everything, and that’s just not realistic,” Barger said. “I think it’s important for us as government officials to highlight the importance of the nonprofits and the faith-based [partners] ... because government advocates for government really well,



The Woods pose on the lot they’ve lived on for decades. Their home was rebuilt through a nonprofit. Photo courtesy of SGV Habitat for Humanity

‘The strength I’ve seen coming out of this community...has been incredible.’

– Kathryn Barger,
Los Angeles County
supervisor

but we have to advocate for our partners, in good times and in bad.

“In this case, I’ve seen it firsthand with the impact it’s had on survivors, having a strong relationship that bridges nonprofits with the government.”

Habitat for Humanity has pledged to build 22 homes for families who lost their homes in the fire, which is made possible through Altadena Builds Back Foundation grant funding.

The first home rebuilt through the initiative was for Ken and Carol Wood, a couple in their 80s who have lived in the same Altadena neighborhood for over 40 years. The Woods had insurance, but the cost to rebuild was still too high, and they weren’t sure if it was feasible for them until they got connected to Habitat for Humanity.

“At my age, I never thought I’d be starting over,” Ken Wood said at a press conference last year. “But today, standing on this land I’ve known for decades, I feel something I didn’t expect — hope.”

Ken and Carol’s son, Ken Jr., and his wife, Lara, lived in an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) on their property, which was also destroyed in the fire.



The Wood family, Chair Barger and nonprofit representatives pose with a model and rendering of the Woods’ home design.

Photo by David Franco for Los Angeles County



Ken and Carol Wood were able to rebuild their home that was destroyed in the fires through San Gabriel Valley Habitat for Humanity.

“It was such an overwhelming and desperate time,” Lara Wood told San Gabriel Valley Habitat for Humanity. “And you don’t know where to start, so when we heard about Habitat and what they were offering to do, what could potentially happen, it felt like ‘OK, well at least we can start with this. Let’s see what this

can do.’

“And hearing the hammers and seeing everybody here has filled us with so much hope and makes us feel really joyful that we can move forward through this.”

The Woods were able to move into their new home in March.

“They’re just an amaz-

ing family, inspirational, as are their kids,” Barger said. “Through devastation, they see the brightness that’s coming through, and it amazes me that they can still see the glasses half full.”

Barger and her team volunteered in the rebuilding process. She also has a newsletter, “Keeping up with Kathryn,” that highlights rebuilding efforts and initiatives in need of volunteers.

“What keeps me going is the fact that I’m here to make sure that the role that government plays is fulfilled,” Barger said. “And in a time when people have such little trust in government, I think that it is vital for me to continue to be that presence in the community.”

In the wake of so much destruction, it’s been inspiring to see the community’s resilience and willingness to show up for each other, Barger said. She shared a story of a member of the Altadena Rotary, Mark Mariscal, who has consistently showed up for survivors over the past year, even though he himself was affected by the fires.

“I said to Mark, ‘You’ve lost everything, and yet you are advocating for everyone when you also need [support],’” Barger said. “And he said, ‘It’s not about me.’ So, I’ve seen in people like Mark the best, in terms of spirit and giving people hope.

“... During the worst times, you see the best in not only people, but in the organizations that we have in Los Angeles County, to come together to really recognize the need to uplift.”

SPONSORED CONTENT

NACo and Savi Continue to Pioneer Efforts to Tackle County Employee Student Loan Debt

As student loan delinquency rates hit 25% nationally and another borrower defaults every nine seconds, the National Association of Counties (NACo) and Savi are scaling a proven solution for county employees across the nation. Through their deepening partnership, Savi has already unlocked over \$5 billion in projected savings for public service workers, delivering an average yearly reduction of \$2,244 in student loan payments.

A Crisis That Demands Employer Action

The urgency behind this partnership is hard to overstate. Since federal student loan repayment fully resumed, delinquency rates have climbed sharply. Twenty-five percent of the country's roughly 43 million federal student loan borrowers are now behind on payments. According to the Student Borrower Protection Center, the number of borrowers in default has surpassed 9 million nationwide.

