

County leaders run for higher office

BY CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Four sitting county leaders have set their sights on their states' governorships this year: Peter Corroon, Salt Lake County, Utah mayor; Dan Onorato, Allegheny County, Pa. executive; John Hickenlooper, city and county of Denver mayor; and Rory Reid, Clark County, Nev. Board of Commissioners chairman.

In Alabama, Ron Sparks, a former Dekalb County commissioner,

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QuickTakes

Counties with the **Highest Percentage of Hispanic Owned Businesses**

| | |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Hidalgo County, Texas | 68.7% |
| El Paso County, Texas | 61.4% |
| Miami-Dade County, Fla. | 60.5% |
| Bronx, N.Y. | 37.6% |
| Bexar County, Texas | 37.3% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, September 2010

CountyNews Features

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Photo by Robert Hernandez, MDFR

Miami-Dade County Fire Rescue (MDFR) went pink Sept. 22-24 for October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month. MDFR and the South Florida Firefighters Council teamed up with the Guardians of the Ribbon, Inc., who dress in pink bunker gear and drive fire trucks across the country every year to spread awareness and to support all women in their fight against cancer.

MDFR firefighters joined the cause by wearing pink shirts as a part of their uniform to help bring public attention and support toward the need to find a cure for cancer. (See more in News From the Nation's Counties, page 9)

Analysis

Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program on the ropes

BY JULIE UFFER
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

As the clock ticks to the end of the 111th Congress, many local governments are anxious about the fate of the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program.

PACE allowed local governments to finance energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements to homes and businesses through property tax assessments.

This summer, PACE ground to a halt after questions were raised about the program's financial viability. This stands in stark contrast to a year ago when PACE was billed as the shining star by the Obama

administration and federal agencies as a way to jump-start the economy, promote green jobs and reduce greenhouse gases.

Participation in the program is voluntary. The premise of PACE programs is rooted in a long standing, land-secured financing mechanism used by local governments to pay for improvements that provide a public purpose. It has been used by local governments for close to a century to finance projects such as roads, water or sewer projects, or schools. Basically eligible participants are allowed to pay for energy efficient improvements to their property via their property tax assessments.

The tax liens created by PACE assessments are considered "senior" to other loans, such as mortgages, and must be paid first in the event of a foreclosure.

This created a problem with the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), which oversees Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. FHFA said that PACE assessments are considered loans, not assessments, and violate standard mortgage provisions by requiring priority over any other loan, such as a mortgage.

FHFA's ruling was a huge blow not only to local and state governments but also to the administration

See **PACE** page 4

NACo weighs in on federal deficit reduction

BY CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

NACo is "concerned" that federal discretionary spending does not become an easy target as the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform makes recommendations to balance the federal budget by 2015, Executive Director Larry E. Naake wrote in a letter to the commission.

The panel, established by President Obama in February, is to make its recommendations by Dec. 1.

Naake noted that local governments are facing "a perfect storm" of decreased tax revenues, declining state and federal aid, and increased demand for social services — all of which have strained county budgets to the point of requiring layoffs, service cuts and fee increases.

"Counties are concerned that too much focus will be placed on reductions to domestic discretionary spending programs, within which many programs critical to counties' ability to fulfill their numerous responsibilities are funded," Naake

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COUNTY GOVERNMENT WORKS

An Initiative to Raise Awareness and Understanding of Counties

Goslin speaks to business leaders to raise county awareness

By Terri Graham
Cook County, Ill.

Responding to NACo President Glen Whitley's call to build awareness of county government, Cook County, Ill. Commissioner Gregg Goslin recently spoke to about 100 business leaders at Siemens' Local Government Summit.

The purpose of the summit was to explain local government's role in the community and offer an interactive forum to clarify the

ing its various record keeping functions, including marriage, property and business filings.

Further, Cook County government also has principal responsibility for the protection of persons and property, the provision for public health services and the maintenance of county highways, as mandated by state law.

For example, the Cook County Health & Hospitals System (CCHHS) oversees an integrated system of health care throughout Chicago and

services, and Goslin described the relentless struggle to responsibly manage resources to ensure that help is available for those most in need. This also explains why officials are so active with associations such as NACo. "We're always looking for innovative programs that are more efficiently serving citizens or saving dollars, and learning about successful initiatives from other communities helps us duplicate their achievements in our own communities."

The old line goes that Chicago has two seasons — winter and construction — and the Cook County Highway Department has evolved to include jurisdictional authority over 557 centerline miles of highways. The department has maintenance responsibilities for 1,474 lane miles of pavement, 130 bridges, 332 traffic signals and five pumping stations.

The protection of persons and property falls principally to the Cook County Circuit Court, the state's attorney and the Cook County Sheriff's Department. The Circuit Court of Cook County is one of the largest unified court systems in the world with more than 2.4 million cases filed every year.

The Sheriff's Department runs Cook County Jail, one of the largest single-site, pre-trial facilities in the United States, with an average daily population of 9,000 inmates. The majority of inmates at the jail, (more than 90 percent) are held on a pre-trial basis, detained at the jail while their trials are conducted in the county court system.

"Having a better understanding of the needs and priorities of local government makes us more effective as we work to provide solutions," said Siemens' Chuck Hall, who moderated the event. "Attendees came away with a much better understanding of the unique issues facing elected officials today."

Goslin is scheduled to repeat the presentation later this fall for several local service clubs. Whitley has asked county officials to seek out public speaking engagements and other opportunities where they can tell the county government story and share information about the good work and services counties provide.



Photo courtesy of Cook County, Ill.

Cook County Commissioner Gregg Goslin takes the "County Government Works" message to business leaders at a local government summit.

message that "County Government Works," the title of Whitley's presidential initiative. Goslin shared the stage with Mayor Ted Ellis of Bluffton, Ind. and started with a basic County 101 approach. When putting together his notes for his presentation, Goslin utilized the tools and communication template available at the Presidential Initiative link at www.naco.org.

