



**Reform efforts are underway. Pg. 6**



**Resiliency grant program resumes. Pg. 7**

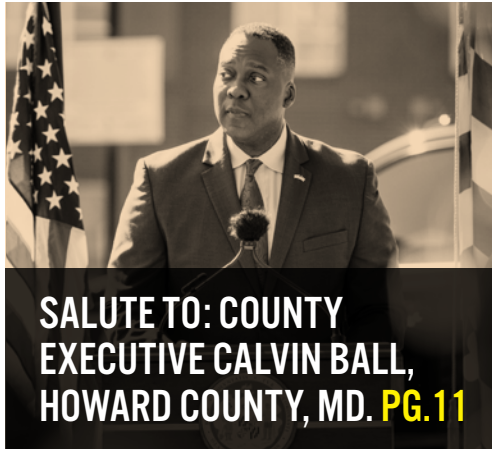


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# CN

## CountyNews



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**NACo SECOND VP CANDIDATES LAY OUT PLATFORMS: PGS. 12-14**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

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The County Leadership Institute celebrated its 22nd year June 1-3 in Washington, D.C. The three-day intensive in-person program gathers county leaders from across the country to grow and learn personally and professionally, guided by Jill Hufnagel and Tim Steffensmeier. Photo by Charlie Ban

See **FULL NAMES** page 15

## Partnerships drive better community health, leaders say

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Success stories of county-public health partnerships took center stage at NACo's Public Health Leadership Academy on June 4, demonstrating their impact on community well-being.

Thurston County, Wash. worked with its public health department to create its Street Vendor Program, which allows operators to sell food without a traditional food truck, while still prioritizing health and safety standards, according to Thurston County Commissioner Carolina Mejia.

"What really gives me optimism about Thurston County is we have a very collaborative community," Mejia said. "We're always talking about partnerships, and everyone's always willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work."

See **HEALTH** page 4

## Behind the scenes in Orleans Parish: Same great tours, two time slots

by **Mary Ann Barton**  
editor

The 2026 NACo Annual Conference officially gets underway Friday, July 17, and

if you're arriving a day early, you can go behind the scenes of Orleans Parish on a set of mobile tours Thursday, July 16. The tours show how the parish and city deliver critical services to its residents. From flood protection and public safety to pest control and water infrastructure, the tours offer a firsthand look at local government in action — and plenty of inspiration to bring back home to your county.

All five tours run from 2:30 to 5 p.m., and each is also

offered on the afternoon of Monday, July 20 (which take place at the same time as educational workshops at the conference). Space is limited and varies by tour.

### The Real Time Crime Center

As technology evolves, so does law enforcement's toolkit. New Orleans' 24/7 Real Time Crime Center helps the city respond faster to 911 calls, tri-

See **TOURS** page 2

## OMB proposes major change to federal grant administration

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Counties have roughly one month to make their opinions heard about a proposed rule that would drastically alter federal grant management.

The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) is proposing sweeping changes to the Uniform Guidance — 2 Code of Federal Regulations Part 200 — which covers all direct federal disbursements, representing its largest revision since 2013.

The proposed rule would apply to all federal grant, cooperative agreement and pass-through awards counties receive, a portion of \$1 trillion in annual federal grant funding. Counties that often serve and operate as pass-through entities, which administer federal funds to subrecipients, are also subject to additional requirements under the proposed rule. These changes could put counties at risk of grant termination if they run afoul of policies articulated by executive orders.

"The rule changes [Uniform Guidance] from guidance to regulation," said Emily Brock, director of the Federal Liaison Center at the Government Finance Officers Association. "It hits the financial administration of counties really hard."

"If [the federal government]

See **OMB** page 5

# Mobile tours offered at NACo Annual Conference in New Orleans

From TOURS page 1

age threats and share data and video seamlessly across agencies. It was created in 2017 as part of a citywide public safety improvement plan and, unusually, sits outside the police department — it's run by the city's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, which lets it support fire, EMS and emergency management alongside police, according to *Security Magazine*. From a single hub, staff monitor a sprawling network of cameras, sensors and license plate readers, and the center has built some of the most restrictive video-access policies in the country, according to Security Info Watch. Step inside and discover the capabilities behind the operation. *Limited to 25 attendees.*

## The 911 and Emergency Response Centralized Call Center

For years, New Orleans' emergency response operated in silos. Now the city's call centers are unified under one roof, improving response times, boosting resilience and opening the door to innovation, including through AI. The consolidation also feeds the Real Time Crime Center, which bridges the 911 computer-aided dispatch system with the city's video network so responders can get eyes on a scene as a call comes in, according to *Security Magazine*. Join this tour to see the centralized operation in action and learn where it's headed next. *Limited to 50 attendees.*



West Closure Complex in Belle Chasse, La., during a pump test. It serves as the world's largest drainage pump station, designed to protect against storm surges. Photo by Ryan Labadens, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

## The West Closure Complex

The West Closure Complex, in Belle Chasse just south of the city, is a key component of the region's hurricane protection system, designed and built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with local and state partners. It anchors the West Bank's defenses with levees, floodwalls, a navigable gate and one of the largest drainage pump stations on earth.

The complex is one of the crown jewels of the roughly \$14.5 billion risk-reduction system built around New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and its 11 pumps can move close to 20,000 cubic feet of water per second — enough to fill an Olympic-size pool in about four seconds, according to NOLA.com.

Its sector gate is the largest of its kind in the world at 225 feet wide.

The system proved itself during Hurricane Ida in 2021, when crews ran all 11 pumps for 18 straight hours to hold back roughly nine feet of surge. During the tour, attend-

ees will learn how the complex fits into broader post-Katrina resilience efforts and will witness a live test of the pumping system in operation. *Limited to 55 attendees.*

## The Mosquito, Termite and Rodent Control Board

New Orleans' rich flora and fauna are central to the city's ecosystem — and to its public health challenges.

The New Orleans Mosquito, Termite and Rodent Control Board protects residents and visitors with fogging trucks, a helicopter and a working laboratory that conducts pathogen testing on the insects it traps, racing each summer to stay ahead of West Nile virus carried by the Southern House Mosquito, according to NOLA.com.

This tour takes attendees through the board's headquarters via a series of hands-on "stations," showing how local government manages mosquitoes, insects and rodents across the city. *Limited to 55 attendees.*

## Sewerage and Water Board Pump Station No. 6

New Orleans sits below sea level, and its survival depends on an extraordinary network of canals, pumps and outfall channels. Pump Station No. 6 is the heart of that system — the largest pumping station in the city and, for decades, the largest in the world, capable of filling the Superdome in about two-and-a-half hours as it pushes stormwater along the Metairie Relief Outfall Canal toward Lake Pontchartrain, according to *Invention & Technology*. The station still runs on the famous screw pumps designed by New Orleans engineer A. Baldwin Wood beginning in 1913 — a design so durable that the originals kept working through Hurricane Katrina, according to NOLA.com. Operated by the Sewerage and Water Board of New Orleans, it is historic and still very much in service. Join this tour to see that system up close. *Limited to 45 attendees.*



## Father's Day

- Average age for first-time dads:.....31
- Stay-at-home dads: ..... 7%
- Absent fathers: .....25%
- Part of labor force:.....93.7%
- Paternity leave:..... 64% take less than two weeks

Source: fathercraft.com; Bureau of Labor; House.gov

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CEO INSIGHTS | BY MATTHEW D. CHASE

# The Promise and Peril Arrive on the Frontlines

There I was, standing in Loudoun County's Data Center Alley with 40 congressional staff from NACo's Federal Fellowship Program, surrounded by the hum of the modern world in action.

More than 200 high-performance computing facilities sit in this corridor of Northern Virginia — the literal birthplace of the internet. Together these massive data centers generate more than \$1.2 billion in annual tax revenue for the county and its schools, money that flows directly into classrooms, community centers, and parks.

That's the part of the story we love to tell: county government, on the frontlines, turning a global industry into a sheriff deputy's salary or meals at the



local senior center.

But standing there, I'll be honest — I felt a rush of emotions all at once. Anxious. Curious. Inspired. And, yes, terrified.

That afternoon collided with something else on my mind. I've been serving on the Partnership on AI's global task force on labor and the economy, and the conversations at that ta-

ble don't let you look away from the hard questions: What is happening to the way we work? To wages versus wealth? To the character of our communities?

And how does NACo help county leaders keep pace when technological change is outrunning the pace of policy — and even human experience itself?

A recent presentation by a leader of Google's DeepMind team did not calm my racing mind. It convinced me of the sheer speed and force of what's already here. This is happening today, not in some distant decade.

Here is what I keep thinking. Counties did not ask to be on the front lines of the AI era. But we are. The power demands, the water use, the

“Here is what I keep thinking. Counties did not ask to be on the front lines of the AI era. But we are.”

land battles, the tax base, the workforce changes, the pressure for public services — all of it lands on us first.

The promise and the peril arrive at the same address: the county square.

I don't have this figured out, and we should all be suspicious of anyone who

claims they do. What I do know is that local government has always been where theory meets reality. That's our world.