For those who fall behind, the consequences compound quickly. Credit scores have dropped an average of 57 points for delinquent borrowers in 2025, raising the cost of auto loans, mortgages, and other credit. Prolonged default triggers wage garnishment and tax refund seizure. And with nearly one million



Income-Driven Repayment applications still stuck in processing, most borrowers are left figuring it out alone.

For county governments, this plays out internally. Employees weighed down by student debt are harder to recruit, harder to retain, and more likely to experience financial distress that spills into the workplace. The cost of inaction is no longer theoretical. It is showing up in turnover numbers and benefits utilization across the country.

The Savi Solution

Most county employees qualify for meaningful relief through programs like Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), but the constantly shifting landscape of federal repayment options makes it nearly impossible to know



where to begin. That is where Savi comes in.

As a trusted, NACo-vetted student loan benefits provider, Savi guides borrowers through every step: understanding eligibility, filing the right paperwork, and monitoring accounts as policies evolve. The goal is not just short-term relief. It is long-term financial stability and real protection from the consequences of default.

The results speak to this directly. Nationally, only 5.43% of PSLF applications have

been accepted (Education Data Initiative). Savi's process and expert debt navigators have achieved a 99% application acceptance rate. That gap represents thousands of county employees who would otherwise miss out on the forgiveness they have earned through years of public service.

Hennepin County Case Study

- Over 1,400 county employees helped
- \$44,000 in average forgiveness found

"I wish SAVI would have been around for the last ten years! The support makes me feel less anxious and frozen when managing my student loan debt/forgiveness and understanding legislative updates, etc. that impact individuals working towards and qualifying for PSLF."

"I'm very grateful." - Hennepin County Employee

A Call to Action for County Leaders

With delinquency rates still climbing, this is not a problem that resolves on its own. County leaders who act now can protect their workforce from the worst consequences of the student loan crisis while strengthening their benefits package at no cost to the county.

- **For County Leaders:** To add Savi to your employee benefits package and support your workforce's financial well-being, contact John Nelson at johnnelson@bysavi.com.

- **For Counties Already Offering Savi:** Encourage employees to log in and make sure their accounts are current as federal policies continue to shift.

- **For County Employees:** Ask your Department Head or Human Resources office whether Savi is available to you. If it is not yet offered, let them know there is demand.

About Savi

Savi is a social impact technology company in Washington, D.C. working to solve the student debt crisis affecting 43 million borrowers by helping them find repayment and loan forgiveness options. Founded by long-time student loan experts and advocates, Savi is a public benefit corporation that works with employers, membership organizations, and financial institutions to provide student loan benefits that support recruitment, retention, and financial wellness.



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BRIGHT IDEAS | DEKALB COUNTY, GEORGIA

Georgia County's HR Policy Council Goes Digital, Boosting Attendance, Reducing Grievances



DeKalb County, Ga.'s Human Resources and Merit System team poses for a photo. DeKalb HR saw a 50% reduction in grievances after it shifted its Policy Council meetings online.

PROBLEM: DeKalb County HR quarterly meetings were inconveniently located and not as efficient as they could be, causing more grievances down the line.

SOLUTION: Shift the meetings to an online format, allowing for chat-based Q&A and real-time issue tracking.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

To better serve county employees and streamline processes, the DeKalb County, Ga. Human Resources and Merit System (DeKalb HR) moved its quarterly policy council meetings online. The shift to digital has boosted attendance and made the meetings more efficient by enabling chat-based Q&A and real-time issue track-

ing, according to Jadia Haynes, the DeKalb County interim Human Resources director.

Since the DeKalb County Department of Human Resources and Merit System-led policy council moved online, there has been a 50% reduction in grievances, a 67% increase in meeting participation and a 50% improvement in Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) processing efficiency for 6,600 employees, according to county data.

DeKalb County has 45 departments, with more than 200 locations across the county where staff work, so many people who would otherwise want to attend the meetings when they were in-person were unable to, according to Katherine Furlong, interim deputy director, DeKalb County Human Resources Information Systems Division.

Between the length of the

actual meeting and the time it took to commute there and back, it could take up to three hours out of some people's days, noted Haynes.