The room exploded with laughter when Goslin opened with, "Wherever I go people ask, 'just what the heck does a county do?'" A participant offered that the group had asked that exact question before the introduction of the program.

Although Cook County is the second largest county in the nation, the services it provides and issues it addresses are shared by many counties, whether rural, suburban or urban.

"The county is with you from birth to death," Goslin said, explain-

ing suburban Cook County with three hospitals, a growing ambulatory and community health network, a public health department, a correctional health care facility and an outpatient infectious disease center. Services ranging from specialty to primary care to emergency, acute, outpatient, rehabilitative, long-term and preventative care are available to the more than five million residents of Cook County, regardless of their ability to pay.

In the last several years, CCHHS underwent a major revamping, establishing an independent board of business and community leaders to run the system and implement improvements, many of which were ideas Goslin attributed to studying best practices in health care delivery around the country when he served as chair of the NACo County Hospital Task Force.

The county is often the sole provider of these basic, essential

Local leaders aim for state, federal office

LEADERS from page 1

is running for governor. All are Democrats.

They are but a few of the current and former county elected officials who are seeking higher offices Nov. 2. In Delaware, New Castle County Executive Chris Coons is the Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate. Queen Anne's County, Md. Commissioner Eric Wargotz, a Republican, is trying to unseat four-term incumbent Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D).

Coons' race has become a marquee contest, drawing national interest — not only because the seat was formerly held by Vice President Joe Biden but also because his opponent, Christine O'Donnell, a Tea Party-backed candidate, scored an upset to win the Republican nomination.

In Nevada, Reid has also attracted national attention, in part, because he will share the ballot with his famous father, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D), who is seeking reelection.

County News queried state association of counties executives to compile a list of current and former county officials who are seeking to take their experience to the state house or Capitol Hill.

Alabama

Madison County Commissioner Mo Brooks (R) is running for the state's 5th District congressional seat.

Arizona

Former Maricopa County Treasurer David Schweikert (R) is running for Congress in Arizona's 5th District.

Iowa

Story County Treasurer David Jamison (R) is running for state treasurer. State Sen. Kim Reynolds, formerly Clarke County treasurer, is the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor.

New Mexico

State Sen. Dianna Duran (R), former Otero County clerk, is running for secretary of state against the incumbent, Mary Herrera (D), former Bernalillo County clerk.

New York

Chautauqua County Executive Greg Edwards (R) is running for lieutenant governor.

Pennsylvania

State Rep. Scott Conklin (D), a

former Centre County commissioner, is running for lieutenant governor. Bucks County Commissioner Jim Cawley is the Republican candidate.

Former Bucks County Commissioner Mike Fitzpatrick (R) is running to reclaim the state's 8th District U.S. House seat. He lost the seat in 2006 after serving one term in Congress.

Oregon

Ted Wheeler (D), appointed state treasurer last May, is seeking election to the post. He is former chair of the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners.

South Carolina

State Rep. Tim Scott (R), former member and chairman of the Charleston County Council, is seeking the state's 1st District congressional seat.

Washington

Snohomish County Commissioner John Koster (R) is running for the state's 2nd District congressional seat. Pierce County Councilmember Dick Muri is the Republican candidate for the 9th District congressional seat.

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President Obama signs Small Business Jobs Act

By DESEREE GARDNER
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

SpeedRead » » »

- » Legislation creates \$30 billion small business fund and \$12 billion in tax breaks
- » 457(b) deferred compensation plans can now offer Roth accounts
- » Small business administration loan fees are waived

The Small Business Jobs Act, signed into law by President Obama Sept. 28, includes a NACo-backed provision that allows those participating in Section 457 (deferred compensation) plans to do so through a Roth retirement plan.

Inclusion of a governmental Roth 457 provision, which permits 457(b) plans to offer the designated Roth accounts already permitted in 401(k) and 403(b) plans, levels the playing field for state and local government workers. Those who use Roth plans do not receive a deduction from their current income for a contribution to the plan, but they do earn returns within the plan tax-free and the withdrawals from the plan are tax-free.

The legislation also includes approximately \$12 billion in tax breaks to help companies invest and hire, a \$30 billion small-business lending fund and enhanced government assistance programs.

The measure, blends a \$30 billion government fund to help open up lending for credit-starved small businesses with bipartisan tax provisions.

The \$30 billion loan fund would be available to community banks to encourage lending to small businesses, and supporters say banks should be able to use the fund to leverage up to \$300 billion in loans.

The bill also offers \$12 billion in tax breaks to businesses to encourage investment, entrepreneurship and hiring. Businesses would be able to write off more of their capital equipment and improvement costs.

Those who are self-employed could deduct health care costs from the self-employment tax. The bill would also continue to waive Small Business Administration loan fees that had been eliminated as part of the 2009 Recovery Act.

The bill, which includes a series

of proposals to help small businesses invest and hire, accomplishes the following:

- Extends SBA Recovery Loan Provisions: With funds provided in the bill, SBA will begin funding new Recovery loans. In total, the extension of these provisions has the capacity to support \$14 billion in loans to small businesses.

- Increases the Loan Size for the Largest SBA Programs: The act also increases the maximum loan size for SBA loan programs, which in the coming weeks will allow more small businesses to access more credit to allow them to expand and create new jobs.

- Establishes a New \$30 Billion Small Business Lending Fund: The bill would establish a \$30 billion Small Business Lending Fund, which — by providing capital to small banks with incentives to increase small business lending — could support several multiples of that amount in new credit.

- Strengthens Innovative State Small Business Loans: The act will support at least \$15 billion in small business lending through a new State Small Business Credit Initiative.