So, I'm leaning into the curiosity and the realities in front of us and letting the anxiety keep me sharp. The evolution of change is never ending, whether we're ready or not. Our job is to make sure counties — and the people we all serve — aren't just along for the ride.

More to come. There always is.

*Matthew D. Chase is CEO and executive director of the National Association of Counties (NACo), the only national organization serving America's 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs.*

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## County government, public health collaboration creates stronger outcomes

From **HEALTH** page 1

Washington counties can develop their own county-wide code. That, in addition to the state's "broad and vague" administrative code, gave Thurston County the necessary latitude to create the Street Vendor Program, said Dr. Jen Freiheit, director of Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department.

"It was a unique concept — Washington didn't have this anywhere else," Freiheit said. "... This was a very grassroots effort led by some entrepreneurs in our community who were interested in promoting this lower cost option and starting up businesses, so it was a really innovative approach, really championed by community."

Because street vending doesn't follow the code of traditional physical facility requirements and entails unknown food sources, the county needed to identify regulatory concerns.

To better understand logistics around how the street vendors would operate, such as the processes around preparation, developing food and storage capacity, the county brought together five entrepreneurs who helped inform the creation of the Street Vendor Program.

"This really was a big partnership where we had the vendors come in and sit around the table with public health and the commissioners and just talk through all the pieces of it," Freiheit said. "Of like 'What does a refrigeration unit mean?' ... or 'If I'm operating from a brewery, if I'm operating on the street, it's going to be hard for



**Thurston County, Wash. Commissioner Carolina Mejia answers a question during NACo's Public Health Leadership Academy June 4 in Washington, D.C. To her right is Dr. Jen Freiheit, director of the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department.** Photo by Charlie Ban

me to find a connection.'

"So, I really appreciated how we all came around the table and talked through the different pieces to get to the solution."

The street vendors still operate under strict requirements, but not to the extent of a food truck, Freiheit noted. Participating vendors must apply for a Mobile Food Unit Permit and a variance, have access to a commissary kitchen, maintain an insulated mechanical refrigeration system and have a commercial-grade handwashing station with hot water.

Following the two-year pilot program, one of the five entrepreneurs continued as a street vendor, and two moved their businesses into brick-and-mortar locations.

"We are very proud of the people who have used this as a stepping-stone to actually open up brick-and-mortar places,

because it's a driver for economic development and small businesses," Mejia said. "So, that's one of the areas where we've shown that public health can be an economic driver."

There are now eight active street vendors operating across Thurston County, and the county is currently reviewing an additional seven applications.

"This was a really great program to promote economic development, public health and safe outdoor food access without people just popping up and doing it on their own," Freiheit said.

In Delta County, Colo., a preschool located in an area where bats regularly migrate, combined with low confidence in vaccines among some residents, created conditions that could have led to a rabies outbreak.

County officials and public

health leaders worked together to mitigate the situation in a way that worked for their community.

"Delta County doesn't have a formalized animal control, so a lot of those things end up on public health," said Jacqueline Davis, Delta County Public Health Director. "Many times, we refer to ourselves as the bat wranglers."

A nurse was conducting vision and hearing tests at a preschool in the county when a bat fell from the ceiling. She took the bat into Delta County Public Health, which had it tested for rabies; roughly 15% of bats in Colorado that are tested for rabies have the viral zoonotic disease which are infections caused by viruses that naturally jump from animals to humans.

The bat tested negative, but state guidance maintained that the 120 preschoolers

who were potentially exposed should receive rabies post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), a four-dose vaccine series along with one dose of rabies immune globulin.

"We have very low vaccination rates for MMR [Measles, Mumps and Rubella, a routine childhood immunization]," Davis said. "So, it wasn't something that was going to be accepted well in our community."

The state's recommendations of administering PEP, which is a 14-day process, and closing down the school, a Head Start program, didn't feel realistic for the county, Davis said.

"You could feel the tension in the room when they said, 'You have to vaccinate all these children with this long, drawn-out process, you're going to have to close this building, you're going to have to do this, this, and this,'" Davis said. "They had a lot of really good information that we were able to share and to glean from it, but you could tell from everybody else in the room that it wasn't a good situation, it wasn't going to end pleasantly if we continued."

The school district, county commission and board of health came together to determine a path forward that would work for their community, Davis said.

"I said, 'OK, what are we going to talk about? How are we going to do this?'" Davis said. "And how are we going to coordinate and make this really a livable situation for every-

See **HEALTH** page 17



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# Comments are due July 13 on OMB grant change proposal

From OMB page 1

get[s] what they want, then there will be fewer federal funds to administer.”

OMB is accepting comments through July 13, and NACo is holding a June 17 webinar, which will be recorded, to discuss details relating to the rule.



**BROCK**

“This affects any county that receives any federal funds whatsoever,” Brock said. “We could be talking about housing, we could be talking about education, we can be talking about energy. Most importantly for counties, what we’re talking about is the social safety net, and that means Medicaid.”

Once a relatively obscure facet of federal government, uniform guidance became relevant to every county that accepted American Rescue Plan Act funding in 2021.

Among the changes proposed in the rule, all grants would be subject to approval by a political appointee, giving the federal government discretionary termination authority subject to shifting federal priorities.

“You’ve got counties that budget very carefully and deliberately, yearlong budgets that depend on federal funds to provide specific social services inside of their communities,” Brock said. “You can’t run the risk of that whipsaw sitting in the middle of your budget. There are going to be a lot of questions from counties about whether they can protect themselves against the risk of termination before they even apply for a grant.”

A developing NACo analysis indicates that events held on county property could imper-

il grant eligibility if an event sponsor violates an executive order prohibiting the facilitation of prohibited content, including matters of diversity, equity and inclusion.

“OMB is proposing revisions that would improve transparency, accountability and oversight for Federal awards across the Federal Government,” the rule said. “This includes ensuring that American tax dollars are not wasted or misused, activities performed under Federal awards are consistent with law and policy, and recipients are held accountable when they fail to meet relevant standards. The revisions also aim to ensure that basic American principles of equality and equal opportunity are upheld throughout all stages of the award making process and that unlawful discrimination is no longer permitted.”

Brock said the rule may be partially in service of easing the burden on compliance officers.



“I think they really tightened up the screw a little too hard that there’s going to be a lot of considerations from counties now and they try to figure out outside a federal fund assistance,” she said. “How else might they be able to achieve organizational missions of delivery of services that were otherwise partially funded or always funded by federal funds?”

County management and financial personnel are still reviewing the proposed rule, which spans more than 400 pages, and are still comprehending what these changes would mean for county administration.

“Aside from ARPA, and maybe the occasional transportation project, we don’t usually do a lot of direct involvement



**TINSLEY**

with the feds,” said Fayette County Assistant Administrator Jason Tinsley. “Normally, we normally have our state as an intermediary, and it’s mostly transportation stuff. We’re kind of an affluent community, so we don’t do any housing-type stuff or anything like that. Our money is spoken for and reported on and gone, but we’re going to do our due diligence to try to figure out how it affects us.”

Brock noted that the rule could provide a potential upside for counties. With more deliberation to the grantmaking process, smaller counties could find themselves becoming players for grants that they were previously boxed out of.

“So that federal funds are a little bit broader in scope and can reach those entities that haven’t always been considered,” she said. “I think that is a terrific objective.”

As counties consider their input to comments to OMB, Brock recommends looking at three elements:

- **AGENCY AND ADMINISTRATION.** “Many counties feel like they have polished strong policies and procedures in place that are responsive to the federal government. They need to tell the government what it is that they do.

I think the perspective of the federal government is that counties just don’t care and they’re throwing papers up in the air and nobody’s tracking any spending. And that’s patently false.”

- **THE NOTION OF PRE-AWARD.** “The federal government needs to know the extent that this risk assessment, pre-award, makes the county think twice about applying

for a grant. They need to know why and what federal awards will they defer, right? So, to the extent that you’re saying that it’s going to be a \$120,000 to administer a \$1 million grant. The cost benefit isn’t there and we’re not going to apply for it. I think it’s worth it, saying the cost benefit is definitely not there.”

- **GRANT ADMINISTRATION.** “How much more difficult do the articulated regulations make it for you to just report back on those funds?”

Most importantly, Brock said counties must illustrate

the value of the intergovernmental system.

“It’s important that a county articulates how especially meaningful policies and procedures are in their administration,” she said. “You don’t need to make these regulations — we are taking this all very seriously.”

Scan this QR code to view the webinar on proposed rule changes:



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# FEMA AT A CROSSROADS: WHAT COUNTY OFFICIALS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT REFORM EFFORTS

by **Brett Mattson**

The federal emergency management landscape is shifting rapidly, and counties — as the first layer of government that residents turn to when disaster strikes — have more at stake than nearly any other stakeholder.

Two overlapping efforts are now unfolding in Washington: a sweeping executive-branch review of FEMA and a bipartisan legislative push to reform the agency through Congress. County officials should understand both tracks, what they could mean for local governments and where each stands today.