'The time commitment is a lot less and more people can participate.'

— Katherine Furlong,
DeKalb County HR

County survey feedback shows 88% of department liaisons feel more informed and aligned with human resource policies after participating in a policy council meeting. Since shifting the meetings online, attendance has increased from an average of 75 people to 126.

"This gives the employees

a lot more flexibility," Haynes said. "So now the time commitment is a lot less, and more people can participate."

The meetings are much more efficient and interactive now, as people can submit questions through Zoom's chat feature, said Furlong.

People share more often with the comment feature, which Haynes attributes to people feeling more comfortable typing a message vs. speaking up in-person or on camera.


Policy council participants include directors, deputy directors, managers and department administrators. Utilizing Zoom enables the human resources department to review meetings to better inform the process and make improvements moving forward, Haynes said.

"We can go back and check the chat too, and see what types of questions people ask, so we can make sure we can follow up

to ensure that we've addressed them," Furlong said. "If we don't address them verbally in the meeting, we say, 'OK, we'll take that as an action item and come back and make sure we give that back to the team.'"

Human Resources has received "rave reviews" from county employees regarding the shift to virtual, Haynes noted.

According to Kevin Buford, DeKalb County Parks and Recreation's deputy director, the new structure has been "so valuable and useful."

"We would be totally lost without this policy council," said Debra DeBerry, DeKalb County Clerk of Superior Court. 

DeKalb County's Department of Human Resources and Merit System-led Policy Council was the 2025 NACo Achievement Award "Best in Category" winner in County Administration and Management.

ON THE MOVE

NACo MEMBERS



Clark

● President **J.D. Clark**, First Vice President **George Dunlap**, Executive Director **Matt Chase** and Chief Government Affairs Officer **Eryn Hurley** attended a meeting of the Big Seven state and local leadership associations in Oklahoma County, Okla.

● **Dunlap**, Second Vice President **Alisha Bell** and Associate Membership Director **Grace Dunlap** attended the Michigan Association of Counties Legislative Conference in Ingham County.

● **George Dunlap, Chase**, Conferences Director **Leah Rivera**, Intergovernmental Affairs and Partner Engagement Director **Rich Hart** and National Program Director **Anthony Chapman** attended the Advancing County Commissioners of Georgia Annual Conference in Chatham County.



Dunlap

NACo STAFF

● **Rachel Yeung** has been promoted to associate legislative director after serving as a legislative assistant. She will serve as liaison to the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Policy Steering Committee and Rural Action Caucus.

● Membership Engagement Director **Tammy Tincher** attended the Kansas County Commissioners Association Annual Conference in Reno County.



Yeung



Lee

● Membership Manager **Priscila Chrappah** attended the Illinois Association of County Officials Spring Conference in Sangamon County.

● Legislative Director **Zeke Lee** attended the Utah Association of Counties Legislative Conference in Washington County.

● CIO **John Matelski** attended the National Association of State Chief Information Officers in the City and County of Philadelphia, Pa.

GET TO KNOW...

SANGAMON COUNTY, ILL.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

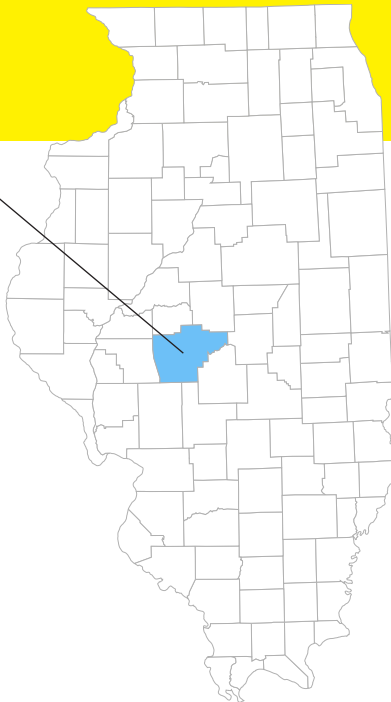
Sangamon County, Ill., established in 1821, is named for the Potawatomi word for “where there is plenty to eat,” as it’s located along the Edwards Trace, an ancient Native American trail in Illinois spanning from Kaskaskia to Peoria that has high-quality fertile soil and was a popular spot for bison hunting. The area’s fertile soils were created by the Illinois Glacier that covered the region between 186,000 and 128,000 years ago.