- Eliminates for 2010 Taxes on Capital Gains from Key Small Business Investments: Under the Recovery Act, 75 percent of capital gains on key small business investments this year were excluded from taxes. The Small Business Jobs Act temporarily puts in place for the rest of 2010 a provision that eliminates all capital gains taxes on these investments if held for five years.

- Extends and Expands Small Businesses' Ability to Immediately Expense Capital Investments: The bill increases for 2010 and 2011 the amount of investments that businesses would be eligible to immediately write off to \$500,000, while raising the level of investments at which the write-off phases out to \$2 million. Prior to the passage of the bill, the expensing limit would have been \$250,000 this year, and only \$25,000 next year.

- Extends the 50 percent Bonus Depreciation: The act extends — as the president proposed in his budget — a Recovery Act provision for 50 percent "bonus depreciation" through 2010.

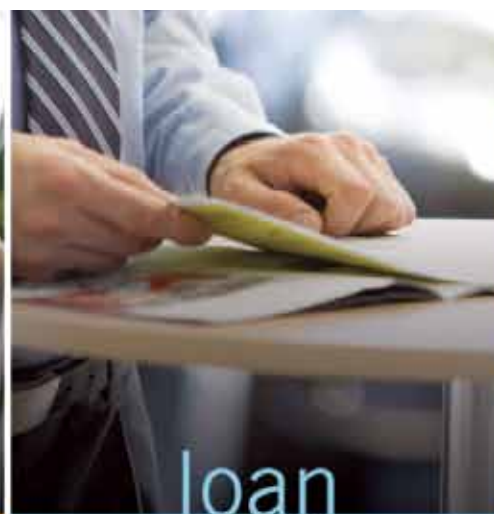
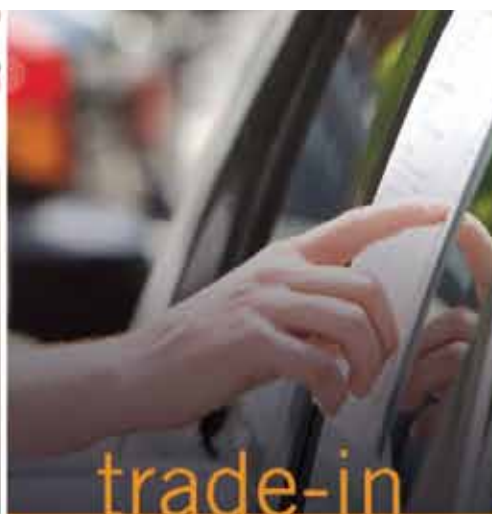
- Establishes a New Deduction of Health Insurance Costs for Self-Employed.

- Provides Tax Relief and Simplification for Cell Phone Deductions: The act changes rules so that the use of cell phones can be deducted without extra documentation.

- Increases the Deduction for Entrepreneurs' Start-Up Expenses: The bill temporarily increases the amount of start-up expenditures entrepreneurs can deduct from their taxes for this year from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

- Permits a Five-Year Carry-back of General Business Credits: The act would allow certain small businesses to "carry back" their general business credits to offset five years of taxes, while also allowing these credits to offset the Alternative Minimum Tax, reducing taxes for these small businesses.

- Limits Penalties for Errors in Tax Reporting that Disproportionately Affect Small Business: The act would change, beginning this year, the penalty for failing to report certain tax transactions from a fixed dollar amount — which was criticized for imposing a disproportionately large penalty on small businesses in certain circumstances — to a percentage of the tax benefits from the transaction.



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Commissioner Gouge testifies on Livable Communities Act

By **DARIA DANIEL**
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

During testimony before the House Financial Services Committee, Carroll County, Md. Board

of Commissioners President Julia Gouge gave high marks to legislation that would provide nearly \$4 billion in funding over four years to regions and localities for sustainable development planning.

The Perspectives on the Livable Communities Act (H.R. 4690), introduced by Rep. Ed Perlmutter (D-Colo.), would formally establish the Interagency Council on Sustainable Communities, an existing partnership between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency that focuses on better coordination among federal agencies on sustainability issues including research and grants.

During her testimony Sept. 23, Gouge discussed the importance of all counties being eligible for these federal incentive grants. She

noted many counties have been using sustainable planning for decades. However, many rural and mid-size counties would like to begin such planning, but lack the resources to do.

The final bill also includes a NACo-supported rural fix, which provides a 15 percent set-aside for rural communities under 200,000 in population. NACo played a key role in ensuring that all aspects of the bill are voluntary to counties interested in the program.

Senate bill

Senate Banking Committee Chairman Chris Dodd (D-Conn.), who introduced a Senate version

of the bill, S.1619, held a hearing on the Livable Communities Act in June at which Gouge also testified. The Senate bill is ready for a floor vote.

After banking committee markup, the authorized funding level was reduced from \$4 billion to \$2.67 billion in grant funding over four years. Of this \$2.67 billion, \$475 million is targeted for planning grants and \$2.2 billion for implementation grants.

No mark-up date has been scheduled yet in the House.

The Livable Communities Act has the support of more than 200 national and local organizations, including NACo.

Profiles in Service



» Amy Wilde

NACo Health Steering Committee
Chair, Medicaid and Indigent Care
Commissioner, Meeker County, Minn.

Number of years active in NACo: 11

Years in public service: 14

Occupation: county commissioner and former journalist

The hardest thing I've ever done: help develop a 13-rural-county-owned managed health care plan for people enrolled in Minnesota's subsidized medical care programs — and keep it operating in a sustainable manner during eight years of constantly changing state and federal health care policy

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: President and Mrs. Obama and Abraham Lincoln. The nation's first Republican president and its first black president and first lady would probably have more in common than most people think.