## The FEMA Review Council: A blueprint, not a law

On May 7, 2026, the President's Council to Assess the Federal Emergency Management Agency released its final report, outlining 10 recommendations to fundamentally

overhaul the nation's approach to disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. The council was established by executive order in January 2025 and spent more than a year gathering input through listening sessions in 13 cities, engagement with all 50 states and territories, four tribal listening sessions and more than 13,000 public submissions. NACo participated actively throughout, including testifying before the council during a public meeting in New Orleans.

The report's proposals are far-reaching. Among the most consequential for counties:

- replacing the existing Public Assistance reimbursement program with a parametric block grant model that would send funds to states within 30 days of a presidential disaster declaration;



- streamlining Individual Assistance into a single direct payment of up to \$150,000;
- replacing the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program with a two-phase state-managed structure;
- raising the thresholds required before a federal disaster declaration can be requested (an estimated 16 fewer major declarations per year);
- and restructuring FEMA itself into a leaner agency designated as the federal government's "payer of last resort."

County officials should read those proposals with one critical fact in mind: **this report contains recommendations only** – it is not policy. The most consequential changes, including restructuring Public Assistance and Individual Assistance, would require acts of Congress to take effect. Some

narrower administrative adjustments could move through regulatory channels or executive action, but the full vision described in the report cannot be realized without significant legislation. The path forward for implementation is unclear, and it is far from certain which — if any — of these recommendations will ultimately be acted upon.

If the report's framework were enacted, counties should expect a significant transfer of responsibility — and cost — to the state and local level. Greater federal reliance on states as intermediaries could create uneven outcomes depending on how individual state governments choose to administer funds and fill the gaps left by a reduced federal footprint.

Smaller, rural and under-resourced counties face the greatest risk in a scenario where state capacity does not keep pace with new expect-

*See FEMA page 9*





A powerful atmospheric river causes widespread flooding across Washington state in December 2025, damaging homes, businesses and major roadways.

# COUNTIES REGROUP AFTER FEMA'S RESILIENCY GRANT PROGRAM RESUMES

by Meredith Moran  
staff writer

As FEMA resumes and restructures its Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program, counties are reassessing projects that were put in limbo during its cancellation and creating new hazard mitigation gameplans ahead of its upcoming funding cycle.

In April 2025, the Trump Administration ended FEMA's BRIC program, halting roughly 2,000 active infrastructure and disaster mitigation projects across the country.

A coalition comprising 22 states and the District of Columbia sued FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security and the United States over the canceled grants.

A federal judge ruled in favor of the states in December, mandating FEMA reinstate BRIC and restore over \$3.6 billion in canceled funding. The federal agency officially resumed the grant program on March 25 in compliance with a court order.

Prior to the program's can-

cellation, Clatsop County, Ore. and Columbia Memorial Hospital were set to receive \$14 million in BRIC funding to help build a tsunami evacuation zone in the rural hospital.

Columbia Memorial Hospital sits along the Cascadia subduction zone; a massive rupture of the fault line would generate devastating tsunamis, and waves could reach up to 52 feet behind the hospital, according to Columbia Memorial Hospital resiliency planning.

The county and hospital had already begun spending down the funds when BRIC was canceled and construction of the project was forced to begin in early 2026, with the federal funds still in limbo, due to the short construction window available, according to Clatsop County Commissioner Mark Kujala.

The county is waiting to hear back from FEMA regarding the funds that were allotted to the project, Kujala noted.

"We decided to push forward with all the resiliency elements of the project," Kujala wrote in a statement to *County News*.

"We could no longer hold off on the construction timeline, and we had to stretch our reserves to fund the additional expenses, but the project is underway and on schedule."

Roughly two dozen projects in Washington state totaling more than \$150 million were put "in limbo" when BRIC was canceled, according to Washington Attorney General Nick Brown's office.

Brown co-led the multi-state coalition in filing the lawsuit against FEMA.

With shifting regulations and rising costs, localities are left to reassess the feasibility of completing the projects the way they were initially planned, said Luke Meyers, Pierce County, Wash. Emergency Management deputy director.

BRIC's reinstatement "is a great opportunity to get access back to the dollars, but now can you still complete the project based on those original scopes?" Meyers said.

"I think that's the real question with work that we're working on in planning and public works with the state — do all those variables still hold, or have costs increased? Has the dynamic changed that would challenge the final out-

come of those projects?"

Washington Emergency Management is working with the county and its other governmental partners to determine how projects that were put on pause when BRIC was canceled will be reconstituted, but logistics are still up in the air, according to Meyers.

"Restarting those has been very slow, to be honest," he said.

FEMA's reinstatement of BRIC brings a new focus to the grant program of funding "shovel-ready" projects that are ready to implement, eliminating phased initiatives.

Applications for fiscal year 2024-2025 BRIC grants are due July 23.

Pierce County is prioritizing earthquake and flood risk mitigation projects, such as seismic retrofitting and updates to drainage systems, according to Meyers.

Eight months after FEMA canceled BRIC, a series of atmospheric river storms resulted in flooding and landslides in Pierce County and the largest dollar amount of public infrastructure damage in Washington state in more than four decades, according to Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson.

The disaster underscored the necessity of federal assis-

tance in pre-disaster hazard mitigation, Meyers said.

Damage in the Pierce County city of Orting, which is located in the mid-Puyallup Watershed and would've traditionally faced much worse flooding, was limited because of work, including a setback levee, that was made possible through hazard mitigation grants, he noted.

"I think it's been a good reminder to take actions to reduce losses, and just the value of the federal mitigation grants," Meyers said.

"It just takes time, and so this flood — though we didn't have as great of impacts — I think some of that future avoided loss was clearly documented with the flooding that we did see."

BRIC enables jurisdictions of all sizes to participate in resiliency projects that otherwise wouldn't have the resources to carry them out or helps complete them more quickly, Meyers noted.

According to a 2019 National Institute of Building Sciences report, there's a \$6 return-on-investment for every \$1 of public funding spent on up-front disaster mitigation.

"The value of that federal



# REIMBURSEMENT POLICY PROLONGS DISASTER RECOVERY FOR COUNTIES

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Long after flood waters are gone, many counties are still left under water when it comes to recovery costs.

And while they are busy removing debris and rebuilding infrastructure and facilities to return to normal, the daily work of county government continues. It can take years, or decades, until the full reimbursement arrives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance Program.

"The first contract that we signed with [disaster recovery contractors] was \$10 million. Then we went to \$20 million, then to \$40 million," said Avery County, N.C. Commissioner Dennis Aldridge. "Every time you're in a meeting and you put your name on that document like that, it's pretty intimidating."

All told, Avery County spent months recovering from Hurricane Helene waiting for a \$57 million reimbursement from FEMA for debris removal, all while managing the Western North Carolina county's annual budget of \$42 million.

"We chose a private contractor, rather than the Army Corps of Engineers, because we felt it gave us a little bit more control over using local people" amid the federal government's disaster recovery regulations, Aldridge said. "If we're going to be spending this huge amount of money, we'd rather have the work go to local contractors."

And the reimbursement delays put the county in a challenging position with those contractors.

"We began to take about \$2 million a month out of our fund balance just to keep the wolves from the door, just to allow the contractors to make some interest payments," he



Avery County, N.C. Commissioner Dennis Aldridge surveys damage from Hurricane Helene in 2024 in this still from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners' documentary, "Rising Above Helene," directed by Chris Baucom of 100 Strong Productions.

said. "It's not the people that are the problem [at FEMA], it is the process. They can only work within the process that they're given, and this model of presenting the proposals, and you have to have all the documentation, and we have learned that 'approval' does not always mean 'approval' in the long term."

Avery County's administration building was flooded, forcing county employees into temporary offices. The senior center, EMS center and the county's baseball field were all destroyed.

"We used county money, not FEMA money, to buy a restaurant so we could keep Meals on Wheels going," Aldridge said. "After the first week, we haven't missed a day of providing food, even if we can't do large congregate meals in what's become our senior center."

Aldridge knows that moving ahead without FEMA approval can jeopardize a project's eligibility for reimbursement, but nearly two years after the hurricane, residents are losing their patience.

"Whenever nothing is getting done, you're quite aware of how the people are look-

ing around, and they ask why nothing is happening, why something isn't being fixed," he said. "When we say we can't, that our hands are tied until we get the go-ahead, that makes us look pretty ineffective."

With the county's contractors awaiting payment, Avery County has paid when it can and negotiated partial payments for other services. And officials try to appeal to members of Congress to expedite the process.

"We've learned that we have to be the squeaky wheel to get the federal money," he said. "I joke with our interim county manager that whenever our federal delegation sees us on a Zoom call, they know what we're going to talk about, because we're pretty adamant about it, and we hold them to it."

"I've had to be probably more vocal than I would have liked to have been, but we just feel we can't quit. We can't give up."

There's some hope for a new path forward. That process would change under the bipartisan Fixing Emergency Management for Americans Act (FEMA Act), which would change the current reimbursement model for public assistance into a grant program. The bill would also set fund-

ing deadlines and introduce a flexible cost share that's tied to mitigation measures, along with streamlining environmental and historical reviews that delay projects.

**'We've learned that we have to be the squeaky wheel to get the federal money.'**

— Dennis Aldridge,  
Avery County, N.C.