The Sangamon county seat, Springfield, is the state capital and was home to Abraham Lincoln, the 16th U.S. president. Lincoln led the lobbying efforts of the “Long Nine,” comprising Sangamon County legislators, that led to the Illinois capital moving from the city of Vandalia to Springfield in 1839.

After living in Springfield for 24 years, Lincoln left for Washington, D.C. to serve as president, saying in his farewell address: “To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything.” Lincoln is buried

in the Springfield Oak Ridge Cemetery in a tomb designed by sculptor Larkin Mead. It’s the second-most visited cemetery in the nation, surpassed only by Arlington, and visitors from across the world rub the nose of the statue of Lincoln for good luck.

Springfield is the birthplace of the Horseshoe sandwich, a famous open-faced sandwich made of Texas toast, topped with some kind of meat — often ham or hamburger patties — and covered in beer-



cheese sauce and fries. The Cozy Dog Drive-In, a Route 66 landmark in the city,

claims to have served the first deep-fried hot dog on a stick in 1946.

The 246-mile Sangamon River, which runs through the county, is a popular spot for canoeing and fishing for channel catfish. The Lincoln Heritage Water Trail, an 85-mile stretch of the river, follows the route Lincoln canoed along as a young adult. In 1831, Lincoln steered a flatboat along the Sangamon River in a journey to New Orleans and a year later, he helped pilot a steamboat down the river to prove it could

be used for commercial shipping.

Springfield has seen temperatures as high as 112 degrees and as low as -24 degrees. The city features more than 30 parks — one of which, Washington Park, has one of the world’s largest carillons, with 67 bells. A carillon is a musical instrument with at least 23 cast bronze bells, which are hung in a tower and played through a keyboard and pedal board.

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.



Abraham Lincoln’s likeness is featured in this famous bronze bust by Gutzon Borglum, located at the Lincoln Tomb in Springfield.

WORD SEARCH

ARLINGTON COUNTY, VA.

Created by Mary Ann Barton

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

AIRPORT: Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport is located in the county.

ALEXANDRIA: The county was originally named Alexandria County but was changed in 1920 to avoid confusion with the adjacent City of Alexandria. The county's name comes from Arlington House, located on the grounds of Arlington National Cemetery.

ARLINGTON: Arlington House got its name from the original 17th-century Arlington plantation established by John Custis II in the 1650s on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, from a village name in Gloucestershire, England.

CAPITAL: The county was once part of Washington, D.C., from 1801 to 1847 and was known as Alexandria County.

CELEBRITIES: Famous people from the county include actors Sandra Bullock, Warren Beatty, Shirley MacLaine and Gena Rowlands and journalist Katie Couric.

CEMETERY: Arlington National Cemetery is located in the county on land confiscated in 1864 from Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

FAIRLINGTON: Colonial Revival-style apartments built from 1942 to 1944,

Fairlington was created for World War II defense workers. Renting for \$59 per month, the apartments, now condos, average \$590,000.

HISTORY: The county was established March 13, 1847 as Alexandria County.

MANAGER: Arlington County became the first county in the nation to adopt the county manager form of government.

METRO: There are 11 metro-rail stations of the region's 86 stations located in the county.

NEWSPAPER: The local newspaper for the county is *The Washington Post*.

PENTAGON: Completed in 1943, the Department of Defense headquarters, the Pentagon, is the largest office building in the world, at 6.5 million square feet housing 23,000 military and civilian employees.

POPULATION: The county's population is about 244,300 as of January 2026.

SMALLEST: Arlington County is the smallest county in the country, at 26 square miles. It features no incorporated cities or towns.