A dream I have is to: spend most of a summer on the road driving and camping from Minnesota to Alaska.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: am the first and only female ever to serve on my County Board.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: in 1966, I hitchhiked to San Francisco for spring break. Thirty years later, I ran for public office. With help from my friends and God, I survived both adventures successfully.

My favorite way to relax is: camping in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness on the Minnesota-Ontario border.

I'm most proud of: the success of PrimeWest Health, one of a few county-operated health plans in the nation.

Every morning I read: the Bible, Minneapolis-St. Paul *Star Tribune* and *MinnPost.com*.

My favorite meal is: fresh buttered corn on the cob and sliced tomatoes with cottage cheese.

My pet peeve is: people who complain about the "the government" but don't get involved with civic improvement efforts in their community.

My motto is: "We are all faced with great opportunities, brilliantly disguised as impossible situations."

Recent books I read were: *Dreams of My Father* by Barack Obama and *Team of Rivals—the Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* by Doris Kearns Goodwin.

My favorite music is: rhythm and blues.

PACE programs stalled by Fannie, Freddie

PACE from page 1

since the Department of Energy was actively promoting PACE for usage in conjunction with the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program. Additionally, the DOE awarded more than \$150 million in Recovery Act funds to support PACE programs nationwide. These funds were intended to help develop best practices for PACE. But now, they are being redirected to other financing mechanisms as a result of this stalemate.

Since mid-summer, governments at all levels, including Congress, have tried to break the PACE logjam at the agency level, unsuccessfully. Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.) proposed a pilot PACE program of 300,000 homes. The FHFA countered with a much smaller pilot, but eventually said no. Most PACE advocates feel they have hit a dead end negotiating with FHFA, unless FHFA is mandated to create workable PACE programs.

On another front, the state of California and other parties have filed suit. In the California case, arguments are expected to start this month and move into November. The FHFA will probably move to dismiss the case, which will lead to claims and counterclaims. Other states, localities and interested parties may also file suits in other district courts based on their state PACE laws.

In Congress, PACE has its share of supporters and opponents. A number of relevant bills have been introduced in both the House and Senate that would allow PACE programs to move forward. NACo is very supportive of these efforts.

In the House, Rep. Mike Thompson (D-Calif.) introduced

H.R. 5766, the PACE Assessment Protection Act of 2010, and in the Senate, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), chair of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, introduced a companion bill, S. 3642.

For H.R. 5766, there are currently 48 co-sponsors, including just one Republican — Rep. Bob Inglis from South Carolina. On the Senate side, S. 3642 has five co-sponsors, but none are Republican. This is significant since S. 3642 has little chance of moving without Republican support. But, there are rumors of a new PACE bill being drafted in the Senate that may be bipartisan.

The problem is timing. Congress has adjourned to give members time to hit the campaign trail. That

means there is limited debate time for a host of "must pass" congressional priorities. However, it's likely that Congress will return for a lame-duck session in November after the elections to tie up loose ends.

The question is, will or can PACE be addressed in a possible lame-duck session? It's unlikely that a bill will move independently, due to the number of opponents, and more likely that, if bill language moves at all, it will do so in a larger legislative package.

In July, NACo members passed a resolution at NACo's Annual Meeting to support PACE programs. Since then, NACo has been lobbying with the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors in support of PACE programs.

Background History

In June 2009, the FHFA first raised concerns that PACE financing would increase a homeowner's debts and "could cause a greater probability of default."

As a result of this statement, the White House coordinated a number of interagency meetings in the fall of 2009 to allay fears on PACE. These meetings led to the publication of the *Policy Framework for PACE Financing Programs*. This document suggested writing standardized underwriting criteria and safeguards to protect participants and minimize financial risks to the homeowners and mortgage lenders.

In early May of this year, both Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac issued letters that suggested PACE violated regular mortgage provisions. These letters put PACE programs in a state of uncertainty and many PACE programs suspended services.

FHFA and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency recently stated the PACE program "presents significant safety and soundness concerns" to the mortgage finance industry." They went on to state that homeowners who participate in residential PACE programs will violate standard mortgage provisions and set off a mortgage default. The FHFA instructed Fannie and Freddie to use stricter mortgage underwriting standards for all borrowers in jurisdictions with PACE programs.

Within the past month, Freddie and Fannie have taken it a step further by requiring owners who currently have PACE assessments to pay off their PACE liens before allowing them to refinance or sell their homes.

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TAKE THE NEX STEP

NATIONAL SAVE FOR RETIREMENT WEEK
OCTOBER 17-23, 2010

Counties cope with medical pot's unintended consequences

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

To some, medical marijuana is the proverbial camel's nose under the tent — before you know it, the whole animal is inside. And the “animal” whose entry is feared is the legalization of pot for all.

“California passed their medical marijuana statute back in 1996,” said Trevor Jones of South Dakota's Department of Criminal Investigations. “Well, now on the ballot today what do we see? They want to legalize a certain amount of marijuana (for anyone).” He's working with counties in his state to stop a medical marijuana measure there.

Four states have marijuana-related questions on their Nov. 2 ballots. In California, where medical pot is legal, Proposition 19 would completely legalize the drug and tax its sale, letting the camel in. Arizona and South Dakota voters will decide whether to legalize the substance for medical use. In Oregon, voters, who approved medicinal pot in 1998, will decide whether to legalize marijuana dispensaries.

Medical marijuana is legal in 14 states and the District of Columbia. The laws are proposed as acts of compassionate care, to benefit

the terminally ill and sufferers of chronic, debilitating pain. But the laws' passage in some states provides a cautionary tale. And for their counties, the story doesn't always have a happy ending.