The Individual Assistance program would also change under the FEMA Act, adopting a universal disaster application and offering other flexibility that would help homeowners navigate bureaucracy.

The FEMA Act passed the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee by an overwhelming margin of 57-3 and is awaiting action on the House floor. (Read more on page 7.)

Adding to the administrative headaches throughout the process since Helene hit the Blue Ridge Mountains in 2024, Avery County lost its county manager to health concerns, followed by his interim substitute's retirement.

To earn reimbursement to

rebuild the county administration office and the senior center, the county had to perform a time-consuming cost-benefit analysis, and while the federal government was looking for 51%, the magic threshold that demonstrated the move was justified, Aldridge was satisfied with one number: 3.

"The senior center has been flooded three times already," he said. "I'm not too smart, but I think a wiser move would be to put it somewhere else."

While Congress continues to work on the FEMA Act, counties will receive more clarity on pending reimbursements. In April, the Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill required FEMA to publish an interactive, publicly accessible dashboard tracking all requests for reimbursement under the Public Assistance program. It requires FEMA to post reimbursement request data no more than 90 days after receiving it, and within 60 days of a project entering final review at the Department of Homeland Security. The dashboard must include project-level detail, including cost estimates, applicant identifiers, submission dates, project descriptions and the federal and non-federal cost-share breakdown for every grant. **CN**



# NACo encourages members to engage congressional representatives on FEMA legislation

From FEMA page 6

tations. The report does recommend preserving several critical federal capabilities counties rely on, including Urban Search and Rescue task forces, the National Disaster Medical System and the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System, and it recommends retaining the Emergency Management Performance Grant program.

NACo is actively engaging with FEMA and the administration as implementation discussions progress and will continue to provide updates as the process unfolds. Counties should monitor developments closely but should not expect immediate changes to existing programs.

## The FEMA Act: County wins in committee, Senate work ahead

Congress has its own FEMA reform effort underway, and this one has already cleared a major hurdle. The bipartisan Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act (H.R. 4669), introduced by House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee leadership in the 119th Congress, passed committee on Sept. 3, 2025, by a vote of 57-3. The bill now awaits action on the House floor.

The FEMA Act represents the most significant proposed reform of the agency in decades. It would establish FEMA as an independent, cabinet-level agency, removing it from the Department of Homeland Security. It would also overhaul both Public Assistance and Individual Assistance policies and reform mitigation programs, with a focus on making federal disaster assistance more direct, timely and transparent for local communities.

Several provisions in the bill reflect direct recommendations from NACo's Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force, through which county officials provided input to federal partners throughout the drafting process. Among the top county wins included



in the legislation:

- Advance payments for Public Assistance projects, reducing the burden on counties that must currently front costs and wait for reimbursement under a seven-phase process — a model that has long created financial strain, particularly for counties with limited tax bases and capped borrowing capacity.
- A universal disaster application to streamline survivor access to federal aid, reducing confusion, duplication and delays across assistance programs.
- A publicly accessible, interactive dashboard tracking all Public Assistance reimbursement requests — a transparency provision that NACo separately secured in recent appropriations legislation, giving counties unprecedented visibility into the status of disaster recovery funding.
- Strengthened coordination between FEMA and state and local governments to ensure disaster assistance is delivered more efficiently and that federal programs are better aligned with local needs.

One critical gap remains: a Senate companion bill has not yet been introduced. NACo is actively working to secure Senate introduction of a companion measure, and that effort makes continued county advocacy essential. County officials have a direct role to play in advancing this legislation: scheduling meetings

with U.S. senators, sending formal letters of support on county letterhead and sharing real-world examples of how the current FEMA reimbursement system delays recovery and strains local budgets.

## Why this matters for counties

The stakes for counties in both efforts could not be higher. Counties clear debris, operate shelters, rebuild public

infrastructure, administer recovery grants and fund hospitals. We are, in every practical sense, the institution through which disaster response reaches individual residents.

The current FEMA framework, while essential, has drawn consistent criticism from county officials for bureaucratic delays, complex grant requirements and slow reimbursements. The FEMA Act offers a legislative path to

County officials have a direct role to play in advancing this legislation.

address many of those structural problems in ways that could meaningfully benefit local governments. The Review Council report, by contrast, raises important questions about whether a shift toward greater state primacy and reduced federal presence would leave counties — especially smaller and rural ones — more exposed, not less.

NACo will continue to monitor both tracks and represent county interests in all relevant discussions. County officials are encouraged to use NACo's advocacy toolkit to engage their congressional delegations and to coordinate with NACo to align messaging as the legislative and administrative landscapes evolve. **CN**

*Mattson is a senior legislative director in NACo's Government Affairs department.*

# FEMA prioritizing 'shovel-ready' projects

From BRIC page 7

assistance is extremely important," Meyers said. "And it does allow a lot of leveraging that we just don't have that capacity [for] at the state or local level."

As the BRIC grant program continues to evolve, FEMA should entrust localities with

BRIC's reinstatement "is a great opportunity to get access back to the dollars, but now can you still complete the project based on those original scopes?"

– Luke Meyers, Pierce County, Wash. Emergency Management deputy director

more control over how the dollars are spent, Meyers said.

"The more flexible that these federal programs can be, more like a block grant, and

have longer years of periods of performance, they'll be more beneficial to the state and locals," Meyers said. "At least here in Washington state." **CN**



The Calistoga Setback Levee helped mitigate severe flooding in December 2025, underscoring the importance of federal funding for hazard mitigation. Photo courtesy of Pierce County

## SPONSORED CONTENT

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There is a quiet assumption baked into modern software: if it is powerful, your data must be the price.

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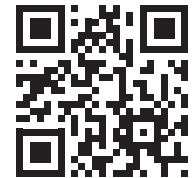
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## SALUTE TO COUNTY LEADERS: Calvin Ball

Calvin Ball's appointment to the Howard County, Md. Council in 2006 launched a county government leadership career that will have lasted more than 20 years when he leaves office after two terms as the county's first African American executive.

His county government career started prior to that appointment, when he worked as a firefighter and emergency management technician while teaching education and urban studies at Morgan State University, where he would later earn a doctorate. As his appointed term ended, he won the first of three races for County Council chair, becoming the youngest person to hold that office. He also served as president of the Maryland Association of Counties.

### How did you know that county government was your calling?

I think when I was able to interact with my neighbors, I thought about how at state and federal government, you rarely have the same direct interaction with your neighbors. You rarely really have an opportunity to see the work that you've done impact the people in such a direct and immediate way.

### What was your proudest achievement in Howard County?

Our long-lasting infrastructure project will be the Ellicott City Safe and Sound flood mitigation plan, but we've built a number of new schools to ensure that we'll have the civic community infrastructure that will stand the test of time and bring people together.

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

I think the most important thing is that we're not alone, that we are all facing many of the similar issues that everyone in every county is facing. How do we ensure that there's educational opportunity that is not bound by ZIP code? How do we ensure that people are not only safe but feel safe? How do we make it so that we're prepared for the future, both financially and connecting with our communities?

I think NACo really helped us see that these are issues and challenges around our nation. And if there are issues and challenges around our nations, the solutions and the way that we address these issues, we can come together and create best practices that help everyone.

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

I'm an educator and a mediator by training, so I've always wanted to, help empower people and bring people together. I think as a leader, I have not only grown in my understanding on how to address some of these issues but gotten even better at pulling people together during the pandemic, during the federal government shutdowns, during the DOGE layoffs.

I've also recognized that none of us are always right. It's tough, especially at the executive level because people look to you to have all the answers and your first instinct is to try to give all the answers. I think over time, recognizing I don't have all the answers, and I don't need to have all the answers. You know, we have team members.

We have constituents that governing, especially over the course of time, is an iterative process that as new information comes, we grow, we learn, we improve, and we try to do better. And that's OK.



Howard County, Md. Executive Calvin Ball. Photo courtesy of Howard County, Md.

### Have you met any mentors that have helped you along the way, people you didn't expect would end up mentors?

Well, you know, I see a lot of county government as collaborative, and so, yes, they're mentors, but over time, I get to be the mentor in some issues. And, you know, there are times where certain executives are like, 'Hey, how do you deal with this?' And they say, 'Oh, I've dealt with that a couple years ago.'

And then, in six months, they're like, 'Hey, how do you deal with that?' I was like, 'Oh,

I dealt with that a couple years ago. And so, you know, I've had the chance to be mentor and mentee.

### Why are you optimistic about the future of county government?

As we've seen in these tumultuous times and increasing turbulence at the federal level, it has just reinforced that at the county level, we are thoughtful. We're collaborative. We don't have to make decisions based upon strict ideology or partisanship. We can come together.

As we've faced some of the most challenging times in the

last eight years with the federal government shutdowns, with the DOGE layoffs, with the financial sector going haywire, county government has been the stalwart along the way.

### Why are you optimistic about the future of county government?

Listen, learn, grow and do your best based upon the information that you have. It's OK, in year six, to make a different decision than you would have in year one, because if you don't, that means you've wasted five years of an opportunity to learn, to grow and to become better.