TRAILS: Despite its small size, the county boasts 55 miles of multi-use trails and 160 parks.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

JOHN PETERS
NACo Board Member
 Mono County, Calif. Board of Supervisors Chair



PETERS

Number of years active in NACo: Nine
Years in public service: 14
My first NACo event was: 2017 Legislative Conference
NACo committees: WIR president, RAC member/past vice-chair, Human Services and Education past vice-chair, Public Lands Recreation Sub Committee vice-chair, NACo Broadband Task Force, Resilient Counties, Veterans and Military Affairs.
Occupation: Hotel and restaurant owner, county supervisor

Education: B.A. in Applied Business Management
Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Winston Churchill, Ronald Reagan and Jack Nicholson
A dream I have is to: Get a hole-in-one while playing at Pebble Beach Hole #7
You'd be surprised to learn that I: Was the high-jump record holder in ninth grade
The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Backpack across Europe at 18 years old

My favorite way to relax is: Fishing
I'm most proud of: Finishing college after a 35-year gap
Every morning I read: Online news from multiple sources
My favorite meal is: BBQ beef ribs
My pet peeve is: Lack of common sense
My motto is: "Lead by example."
The last book I read was: Everything John Grisham has written
My favorite movie is: "Godfather Part II"
My favorite music is: Classic Rock
My favorite U.S. president is: Ronald Reagan
My county is a NACo member because: No small or large county can advocate effectively without the tools NACo provides.



A dream I have is to: Get a hole-in-one while playing at Pebble Beach Hole #7.

BEHIND THE SEAL

ALEXANDER COUNTY, N.C.

In early 2003, Alexander County introduced a new county seal and motto ("Gem of North Carolina") informed by results from a newspaper and county website survey:

- The church represents the county's religious heritage, with more than 100 churches in the county.
- The chair represents the county's manufacturing heritage.



- The apple tree and chickens represent the county's agricultural heritage — at the time, Alexander County ranked first in all poultry produced in North Carolina and third in apple production.
- The outline of the county lies in the background and the date 1847 represents when the county was established.
- The largest emerald discovered in North America was found in the Hiddenite community of Alexander County in 2003. The 1,869-carat gem is now housed in the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ARIZONA

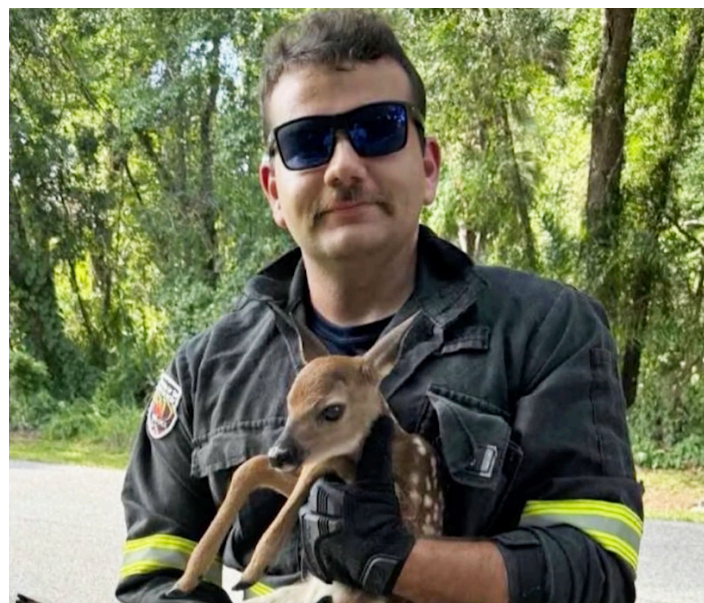
NAVAJO COUNTY Sheriff David Clouse and County Attorney Brad Carlyon penned an op-ed for the local newspapers to kick off **National County Government Month**. Their article focused on public safety and justice delivered at the county level in a rural community. The county attorney's office also developed a month-long social media campaign aligned with that message.

The objective "is to move beyond general descriptions of county government and instead show, in practical terms, what counties actually do — particularly in the public safety space," Carlyon said.