In 2008, 63 percent of Michigan voters approved medical marijuana. Patients there may possess up to 2.5 ounces of medicinal pot and 12 cannabis plants. The law also established a state-run patient registry that issues ID cards to qualifying patients. Eligible patients include those diagnosed with cancer, glaucoma and AIDS, among other conditions.

However in Michigan, some counties have found the law, initiated by citizens, is fraught with problems — mostly due to its lack of clarity and specificity. Last month, Oakland County Sheriff's Office raided two “medical marijuana facilities,” seizing several hundred pounds of pot and arresting 15 people.

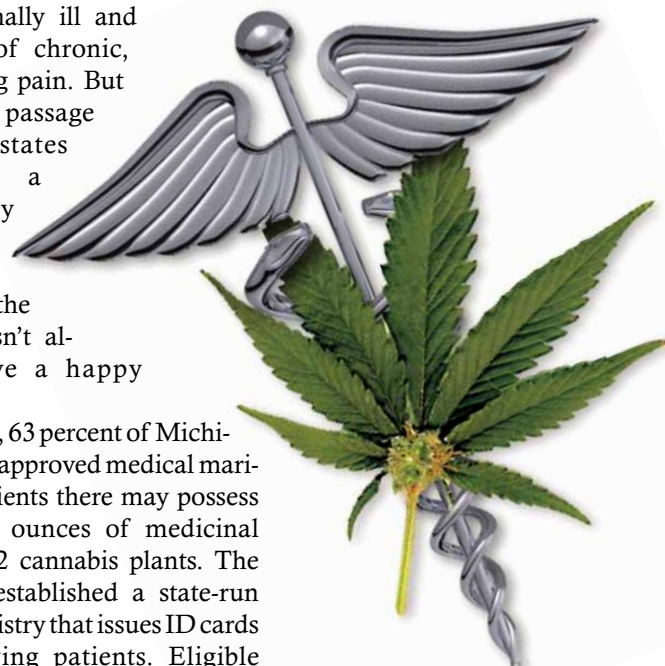
“The law went into effect, but the law does not legally provide anybody the ability to sell and buy marijuana,” Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard said. “Our position is, that being the case, if someone opens these things and starts selling from these facilities, they're illegal. They did, and we

got complaints, and we took action.”

Bouchard, a former Michigan state senator, believes the state legislature has been “negligent” in not developing a framework to support the medical marijuana law. He said the issues that relate to any other medicine have not been addressed, such as therapeutic dosage, quality control and potency.

“There's no situation where people have any confidence that they could go anywhere and have safe, reliable, licensed, predictable, consistent dosage options,” he said. “That is going to be an increasing problem for counties and communities across this state and country unless the legislative bodies do their job.”

Another Michigan case il-



lustrates a how private employers can be affected. But the scenario could just as easily apply to county government. The American Civil Liberties Union is suing Wal-Mart for firing an employee, a cancer patient, because he tested positive for marijuana, despite the fact that he's legally registered as a medical

the expense that could be wrought upon employers (from lawsuits and workers' compensation claims),” he said. Bardwell is also second vice president of the Michigan Association of Counties.

Back in South Dakota, this is the second attempt to pass a medical marijuana law. A 2006 measure was defeated by 52.3 percent of voters.

The South Dakota Association of County Commissioners is working to defeat the new proposal, Initiative 13. “We're growing a coalition of organizations that are in opposition to this measure,” said Bob Wilcox, executive director.

He said the state — facing a \$117 million dollar budget shortfall and a hiring freeze — is ill-equipped to take on the added responsibility of administering the law. The same is true of the state's 66 counties. “From the law enforcement side sheriff's departments are understaffed, our budgets are tight ... the workload will increase,” Wilcox said.

Medical marijuana is legal in 14 states and the District of Columbia.

pot user under Michigan's law. The employee said he didn't use the drug at work and that traces can remain in the body days after usage has ceased.

Thomas Bardwell, chairman of the Tuscola County, Mich. Board of Commissioners, is also a hospital human resources executive. “It's breathtaking to think of

Medical marijuana faces vote in El Paso County, Colo.

By CHARLIE BAN
STAFF WRITER

Whether El Paso County, Colo. will change its mind and pass on medical grass is up to the voters next month.

The county's medical marijuana dispensaries in unincorporated areas, about 21, have been bereft of criminal activity, according to the sheriff's office, and tightly regulated by the county since December 2009. Yet, a ban on dispensaries in unincorporated areas of the county is on the Nov. 2 ballot, however, largely because the citizens have been startled by the speed of their proliferation.

“After the DEA stopped raiding dispensaries, they started popping up, and people said what was happening wasn't what they expected when they voted in favor of medical marijuana use,” said Commissioner Amy Lathen. The Obama administration announced in 2009 that the Drug Enforcement Administration would not raid dispensaries in states that had passed medical marijuana laws to enforce federal drug laws.

Current ordinances restrict dispensaries to three different commercial zones and one industrial zone, with distance requirements from schools, churches, playgrounds and child care facilities similar to liquor stores.

After twice voting unanimously to regulate medical marijuana businesses in the county, the county Board of Commissioners voted 3-2 in August to put the question of banning medical marijuana businesses on the ballot. El Paso County does not allow citizens to petition for a ballot question, but the board may refer the question to the ballot.

Lathen, who voted in favor of the referendum, said citizen concern and two statewide referenda on marijuana — 2000's vote in favor of medical marijuana and 2006's defeat of a proposition to legalize small amounts of the drug — motivated her support.

“Each referendum gave citizens a chance to make their voice heard and set policy on marijuana,” she said. “Because we heard enough from residents and they didn't have the process to do that without the board's action, we felt it was right.”

Abolishing medical marijuana will mean a loss in tax revenue for the county — 1 percent of all sales in unincorporated areas — but the overall impact will not be significant because the majority of the dispensaries are in Colorado Springs, an incorporated city.