## Live Healthy Discount Program

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26NACo SECOND VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES  
**Candidate Platform****Sarah Benatar**Treasurer, Coconino County,  
Ariz.**Dear Colleagues,**

It has been one of the greatest honors of my career to serve as Coconino County Treasurer and to work alongside so many of you through NACo. County government is where service becomes personal — where the decisions we make touch the lives of our neighbors, our families, and our communities. My commitment to this work is rooted in a deep belief that **local leadership matters**, and that when counties are empowered to lead, our communities are stronger, safer, and more resilient.

My journey in NACo has been shaped by the incredible leaders I've met and the shared challenges we've faced together. Over the years, I have had the privilege of serving in several roles, including:

- Vice Chair, Finance, Pensions & Intergovernmental Affairs Steering Committee
- Chair, Fiscal Policy & Pensions Subcommittee

- Member, NACo Board of Directors
- Member, NACo Audit Committee
- Member, Health Steering Committee
- Member, Human Services & Education Steering Committee
- Past NACo Tally Clerk
- 2023 National Government Financial Professional of the Year (Controllers Council)

These roles have given me a deep appreciation for the complexity of county governance and the strength that comes from working together. They have also allowed me to contribute directly to NACo's national policy work — from shaping fiscal policy recommendations, to strengthening intergovernmental partnerships, to helping develop NACo's positions on issues that affect counties of every size.

As the Chief Banking Officer and Chief Investment Officer for my county, I oversee financial operations that touch every resident. That responsibility has shaped my belief that **fiscal stewardship is one of the most important forms of public service**.

Across the country, counties are facing a moment of profound change. We are navigating rising costs, workforce shortages, behavioral health crises, housing pressures, aging infrastructure, and increasing expectations from our residents. At the same time, counties are being asked to shoulder more responsibilities without the flexible, reliable funding needed to meet

them. These challenges are real, and they require thoughtful, steady, and collaborative leadership.

One of the most pressing issues we face is **fiscal sustainability**. Counties are responsible for essential services — public safety, public health, elections, transportation, human services — yet our revenue systems often lag behind the needs of our communities. Cost shifts from states, uncertainty in federal funding, and inflation in labor and materials all strain our ability to plan for the future. Through my work chairing NACo's Fiscal Policy & Pensions Subcommittee and serving on the Audit Committee, I have seen firsthand how counties benefit when NACo advocates for **flexible funding**, modernization of revenue systems, and tools that help counties build long-term financial resilience. Our ability to serve residents depends on it.

Another critical issue is **protecting local control**. Counties must retain the authority to make decisions that reflect the unique needs of their communities. Whether it's land use, economic development, resource management, or service delivery, local leaders understand their communities best. My testimony before the U.S. House Financial Services Committee — where I spoke as a national expert on fiscal policy and local authority — reinforced for me how essential it is that NACo continues to defend local decision-making. When counties decide,

communities thrive.

We must also pursue innovation and responsibly implement new technology in ways that strengthen county operations and support our workforce. As Treasurer, I have focused on practical, meaningful innovation — most notably developing a **cash-flow modeling system that supports disaster response and recovery**, giving counties clearer insight into financial capacity during emergencies. This work has demonstrated that responsible use of technological advancements, when guided by real world needs and human judgment, can boost resilience, improve decision making, and strengthen public trust. NACo can play a vital role in helping counties adopt tools that are effective, accessible, and grounded in real-world needs.

Finally, we must continue to focus on **community well-being**. Counties are on the front lines of behavioral health, homelessness, public health, emergency response, and social services. The challenges our residents face are complex and interconnected, and counties are often the only level of government positioned to respond holistically. My work on NACo's Health and Human Services & Education Steering Committees has shown me how essential it is that NACo continues supporting counties with resources, research, and advocacy that strengthen our capacity to meet these needs.

As we look to the future, NACo's strength will depend

on the strength of its membership. Engagement is essential. Expanding the NACo Ambassador Program, creating more opportunities for new members to connect, and offering limited-access previews of NACo resources can help counties understand the value of participation. Regular communication, peer learning, and intentional outreach — especially to counties with fewer resources — will ensure NACo remains relevant and responsive to all members.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve alongside you. County officials are some of the most dedicated public servants I have ever known, and it is your commitment that inspires me every day. The relationships we build through NACo — the conversations in hallways, the problem-solving across state lines, the shared commitment to our residents — are what make this organization so meaningful and impactful.

To learn more about my experience and vision for our future, or connect with me personally, please visit [www.sarah4naco.com](http://www.sarah4naco.com). I look forward to our upcoming conversations as we shape the path forward for NACo. Thank you for your service, leadership, and unwavering dedication to your communities. It is an honor to walk this path with you. I humbly ask for your support and vote to serve as your next NACo 2nd Vice President. **When counties decide, communities thrive.**

20  
26NACo SECOND VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES  
**Candidate Platform****Matthew G. Prochaska**Clerk of the Circuit Court  
for Kendall County, Ill.**Building Bridges.  
Strengthening  
Counties. Advancing  
NACo.**

The National Association of Counties is at its best when county leaders come together in a bipartisan spirit to solve problems, share ideas, and advocate for the communities we serve. As a candidate for NACo Second Vice President, my vision is rooted in a simple principle: **building bridges**. Building bridges between counties, between rural, suburban, and urban communities, between state associations and NACo, and between experienced leaders and emerging leaders.

My commitment to NACo is grounded in a unique perspective shaped by service at multiple levels of county government. Before becoming a countywide elected official, I served eight years as a county board member, where I learned the importance of fiscal stewardship, constitu-

ent service, and collaborative leadership. Those experiences provided the foundation for my involvement in NACo and continue to influence my approach to leadership today.

I have also had the privilege of serving as NACo Membership Chairman, NACo Parliamentarian, and a member of the Credentials Committee. I also serve as President of the Illinois State Association of Counties and on the Board of the United Counties Council of Illinois. Through these roles, I have learned that NACo's greatest strength is not any single program or committee. Our greatest strength is the relationships that connect county leaders across America.

Membership growth and retention must remain among NACo's highest priorities. During my service as Membership Chairman, NACo achieved a membership high and one of its strongest retention rates. That success was built through outreach, relationship-building, and demonstrating the value of NACo membership.

When I served as a county board member, NACo provided me with access to ideas, best practices, and relationships that helped me become a more effective local official. That experience taught me that membership is not simply about joining an organization. It is about becoming part of a community of county leaders committed to improving county government.

We must continue to communicate both the financial and professional value of

NACo membership. Counties need to understand not only what NACo does in Washington, but also how NACo helps them solve problems at home through advocacy, education, leadership development, peer networking, and programs such as NACo Edge.

At the same time, membership is about engagement. A county with only one actively engaged NACo member is an at-risk county. When participation is concentrated in a single individual, institutional knowledge can be lost and future engagement becomes uncertain. We should encourage counties to develop teams of engaged leaders and employees rather than relying on a single representative.

One of NACo's greatest assets is its ability to connect county officials with colleagues facing similar challenges.

Some of the most valuable lessons I learned as a county board member came from conversations with county leaders who had already faced challenges my county was confronting.

These relationships build trust, encourage innovation, and provide practical solutions that can be implemented immediately. In the various capacities of my public service, I have seen how these relationships help counties avoid mistakes, identify opportunities, and improve outcomes for residents.

A strong association requires a strong financial foundation. NACo Edge has become an increasingly im-

portant resource for counties by providing practical solutions, strategic partnerships, and cost-saving opportunities. It has also become an important source of non-dues revenue for the association.

As an officer, I will support continued growth and innovation within NACo Edge while ensuring that it remains focused on delivering meaningful value to counties. Strengthening NACo Edge is not simply about generating revenue. It is about ensuring NACo has the resources necessary to support advocacy, education, leadership development, and member services for years to come.

At the same time, NACo must preserve its role as a bipartisan, solutions-oriented organization. My experience as a county board member and circuit clerk taught me that local government succeeds when people focus on solving problems rather than scoring political points. Roads must be maintained. Public safety services must be delivered. Budgets must be balanced. Residents expect results.

NACo has long been successful because it brings together leaders from different political parties, regions, and backgrounds to address shared challenges. As an officer, I will work to ensure NACo remains a place where respectful dialogue, consensus-building, and practical problem-solving are valued above partisan division. Counties are strongest when they speak with a unified voice, and NACo is strongest when

it remains focused on county priorities rather than national political battles.

Leadership is ultimately about relationships. The most successful organizations are those that listen to a multitude of voices, bring people together around common goals and create opportunities for collaboration. NACo has done that for nearly a century, and I believe its future is bright if we continue to focus on engagement, innovation, fiscal responsibility, and bipartisanship.

The experiences I gained as a county board member participating in NACo remain the foundation of my leadership philosophy. They remind me every day that NACo exists to serve counties and the people who lead them. Whether representing a rural county, a suburban county, or a major urban county, our members deserve an association that listens, responds, and delivers value.

If elected as your NACo Second Vice President, I will bring my diversity of experiences to the office. I will work to build bridges between counties, strengthen member engagement, support NACo's long-term financial sustainability, elevate NACo's collective voice, and preserve the bipartisan spirit that has made our association successful for generations.