GEORGIA

- First responders in **GILMER, PICKENS** and **FANNIN COUNTIES** are now able to provide **blood transfusions** directly from ambulances, enabling them to begin life-saving treatment before a patient reaches the hospital. The counties are "extremely rural and a lot of times it can take 30 minutes just to get off a mountain or reach a patient," Gilmer County Fire EMS Division Chief Paul Beamon told 11Alive news. "Now we can give them this blood to help transport oxygen and start the clotting process, where it would take us 45 minutes to get to a trauma center if we're not using helicopters."

- The OneGeorgia Authority has awarded a \$2,208,899 **Rural Workforce Housing Grant** to **BALDWIN COUNTY**.



FLORIDA

PASCO COUNTY firefighters **rescued a fawn from a storm drain** after receiving a call that the baby deer was trapped. The crew carefully extracted the distressed deer and was able to reunite it with its mother, who was waiting anxiously nearby. The crew named the fawn "Storm."



COLORADO

"Ready Freddy" is **LA PLATA COUNTY**'s new **emergency services mascot**, a design informed by the department's "ready, set, go" evacuation system. He was sworn in as a county employee, taking his oath in the Office of Emergency Management's fire preparation binder.

The grant will support development of 123 townhouses aimed at providing affordable housing for the local workforce.

County Manager Carlos Tobar stated, "As has been the case across the country, when the government shows its commitment to a neighborhood, citizens and the private sector notice, and private investment follows. Homeowners help make neighborhoods safer and stronger. It is exciting to see the south side of the county revitalized." County employees will have priority to purchase units, followed by city employees,

college employees and other Baldwin County workers.

- **EFFINGHAM COUNTY** was set to host its first premier **fine art market** April 26 at a local winery, WTOC-TV reported.

Organizers say the event will spotlight local talent, connect the community with eight regional artists, feature an artist-first model with profits going directly to creators, and include a 2 p.m. presentation honoring two local leaders. Guests were

welcome to browse original artwork, meet local artists and enjoy the setting.

HAWAII

Despite some opposition from residents, the **HAWAII COUNTY** Council recently passed a resolution to **lease six county-owned residential properties to nonprofits**, Big Island Now reported. These homes will be for "long-term permanent housing for underserved populations who face

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INDIANA

A fourth-grade student from Barr Reeve Elementary School has been named the Southwest District winner of the National County Government Month essay contest, organized by the **ASSOCIATION OF INDIANA COUNTIES** in partnership with Apex Benefits. Isabelle Welsh's essay, written on the theme "Celebrating Indiana County Government," was selected over entries from other fourth graders across the district. She received a \$100 prize for the honor, with winners chosen in each of the organization's six districts statewide.

Welsh was formally recognized on April 8 during the AIC Southwest District meeting in **DUBOIS COUNTY**, where she was presented with her award.



CALIFORNIA

The **ORANGE COUNTY** District Attorney is warning parents about the **dangers of e-bikes** after filing criminal charges against a father whose teenage son was involved in a serious crash, KNBC-TV reported.

As e-bikes grow in popularity among teens, authorities say many parents underestimate their power — especially when the bikes are modified. Police footage shows multiple incidents where riders lose control, crash or collide with cars, highlighting the risks.

Prosecutors allege that the father helped his 12-year-old son modify an e-bike into a much faster, motorcycle-like vehicle by removing speed restrictions and altering its structure. The boy was seriously injured after running a red light and crashing into a car. The father now faces felony charges including child endangerment, child abuse and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

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significant barriers to secure, safe and affordable housing.”

The measure authorizes the negotiation of six one-year leases with four one-year renewal options at an approximate annual cost of \$10 for the residential properties. Last fall, the county Office of Housing and Community Development purchased eight single-family homes for \$6.4 million using Emergency Rental Assistance 2 Program funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The funding had to be used by Sept. 30, 2025.

IOWA

A new campaign from the IOWA STATE ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES is highlighting the work being done in communities across the state’s 99 counties, KHQA-TV reported.

The Behind the 99 Campaign aims to showcase the people, programs and services that keep all of Iowa’s 99 counties up and running. The campaign takes a larger focus on the infrastructure and safety efforts it takes to maintain nearly 90,000 miles of roads across the state.

It also highlights work by local emergency management systems to keep residents safe, and efforts to uphold strong law enforcement systems through sheriff and county attorney offices.