Medical Marijuana Laws

Fourteen states and the District of Columbia have legalized medical marijuana. The states are: Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.

In the three states with medical marijuana measures on the Nov. 2 ballot, the proposed laws are highlighted below.

The Arizona Medical Marijuana Act — allows qualified terminally or seriously ill patients to use limited amounts of marijuana on doctor's recommendation. Patients register with the state; private cultivation allowed; fingerprinting of caregivers and dispensary personnel; inspection of dispensaries; restrictions on number and location of dispensaries.

Oregon Regulated Medical Marijuana Supply System Act, Measure 74 — creates medical marijuana supply system composed of licensed dispensaries and producers, sets licensing guidelines; allows limited sales. Establishes low-income cardholders' assistance program, and allows state to conduct or fund research of cardholders' marijuana use. Producers and dispensaries can possess 24 plants and 96 ounces of marijuana.

South Dakota Medical Marijuana Act, Measure 13 — legalizes marijuana possession, use, distribution and cultivation by persons registered with the South Dakota Department of Health with physician-diagnosed debilitating medical conditions. Schools, employers and landlords can't refuse to enroll, employ or lease based upon marijuana registration unless required by federal law.

County News

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Counties recognized as 'Best Communities for Young People'

By CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Thirty-one counties made the 2010 list of 100 Best Communities for Young People, an annual competition sponsored by America's Promise Alliance in celebration of America's young people and the communities dedicated to helping them graduate from high school.

More than 7,000 U.S. students drop out every school day, totaling 1.3 million young people a year. That amounts to about one out of every three students not graduating from high school. This program is designed to help curb those statistics.

"The 100 Best Communities for Young People are taking bold and effective steps to help youth graduate and lead healthy, productive lives," said Alma J. Powell, chair, America's Promise Alliance. NACo is an alliance partner.

The 100 Best competition is part of the Alliance's Grad Nation campaign, a 10-year initiative to mobilize all Americans to end the dropout crisis. This year, more than 350 communities in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., were nominated for the 100 Best competition. The panel of judges included some of the nation's most well-known civic, business and nonprofit leaders such as William Bell, president and CEO

of Casey Family Programs; Fr. Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA; Javier Palomarez, president and CEO of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Larry Naake, executive director, NACo; Jane Beshear, first lady of the Commonwealth of Kentucky and Dominique Dawes, Olympic gold medalist and youth advocate.

This year's county winners include Prince William County, Va. It was honored for its Office of Student Management and Alternative Programs that created several opportunities and paths for youths to finish high school through Learn and Serve classes, leadership classes and Students L.E.A.D. (Learning Essential Assets of Development) committees. As a result, the dropout rate has decreased by 52.8 percent over the last four years.

Another winning community was Hancock County, Ohio, which found innovative ways to keep students in school despite floods and the economic downturn. Partnering with the city of Findlay, the county commissioners provided youth opportunities to attend college and prepare for the 21st century workforce by the continuing 4-H youth programs, and adding two new middle schools and a career technology center.

The 2010 winners were high-



Photo courtesy of America's Promise Alliance

Community winners wear big smiles at the official announcement of the 2010 100 Best Communities for Young People on the National Mall Sept. 21 in Washington, D.C.

lighted at a ceremony in front of the Washington Monument on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., Sept. 21. Winning communities

were pinpointed on an expansive ceremonial U.S. map.

First held in 2005, the 100 Best competition is open to all communities that make children and youth a priority, including small towns, large cities, counties and school districts. In addition to enhancing local educational opportunities, most winning communities help facilitate greater access to qual-

ity health care for young people, encourage youth civic engagement and supply developmental resources that create better places for young people to live and grow.

To learn more about the competition and how to nominate a county, see the full list of winners or view an interactive showcase of the accomplishments, visit www.americaspromise.org/100best.

This Month in ... County News

County News celebrates NACo's 75th Anniversary with a look back at the issues and events that affected counties over the past several decades.

★ October ★

1975

- Wayne County, Mich. Board Chairman Roscoe L. Bobo told a House subcommittee that counties desperately need federal financial assistance to aid them in coping with excessive unemployment brought about by the recession and help in solving long-term structural unemployment.

He urged the House economic development subcommittee to move on emergency public works and anti-recession legislation.

"The anti-recession — or counter-cyclical — assistance program would save jobs in the public sector and minimize local tax increases or service cuts," he said.

- NACo urged delays to the Urban Mass Transit Acts and Federal Aid Highway Act so that the governments that would be affected could have more intensive discussions with the agencies. The regulations that were published in the Sept. 17 Federal Register went far beyond the comprehensive planning process required by law and certain regulations, taking the ability to determine their own programs and operations away from counties.

1992

- Both houses of Congress overrode President George H.W. Bush's veto of the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992.

The legislation granted local governments the authority to regulate basic cable rates in markets with no competition. The rates are established by the Federal Communications Commission. In 1992, the cable television industry took in more than \$20 billion. The cable bill was estimated to save consumers \$6 billion annually.

- The NACo Radon Project began its second year with a call for ambitious expansion. The education program, operated in conjunction with the Environmental Protection Agency, operated three model programs in counties, but NACo Radon Project Director Jerry McNeil and advisory committee members expected the number to increase to 24. NACo worked closely with many state associations of counties to conduct workshops and seminars to educate county officials about the dangers of radon and distributed more than 1,300 radon test kits.

2010 Best Communities

Madison County (Huntsville), Ala.
Tuscaloosa County, Ala.
Sacramento County, Calif.
Solano County, Calif.
Alachua County, Fla.
Manatee County (Bradenton), Fla.
Sarasota County, Fla.
Hillsborough County (Tampa), Fla.
Forsyth County (Cumming), Ga.
Bibb County (Macon), Ga.
Troup County, Ga.
Barren County, Ky.
Clark County, Ky.
Fayette County (Lexington), Ky.
Calloway County (Murray), Ky.
Barnstable County, Mass.