I'm honored to seek the position of NACo Second Vice President in the company of two other fine candidates and respectfully ask for your support.

20  
26NACo SECOND VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES  
**Candidate Platform****Mike Turner**

Vice Chair/Ashburn District Supervisor on the Board of Supervisors in Loudoun County, Va.

Greetings NACo Colleagues. I'm Mike Turner, Vice Chair/Ashburn District Supervisor on the Board of Supervisors in Loudoun County, VA, and I'm running for NACo 2nd Vice President. I'm currently the Chair of both the NACo and the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) Environment, Energy and Land Use (EELU) Committees.

I've served in a public service job every single day of my life since I was 17 years old. After graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy, I flew as an air rescue helicopter pilot for six years. I then transitioned to fighter aircraft and spent the remainder of my career as a fighter pilot. During my 24-yr. Air Force career, I had two senior staff assignments, first as General H. Norman Schwarzkopf's personal briefing officer for two years before and during Desert Storm, and, in my final assignment, as a senior policy advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs at the Pentagon.

After retiring from the U.S. Air Force as a full colonel,

I served for 22 years as the chief development officer or chief legislative officer in six different national nonprofits, including the American Red Cross, Mental Health America and Wounded Warrior Project.

And now, at the pinnacle of my public service career, I can say without hesitation my current job as an elected Loudoun County Supervisor is the most deeply satisfying and rewarding public service job I've ever had.

That's why, when asked why I was running for NACo 2nd Vice President, I realized the NACo mission, the unwavering dedication of NACo members to public service in their communities, and NACo's vital leadership role in empowering and representing the nation's counties resonated deeply within me.

I believe NACo must remain a unifying voice for our counties and reflect, through them, ethical, compassionate and principled national leadership. Such principled leadership was expected of me as a senior military officer, and my NACo membership has simply reaffirmed these core values. Never in my life have I felt so compelled to stand up and devote all my energies and experience helping to lead an organization that represents the very best of our democracy.

I feel NACo leadership is critically needed in several areas. Here are three I believe are most urgent:

**Data Centers:**

NACo must empower county elected officials to become the "go to" experts on managing data center growth and historically increasing power demand.

As many of you know, Loudoun County has the highest concentration of data centers in the world with 253 data centers in the 30 square miles of eastern Loudoun County. For over twenty-six years, we've had to contend with the highly complex challenges related to historic data center growth, an unprecedented increase in demand on our power grid, pressure to roll back power de-carbonization programs, and rapidly growing community resistance to new data centers.

As a Loudoun County Supervisor, I've tried to learn about and understand all aspects of this historic change. I've spent the past two years researching every aspect of data center growth and its impact on our nation's counties, participated in dozens of panel discussions, webinars, forums and site visits and met with elected county officials from across the country.

I've captured my research in a white paper, a slide deck, and a one-page primer of the 15 best practices for counties considering data center development. They can be downloaded from the QR code above or at [www.Loudoun.gov/Ashburn](http://www.Loudoun.gov/Ashburn).

I believe NACo is uniquely positioned to lead the nation in addressing this historic market trend by providing county leaders with the tools they need to make informed, sustainable decisions about data center growth, power demand, water use, emissions, energy storage and microgrids.

**Affordable Housing:**

NACo must continue to lead the nation in affordable housing innovation.

Every one of our member

counties faces the issue of affordable housing, and many of them have developed highly innovative, community-unique affordable housing solutions. The best of these are the result of a high degree of collaboration among federal, state and local community programs. NACo is ideally positioned to facilitate this process. By sharing member county best practices and establishing regular forums for our members to relate their affordable housing successes—one of our great strengths—we can continue to raise the bar for all counties and help everyone achieve significant affordability results. For example, I helped write Loudoun County's Unmet Housing Needs Strategic Plan shortly after being elected, and I conceived of an initiative to "fast track" residential housing developments comprising 100% affordable homes. The result: we have now cut the application processing times for fully affordable projects from two years down to eight months. NACo offers an ideal platform to share these types of successes with all our members.

**Protecting County Authority:**

NACo must strongly oppose increasing efforts by state and federal governments to usurp county authority.

The historic urgency of issues like data center growth, affordable housing availability and managing and regulating artificial intelligence is fueling a growing trend by state and federal governments to preempt county authority in

these and other areas. NACo must continue to showcase local successes as proof that the most vital role federal and state governments play is to empower counties to implement county-appropriate solutions. The impact on local communities of these emerging, highly complex issues is far too community-unique to lend itself to "one size fits all" state or federal solutions.

Considering these and other emerging issues, it's clear to me NACo members play a vital role in making American democracy work every day. It is important for American citizens to see and hear their local elected officials demonstrating in their local communities the highest ideals and aspirations of American Democracy: compassion, fairness, respect, self-sacrifice, decency, non-partisanship, honesty, and so much more. NACo must be a clarion voice of reason, optimism and hope, a shining testament to those principles which have made America the most enduring democracy in human history. I would be honored to serve as your 2nd Vice President.

Resource Page:



ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

● President **J.D. Clark**, Membership, Engagement Director **Tammy Tincer** and National Director of Executive Relationships **Craig Holmes** attended the Colorado Counties, Inc. Summer Conference in Summit County.

NACo STAFF

● **Henry Perla** has joined NACo as an IT support specialist. He previously served as an IT support specialist for NTT DATA and earned an associate's degree in information technology at Northern Virginia Community College.



Perla

● **Ava Hatcher** has joined NACo as corporate relations coordinator. She previously served as a membership services representative for the Washington Commanders and earned a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Alabama.



Hatcher

● CEO/Executive Director **Matt Chase**, Chief Government Affairs Officer **Eryn Hurley**, Chief Research Officer **Abby Davidson**, Senior Legislative Director **Brett Mattson** and Research Director **Jonathan Harris**

attended the Conference of Southern County Associations Conference in Williamsburg, Va.

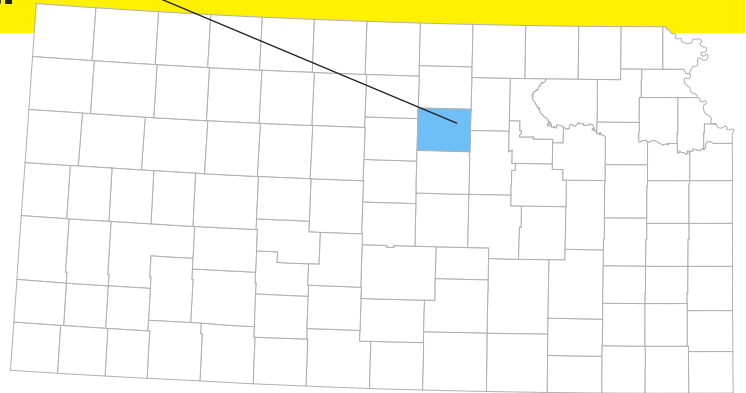
● **Mattson** also attended the American Property Casualty Insurance Association's Flood, Fire and Wind Conference in Dallas County, Texas; The National Sheriffs Association Annual Conference in Douglas County, Neb. and the Maryland Emergency Management and Homeland Security Symposium in Worcester County.

● **Tincer** and Program Director **Shelby Butz** attended the County Commissioners Association of West Virginia Annual Conference in Lewis County.

● Legislative Assistant **Andrew Nober** attended the Idaho Association of Counties Annual Conference in Canyon County.

GET TO KNOW...

Ottawa County, Kan.



by Meredith Moran  
staff writer

Ottawa County, named for the Odawa Native American tribe, was established in 1860. The rural north-central Kansas county is situated in the Solomon River Valley.

Its county seat is Minneapolis — not the Minnesota “twin city,” but a roughly 2,000-person town of the same name. It's the only other “Minneapolis” in the United States. Some local historians contend that the Kansas county seat was not actually named after the larger, more well-known city, but for the Sioux phrase for “city of waters,” as the Solomon River flows through Minneapolis.

**George Washington Carver, an agricultural scientist and inventor who revolutionized Southern farming by promoting alternative crops like peanuts and sweet potatoes to restore depleted soil, went to high school in Ottawa County. Carver was born into slavery in**

**Missouri and lived in Kansas before becoming Iowa State University's first Black student, graduate and faculty member. Carver created 325 uses for peanuts (earning him the nickname of “The Peanut Man”), 108 applications for sweet potatoes and 75 products made from pecans.**

In 1906, he created the “Jesup Wagon,” a mobile laboratory that brought agricultural education and demonstrations to poor rural farmers; after his death, the George Washington Carver Foundation was established to provide an opportunity for Black youths to study botany, chemistry and agronomy.

A corner of the Ottawa County Historical Museum

is dedicated to Carver and his inventions. Also featured in the county museum is a letter written by a local girl to Abe Lincoln suggesting that he should grow a beard to win votes.

Rock City Park, located in the county, is a National Natural Landmark overlooking the Solomon River with more than 200 Dakota sandstone concretions, which are up to 27 feet in diameter and that visitors are encouraged to climb. Ottawa County is also the discovery site of the *Silvisaurus*, the only known dinosaur species in Kansas. It was designated as the official state land fossil in 2023.