MARYLAND

With spring events ramping up across the region, CHARLES COUNTY Government is encouraging residents and organizations to review permitting requirements before planning festivals, markets, parades and other public gatherings, The Baynet reported.

The county’s Public Event Permit Guide brings together key information, outlining what qualifies as a public event, how to apply for a permit and what additional approvals may be required, helping organizers navigate the process efficiently and keep events on track.

NORTH CAROLINA

As NEW HANOVER COUNTY’s commissioners continue



OHIO

• A long-awaited transportation center for veterans is now open and operating in downtown Lima, providing a safer and more convenient space for those traveling to medical appointments, WLIO-TV reported. The new facility serves as the home base for the ALLEN COUNTY Veterans Service Commission vans that transport veterans to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs-directed appointments.

The county purchased the property to improve access and comfort for veterans using the service. “They can meet here to get in out of the weather; before, they were just meeting in a parking lot,” said County Commissioner Brian Winegardner.

working on Fiscal Year 2026-2027 priorities, residents can try their hand at balancing last year’s adopted budget of \$488.5 million with the county’s budget simulator tool. Constituents are invited to adjust spending, explore revenue options and see how their decisions impact the big picture.

OHIO

• The CUYAHOGA COUNTY Fiscal Office is bringing back

the Great Estates program of outreach events to help residents avoid unnecessary costs and delays when settling an estate.

The program provides guidance and documents for real estate, bank accounts, motor vehicles and other personal property to ensure that assets are passed directly to the intended beneficiary. Information on the importance of trusts in estate planning will also be discussed.

SOUTH CAROLINA

A new tool in BERKELEY COUNTY is giving officials a near real-time look at suspected drug overdoses, with the goal of helping first responders act faster and prevent future deaths, WCBF-TV reported.

The overdose dashboard, developed with help from the Charleston Center and built by the county’s IT department, brings together data from more than 40 agencies across the county and the tri-county area. Those partners include EMS, law enforcement and prevention organizations.

VIRGINIA

Officials with PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY, the City of Manassas and George Mason University recently announced the name selected for an innovation district encompassing 6,000 acres in Northern Virginia: Nexus 234 Innovation District.

The innovation district will be a place where researchers, entrepreneurs and scholars, as well as a growing cluster of technology companies, can share ideas and talent. It will support life sciences, aerospace, defense, data centers and AI infrastructure, along

with other industries.

The moniker is a nod to how the district centers around Innovation Park, a 1,500-acre corporate research park in Manassas that’s anchored by George Mason’s Science and Technology Campus. The central corridor of the district is Route 234.

“Prince William County is building a destination for discovery,” said Deshundra Jefferson, chair-at-large of the Prince William Board of County Supervisors. “Nexus234 reflects our long-term strategy to attract high-value industries, support groundbreaking research and ensure companies have the space, talent and infrastructure they need to grow.”

WASHINGTON

• After more than a decade of community advocacy, KING COUNTY is moving forward with plans to build Skyway’s first community center next to Skyway Park, utilizing the property of a former bowling alley, KOMO-TV reported.

King County Executive Girmay Zahilay announced that King County Parks has entered an agreement to purchase Skyway Park Bowl as the location for the future Skyway Community Center.

• It’s getting harder to discern a scam text from a legitimate request from local governments. Residents across SPOKANE COUNTY recently received a notification from ALERT Spokane asking the respondent to re-register for the emergency notification system, through which local public safety agencies notify people about developing emergencies, road closures and first responder activities in the area.

That request via text last week was legitimate. The county announced it has established a new agreement to operate the notification system, after a cyberattack against the county’s former provider, The Spokesman-Review reported.



MAINE

A federal grant will help PENOBSCOT COUNTY address a house that is at risk of collapsing into the Penobscot River, WABI-TV reported. The county Emergency Management Agency said it received a Hazard Mitigation Grant from FEMA. Officials said the \$280,000 grant will go toward acquiring and demolishing the house. After it’s torn down, county officials said the property will then be maintained as open space in accordance with FEMA requirements.

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

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