Calvert County, Md.
Wicomico County (Salisbury), Md.
Butler County, Mo.
Platte County, Mo.
Orange County, N.Y.
Moore County, N.C.
Pitt County, N.C.
Hancock County (Findlay), Ohio
Indiana County, Pa.
Harris County (Houston), Texas
Chesterfield County, Va.
Hanover County, Va.
Prince William County, Va.
Surry County, Va.
Mercer County, W. Va.

Keep up with NACo online ...

www.naco.org



Model Programs FROM THE NATION'S COUNTIES

Chippewa County, Minn.

Dialogue Provides Options for Troubled Teens

By CHARLIE BAN
STAFF WRITER

Reconciliation now has a seat at the table with crime and punishment for some Chippewa County, Minn. youths.

Circle sentencing, a holistic technique based on Native American conflict resolution methods, has gained traction as a corrective measure for juvenile justice, especially in Minnesota. Its effectiveness in deterring recidivism and saving money by forgoing traditional incarceration is encouraging Chippewa County Family Services to expand its use.

Coordinator Emily Wright touts its savings and effectiveness, but relishes the opportunity participants have to avoid criminal records as teenagers.

"People typically think juvenile records don't follow you, but they do," she said. "Kids who are adjudicated won't be able to hold some jobs or serve in the military. It can really stop them for their life."

Youths who are convicted of

felonies or gross misdemeanors that do not involve violence or assault are eligible, at the county attorney's discretion, to choose circle sentencing in lieu of detention.

Circle sentencing relies on structure, adult involvement and insight and self-discipline for its corrective function.

"We'll offer the circle if the offense is serious enough that the kid would go to jail," Wright said. "It has to be serious enough to warrant input of community time."

The first step involves an application meeting, where he (all but four of 27 circle participants in Chippewa County have been male) meets with a group of eight volunteers, culled from the 32 Wright has recruited. Volunteers undergo 16 hours of training and comprise a cross section of the community.

The offender answers a variety of questions that set the parameters for his participation in circle sentencing:

- What did you do that was wrong in the first place?
- What are your personal

strengths?

- What do you need to work on to prevent this from happening again?

- Who did you harm and why did your act harm them, and how can you make amends?

"We have the opportunity to hear from the kid but also for his family to see what it's like," Wright said. "We decide together if the circle will work for them."

Only one applicant has not stuck with the group, which speaks to the self-selective population that pursues that route.

"Some kids choose to not do it, they're so angry they would rather do the time and get it over with," Wright said. "Circle sentencing isn't an easy way out—participants have to work hard and open themselves up. It's not a slap on the wrist and a bunch of lectures from adults."

James Payne, a consultant with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, said that he has seen the technique adapted from the Native American application of getting people to talk about gender, racial and ethnic disparities.

"It gets people to loosen up and talk and relate to each other and demonstrates the difference between listening and hearing," he said. "You're not sitting there making someone feel bad, you're figuring out 'how did we get here, and how do we be sure we don't get to this point again.'"

While inmates at the detention center can serve their sentences in relative anonymity, keeping to themselves, circle participants immediately have eight adults who are keenly aware of who they are. For some, it is a welcome increase from what they had before.

"Seventeen of our 27 participants had a parent or sibling in prison, and only four lived in a two-parent home, so right off the bat they get a handful of volunteers who care about them," Wright said.

Early circle sessions focus on goal setting and altering behavior to reach that goal. One teenager was a talented basketball player, so his intermediate steps to reaching his goal of playing basketball were to stop smoking, attend his classes and improve his grades so he would be eligible for the team.

The group helps youths figure out

how to make amends, financially and psychologically, for the harm they've caused. Most of the charges resulting in circle sentencing have been property destruction.

Between one-third and half of the victims affected by circle participants choose to attend a session to accept their apology.

"It's educational for the victims, too, because they get to see the nature of the perpetrator and hear their explanation," Wright said. "A lot of people feel they are specifically targeted, when in reality a lot of juvenile crime is random—it has little to do with retaliation or intimidation of a specific adult. More often than not, these victims come and find themselves sitting across from 12-year-olds, shaking in their boots."

"The kids often admit, 'I was out late, with my friends, and we did something stupid.'"

On occasion, a victim can help mete out the remedy. When two boys damaged a historic church with fireworks, the representative of the historical trust worked with community members to guide the boys on their way to performing the labor for some of the repairs, saving them thousands of dollars.

"I think that what was so amazing was people reaching out to be creative, flexible and helpful, get things fixed and not haunt the boys for the rest of their lives," Wright said.

In two-and-a-half years, one of the 27 participants has reoffended, so Chippewa County's program has

been pretty effective. An average of 12 teens per year come through circle sentencing, which has a \$30,000 budget from the county. By comparison, if each of those youths was detained for 45 days, it would cost the county \$108,000.

"Plus, the county is still paying for the seat in public school they aren't filling, so in a lot of instances, detention is just doubling a lot of services the county already provides for kids."

Adjacent Yellow Medicine County has also begun a circle sentencing program.

Payne sees value in the program, regardless of the savings.

"Any approach that gets good results with kids is worth it," he said. "Locking them up doesn't work. Parents wouldn't lock a misbehaving kid in a bathroom for a month, they'd talk to him and figure out what the problem is."

"Young people act consistent with the future they see for themselves, and adults in authority contribute overwhelmingly to that future."

Circle Sentencing Coordinator Emily Wright can be reached at Chippewa County Family Services at 320.269.6401.