*Get to Know features new NACo member counties.*

From FULL NAMES page 1



Back row: **Price County, Wis. County Administrator Nick Trimmer; Hoke County, N.C. Commissioner Allen Thomas; Newaygo County, Mich. Commissioner Bryan Kolk; Marion County, Kan. Commissioner Jonah Gehring; Logan County, Ohio Commissioner Joe Antram; Douglas County, Nev. Commissioner Nathan Tolbert; Polk County, Ore. Commissioner Jeremy Gordon; Johnson County, Iowa Sheriff Brad Kunkel; Tioga County, Pa. Commissioner Shane Nickerson; Monroe County, Ga. Commissioner Lamarcus Davis and Weston County, Wyo. Commissioner Ed Wagoner.**

Front row: **Roosevelt County, N.M. Commissioner Tina Dixon; Yavapai County, Ariz. Supervisor Mary Mallory; Indian River County, Fla. Commissioner Susan Adams; Missoula County, Mont. Commissioner Juanita Vero; Comal County, Texas District Attorney Jennifer Tharp; Monterey County, Calif. Supervisor Luis Alejo; Clay County, Minn. Commissioner Jenny Mongeau; Columbia County, N.Y. Sheriff Jackie Salvatore; Whatcom County, Wash. Councilmember Kaylee Galloway and Tooele County, Utah. Recorder/Surveyor Jerry Houghton.**



Agricultural scientist George Washington Carver attended high school in Ottawa County, Kan.

## BRIGHT IDEAS | SUFFOLK COUNTY, N.Y.

# Banking Program Makes for County ‘Peace of Mind,’ Smooth Audit Process

**PROBLEM:** Bank failures in the news in 2023 gave county incentive to upgrade its own bank program.

**SOLUTION:** Create a more streamlined collateral reporting process.

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Suffolk County, N.Y.’s Bank Account Collateralization program increases financial transparency and ensures that taxpayer dollars are safe, even in the event of a bank failure, through three+one technology and cross-county collaboration.

Five bank failures in 2023 led to the largest banking sector crisis in U.S. history by total asset value, representing over \$540 billion in combined assets. While the Suffolk County Comptroller’s Office was not directly impacted by the failures, it prompted the county to “take a step back and re-think how it was managing depository relationships,” said Suffolk County Comptroller John M. Kennedy, Jr.

“It was an important reminder that strong oversight and visibility are essential, regardless of the economic environment,” he said.

Three+one, which had already been an “integral” piece of the county’s depository and cash management operations for years, helped coordinate the technological resources and banking relationships needed to bring together the county, its banks and custodians into a more streamlined collateral reporting process, according to Kennedy.

“When I saw there was an opportunity to strengthen our collateral monitoring process and improve transparency without creating additional strain on staff, I felt it



was something we needed to pursue,” Kennedy said. “It’s about making sure the county is doing everything possible to protect public funds and maintain confidence in our financial systems.”

There are currently seven banks which hold the majority of Suffolk County’s deposits, all of which are being tracked, and there are additional financial institutions and custodians involved behind the scenes, Kennedy noted.

“A significant amount of coordination was involved because many of our banks utilize third-party custodians to hold collateral,” Kennedy said. “While that separation of responsibilities is an important safeguard, it also adds operational complexity.”

After launching in the beginning of 2024, The Bank Account Collateralization program continued developing across different departments as they were onboarded, allowing the comptroller to capture their bank data in a reporting tool. By the last

quarter of 2025, the program had been fully implemented, and the Comptroller’s Office produces collateral reports bimonthly, according to Kennedy.

‘Our annual audit process is probably when we appreciate the value of this program the most.’

– John M. Kennedy, Jr,  
Suffolk County, N.Y.

“This is an ongoing process because banking relationships and account structures naturally evolve over time,” Kennedy said. “But we’re very proud of the foundation that has been established and the visibility it now provides our office.”

As staffing changes have occurred within both the county’s cash management and audit functions, having a more structured and transparent

process in place has allowed the Comptroller’s Office to coordinate more effectively with auditors, banks, custodians and its internal team while maintaining continuity and confidence in the process, according to Kennedy.


“Our annual audit process is probably when we appreciate the value of this program the most,” Kennedy said. “Having timely collateral reporting and support from three+one has made it much easier to respond to questions and conduct deeper reviews when necessary.”

The collateralization program has saved the Comptroller’s Office significant time, particularly during audit season, by reducing the amount of manual coordination and research required, according to Kennedy.

“Beyond the operational improvements, the greatest benefit is the peace of mind that comes from knowing we have stronger visibility into the protection of county funds,” Kennedy said. “That level of

oversight and accountability is extremely valuable to our office and to taxpayers.”

For other counties looking to adopt a similar model, it’s important to involve information technology staff and trusted third-party advisors early on to identify opportunities in improving automation, reporting and data sharing, Kennedy said. Maintaining open communication with banking partners, who may already have tools or reporting capabilities available that can help modernize your process, is also key, he noted.

“Ask questions and involve the right people early in the process,” Kennedy said. “Speak with long-tenured staff who understand how your current program evolved over time, because that institutional knowledge is invaluable.” 

*Suffolk County’s Bank Account Collateralization was the 2025 NACo Achievement Award “Best in Category” winner in the Financial Management category.*

# WORD SEARCH

## BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS

Created by Mary Ann Barton

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

**BEXAR:** Bexar County derives its name from San Antonio de Béxar, a prominent Spanish municipality and military outpost (presidio) established in the province of Tejas in 1718.

**BURNETT:** Legendary comedian and TV pioneer Carol Burnett is a Bexar County native.

**CUISINE:** The city is considered the birthplace of several iconic dishes, including chili con carne, nachos and the “puffy taco.”

**DELI:** Schilo’s Delicatessen is the oldest continuously operating restaurant in the county, serving German-Texas comfort food since 1917.

**FIESTA:** Started in 1891, Fiesta San Antonio is a popular annual festival that attracts millions each spring.

**HIGH:** The highest point in Bexar County is Mount Smith at 1,892 feet (576 meters).

**LEATHER:** Bexar Goods Co. is a celebrated area crafter of high-end, saddle-stitched leather goods.

**MILITARY:** The county hosts multiple major military installations.

**NEWSPAPER:** The local newspaper, the *San Antonio Express-News*, was founded in 1865 and is published daily in print and online.

**PARK:** The River Walk is a popular 8-mile pedestrian walkway along the San Antonio River.

**POPULATION:** The county population stands at about 2.18 million, the fourth most populous county in Texas and the 16th largest in the country.

**SEAT:** The county seat of San Antonio gets its name from Portuguese Franciscan friar Saint Anthony of Padua.

**SIZE:** Bexar County has a total area of approximately 1,256 square miles.

**SPURS:** The storied NBA team the Spurs, with at least five NBA championships under their belts, are based in San Antonio.

**TOYOTA:** Thousands of workers create Toyota Tundras and Toyota Sequoias at Toyota Motor Manufacturing Texas in the county.

*(Tip: Words can share letters as they cross over each other.)*

# PROFILES IN SERVICE

**CRAIG SMITH**  
**NACo Board Member**  
 Rapides Parish, La.  
 Police Juror



**SMITH**

**Number of years active in NACo:** 14

**Years in public service:** 15

**My first NACo event was:** Annual Conference in 2014

**NACo committee(s):** RAC, Agriculture and Economic Development

**Occupation:** Police juror, retired service manager for a heavy equipment dealership

**Education:** Graduated trade school as a diesel mechanic and received a high school diploma

**The hardest thing I’ve ever done:** Bury my mother and father on the same day

**Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner:** President Trump, my grandparents and my parents

**You’d be surprised to learn that I:** Was very shy in school and could hardly speak during classroom events.

**The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done is:** Canadian goose hunt

**My favorite way to relax is:** Camping, hunting and fishing

**I’m most proud of:** My grandkids

**Every morning I read:** Local news

**My favorite meal is:** Italian

**My pet peeve is:** Stealing

**My motto is:** Do to others as you would like to be treated.

**The last book I read was:** “Louisiana Sportsman”

**My favorite movie is:** “Smokey and the Bandit”

**My favorite music is:** Country

**My favorite U.S. president is:** Donald Trump

**My county is a NACo member because:** The benefits it brings to local government.

**A dream I have is to:** Tour Finland



## Established relationships with counterparts is key to coordination when a health crisis strikes

From HEALTH page 4

body?”

Instead of closing the school, the public health department’s environmental health director and County Commissioner Wendell Koontz went to the preschool to ensure that there were no more bats and professionals were brought in to disrupt the migratory pattern.

Education was also provided to the parents about the risk of rabies, as was the opportunity to have their kids vaccinated as protection against the potential exposure. The county worked with a regional hospital to ensure that its small community hospital would have the resources to provide the PEP that would be needed, if the

demand was there. Only one preschooler ended up receiving PEP and there were no infections reported, Davis noted.

‘Lessons learned is that trust matters...’

– Jacqueline Davis, Delta County, Colo.

“We worked through different perspectives and reached something that was very practical for everybody,” Davis said. “Because everybody could join together, understand the risks and benefits of everything and come to a conclusion.”

Public health, the school district and county govern-

ment all having established relationships was key to coordination in crisis, Davis said. Local governments represent their communities and should keep that in mind while still ensuring that public health is accounted for, she said.

“Lessons learned is that trust matters,” Davis said. “... And having those conversations early, and not about how you’re going to respond [once it’s already happened]. Community context matters. Decisions must consider both scientific evidence and local reality.

“We’re in local Colorado, there are things that’re not going to happen, so how are we going to, in the best and healthiest and safest way, be able to execute that? Problem solving and communication matter.” **CN**

# BEHIND THE SEAL

## WHATCOM COUNTY, WASH.

Mount Baker, or Koma Kulshan, is the highest point in Whatcom County, Wash., and is featured prominently on the county’s seal. It is an active, glacier-covered andesitic strato-volcano. It is the highest peak in the North Cascades (10,781 feet) and the northernmost volcano in the conterminous United States.





# NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

## FLORIDA

• Volunteers string recycled oyster shells to create underwater habitats. Three **FLAGLER COUNTY** parks will soon receive the free vertical oyster gardens designed to **help improve water quality and create habitat for marine life**, WFTV-TV reported.

The county said the “Oysters for My Neighborhood” team has agreed to install the gardens at three boat docks in the area. Vertical oyster gardens are artificial habitats made by stringing recycled oyster shells onto heavy-duty wire or rope. They are hung from docks or seawalls, where they can attract juvenile oysters and other marine life.

## ARKANSAS

The **JACKSON COUNTY** Office of Emergency Management recently invited the public to **learn how to track and report severe weather** at a free training event, White River Now reported.

The National Weather Service in Little Rock, along with emergency management agencies from **LAWRENCE, JACKSON, INDEPENDENCE** and

**WOODRUFF** counties, hosted the Storm Spotter Training session June 9.

Organizers say storm spotters provide critical, real-time reports that keep communities safe during volatile weather.

## CALIFORNIA

For the first time, **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** residents can see how many people are ending up in emergen-

cy rooms due to **heat waves**. The county Department of Public Health says its new Heat-Related Illness and Mortality Dashboard will provide heat illness counts in “near real time.” Heat is the leading cause of weather-related death in the United States.

## FLORIDA

• **MANATEE COUNTY** saw the necessity for its own **high-water rescue vehicle** more than two years ago, WT-TV-TV reported. That’s when the county saw rising floodwaters that trapped residents inside their homes, stretching from coastal beaches to inland neighborhoods.

The newly acquired rescue vehicle will be operated by members of the county’s beach patrol to navigate these hazardous conditions.

Division Chief Chet Brown said that the high-water rescue vehicle can safely operate in up to 48 inches of floodwater. To prepare for deployments, lifeguards underwent rigorous training scenarios alongside the North River Fire District

and West Manatee Fire Rescue to receive official certification.

• The future of **PALM BEACH COUNTY’s public transportation system** Palm Tran is hanging in the balance, with voters set to decide on property taxes this November, WPTV-TV reported.

Depending on the outcome, millions could be slashed from its operating budget. Palm Tran, which serves about 22,000 riders, has been a lifeline for residents across the county. For some, it’s their only way to get where they need to go.

## IOWA

Iowans with concerns about **water quality** and its impact on health have a new resource, as the **POLK COUNTY** Health Department is launching a “Know Your Water, Know Your Health” campaign, Iowa Public Radio reported.

Health department director Juliann Van Liew says water quality is an important issue that needs transparency.

“In this campaign, we commit to really sharing what we know, sharing what the evidence base is already telling us,” Van Liew says, “but also being honest about what we’re still learning based on the emerging research.”



## FLORIDA

• **LEON COUNTY** recently launched a **tourism** campaign called “Beyond Your Block: America250 Edition,” a summer promotion designed to inspire residents to explore all corners of the community and discover the rich adventure that the county has to offer, according to Tallahassee Reports. The campaign highlights local hotspots, historical landmarks, unique events and more.

This month, the Beyond Your Block program features local businesses and attractions, including restaurants, breweries, shops, museums, parks and events, while highlighting six historic “America250FL Road Trip” stops located within the county.

## NEVADA

• **CLARK COUNTY** has partnered with Nevada Hand to break ground on a **senior housing** development, KV-VU-TV reported. Organizers say this marks an important milestone for the largest Welcome Home Community Housing Fund investment to date.

“Today’s Serene Pines groundbreaking represents the largest single investment Clark County has ever made in an affordable housing development, and it reflects our commitment to ensuring Southern Nevada’s seniors can age with dignity in a safe, welcoming community,” said Michael Naft, chair of the Clark County Commission. “This project will provide 281 affordable homes, as well as supportive services that will help residents thrive. As housing costs continue to rise, Clark County is proud to partner with Nevada Hand to expand housing opportunities for our seniors, many of whom are on fixed incomes and represent some of our most vulnerable community members.”

## NEW YORK

**SARATOGA COUNTY** has launched a new **Traffic Ticket Reduction website**, WTEN-TV reported. The resource will reportedly allow residents to apply for a reduction of eligible traffic offenses without having to spend hours in court.

According to the District Attorney’s Office, the online system is meant to streamline the process for motorists while also reducing administrative and financial burdens on town courts and county government. The website was reportedly developed by the county’s Information Technology Department.

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**NEVADA**

● **STOREY COUNTY**'s director of Health and Community Services helped turn a county resident's dream into reality.

Stacy York had worked closely with Charlotte, "Char," a senior citizen in Storey County, who wanted to see the letter L formed from **painted rocks on the hillside** above the town of Lockwood, a custom in many towns in Nevada and across the west. Char has since died.

York worked with two Virginia City High School students who chose the project for their National Honor Society requirements. The students spent months coordinating with county commissioners, fire officials, local residents and contractors to move the project through approvals and planning stages before applying paint, which was donated by a local paint business.

"I hope they will remember that they are one community and all the little irritations of small-town living exist, but they can come together as one community and be neighborly to one another," York said. "I also hope that people who know how badly Char wanted this remember her and her thick Philadelphia accent."



and emergency room visits, prompting public health officials to install new "tick check" stations at local parks.

"We just want it to be a really nice visible reminder that when you're at the park, or you're in the woods, or you're hiking or doing an outdoor activity, take a moment to stop and check yourself for ticks," explained Nyssa Van Ness, a vector technician with Public Health **MADISON** and **DANE** counties.

● Emergency Communications staff at the **JEFFERSON COUNTY** Sheriff's Office recently launched a new **Emergency Medical Dispatch system**, utilizing a standardized protocol and advanced technology to ensure that EMTs and paramedics have critical information they need when responding to calls for medical assistance.

All dispatchers on the Emergency Communications team will use the new software, allowing them to gather real-time information in order of importance while speaking to callers. This aids staff in providing vital details to responders as they travel to the scene.

*Send your news to Editor Mary Ann Barton: [mbarton@naco.org](mailto:mbarton@naco.org).*

*From NEWS FROM page 18*

**SUFFOLK COUNTY** Sheriff Errol D. Toulon, Jr. and the Northwell Health Center for Gun Violence Prevention recently announced the first-ever **gun violence prevention course** in a jail in the country.

The curriculum was created through a collaboration between the Northwell Health Center for Gun Violence Prevention and the Sheriff's Office with the mission of reduc-

ing gun-related crimes and harm throughout the county. This first-of-its-kind course will cover topics such as public health approaches to gun violence prevention, risk and protective factors, community impact and healing, violence intervention strategies, career development and goal setting for personal growth and community empowerment.

**NORTH CAROLINA**  
**BUNCOMBE COUNTY** has

launched a new **WhatsApp channel** in Spanish with the aim of improving access to official information for the Hispanic community and ensure that important notices reach residents directly.

The initiative arose after a listening process with organizations and members of the Spanish-speaking community, where it was identified that WhatsApp is one of the main tools for everyday communication.

"Many people told us that they communicate through WhatsApp and that there are even community channels with hundreds of members," he explained to Enlace Latino NC's Lina Herrera Hernández, information and communications specialist for the county.

**WISCONSIN**

● **DANE COUNTY** is seeing some of its highest numbers of tick-related urgent care



**NEW JERSEY**

The **MORRIS COUNTY** 250th Celebrations Committee, in partnership with the Morris County Tourism Bureau and the Morris County Board of County Commissioners, announced the launch of the **Morris County 250th Traveling Mural**, an interactive public art initiative designed to celebrate the people, places and events that have shaped Morris County over the past 250 years.

Created by artist Dan Fenelon, the mural serves as a visual representation of Morris County's history and development, tracing its evolution from the Revolutionary War era through present day.



**OREGON**

**CROOK COUNTY** discussed **workforce readiness** with U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon (right), during her recent visit to the county, marking the first time a presidential cabinet secretary has officially visited the county.

Commissioner Seth Crawford (center) coordinated the visit to help emphasize the importance of education, workforce development and opportunities for rural communities. During the visit, discussions focused on the unique needs and successes of education in the county and the importance of continued investment in students, schools and future workforce readiness.

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# Annual Conference & Expo

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Orleans Parish/New Orleans, La.



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