(Model Programs from the Nation's Counties highlights Achievement Award-winning programs. For more information on this and other NACo Achievement Award winners, visit NACo's Web site, www.naco.org ► Resource Library ► Model County Programs.)

NACo on the Move

» NACo Officers and Elected Officials

• **James Snyder**, Cattaraugus County legislator, was honored by the New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) with the Edwin L. Crawford Award for outstanding public service to New York's county governments.

Snyder served as president of NACo from 1988–89, New York State Association of Counties president from 1989–90 and was the White House director of intergovernmental affairs under President George H. W. Bush 1991–1993.

• **Glen Whitley**, NACo president, spoke on the value of NACo membership and legislative accomplishments at the general sessions of the Wisconsin Counties Association annual conference in Milwaukee County, Wisc. Sept. 26 and the Association of Indiana Counties annual conference in Laporte County, Ind.

• **Lee Kyle Allen**, Craven County commissioner, was named Outstanding North Carolina County Commissioner for 2010 for his work on behalf of counties and issues of statewide and national significance. Allen is going into his fourth year on the NACo Board of Directors.

» NACo Staff

• **Jacqueline Byers**, director of research and outreach, conducted two training sessions titled "Developing a Code of Ethics" and "Who's Listening In?" at the Wyoming County Commissioners Association Conference in Albany County (Laramie), Wyo. Sept. 20–21.

On the Move is compiled by Christopher Johnson.



James Snyder



Lee Kyle Allen

Talking Circles

Circle sentencing comes from a Native American practice called "talking circles." Indigenous people in Yukon Territory in Canada, and later in Minnesota, have used talking circles for generations to resolve individual and community issues. The practice emphasizes living in balance with self, community and the creator.

A circle includes the offender and their support group, the victims and their support group, a mentor, members of the core circle group, volunteer members of the community and representatives from social services and the legal system. This circle initially discusses what happened, what impact it had on the victim and community, and what punishment is warranted.

Punishment can include counseling and community service. After the sentencing the circle continues to meet to discuss what progress has been made, helping to keep the offender stay on track. However, if the offender does not comply with what is asked of him or her, that person is sent back to the judicial system for sentencing.

Source: Kay Pranis, then of the Minnesota Department of Corrections, via ACF News Source



News From the Nation's Counties

► ARIZONA

The **MARICOPA COUNTY** Board of Supervisors **cancelled 32 school board races** with no candidates or competition. The board appointed unchallenged candidates to the open seats and declared vacancies for seats without candidates. County records show that since 2006, when state law allowed supervisors to cancel unopposed elections, as few as one-third to close to half of candidates were voted into office, the *Arizona Republic* reported. Not having elections in those races will save the school board \$547,000.

► CALIFORNIA

LOS ANGELES COUNTY supervisors voted to **restrict foam food containers** from most county offices and concessions.

The ban will cover restaurants, catering trucks and snack shops from the county's massive public hospital system to beach concessions, golf courses and even food delivery to senior citizens.

They also requested a study examining a more extensive ban. Department of Public Works officials and the county counsel will report back in a year on the potential implications of banning foam food containers in private restaurants and other businesses in L.A. County's vast unincorporated areas, which cover 2,600 square miles and more than a million residents.

The Sheriff's Department, which runs the county jail system, will probably be exempted from the ban because officials there rely on the lightweight containers because they cannot be made into weapons the *L.A. Times* reported.

► FLORIDA

The recession has meant a boost in business for the **LEE COUNTY** Clerk of Court, with a **15 percent increase in marriages** performed there in 2010's first eight months.

Between January and August, the clerk's office performed 527 marriages, about 15 percent more than the same time last year, the *News-Press* reported. Couples are lured by the \$123.50 fee — \$30 for the ceremony, \$93.50 for the license — that pales in comparison to the tens of thousands of dollars it can cost to rent a church and pay for a catered dinner.

► GEORGIA

McINTOSH COUNTY Commissioner Mark Douglas suggested changing the name of several streets to **curb road sign theft**.

The county is losing about 550 street signs a years to thieves and a



Photo courtesy of Clackamas County, Ore.

► OREGON

This was no kitten-up-tree rescue. **CLACKAMAS COUNTY** fire and sheriff's personnel were recently called to help a camel named Moses out of a sinkhole in Oregon City, while owner Kim Dillworth tried to comfort the animal.

The 1,500-pound pet Bactrian camel fell into a hole about 6-feet deep on Dillworth and her husband's rural property. The couple bought Moses and his brother, Bethlehem, to use in a live nativity display, according to *OregonLive.com*.

Responders arrived to find Moses up to his shoulders in mud. After calling for additional help, they were able to free the camel. A veterinarian who checked the animal found no obvious injuries.

commissioner says he has a solution: Make the names boring.

Douglas says signs marking Green Acres, Boone's Farm and Mary Jane Lane are frequently stolen. He suspects the thieves are targeting those signs because they share names with a popular TV series, a low-cost wine or, in the third case, a slang term for marijuana. Douglas figures the thieves just like the alliteration in signs for Harmony Hill. County Manager Luther Smart says the area is paying \$17,000 a year to replace the signs, the Associated Press reported.

► INDIANA

VIGO COUNTY adopted a **responsible bidder ordinance** for county construction projects.

County Attorney Michael Wright said the ordinance establishes criteria for bidders on taxpayer-supported public construction projects. It is based on legislation that Terre Haute city officials passed.

The concept is that public construction projects paid for by taxpayer money not be automatically awarded to the lowest bidder. The government body undertaking a project can retain discretion to award the project to the lowest "responsible bidder."

► KANSAS

• **JOHNSON COUNTY** is one

of two national demonstration sites working with the U.S. Department of Justice to try to find ways to keep **mentally ill** petty criminals out of jail.

The National Justice Center of the Council of State Governments is working with the Johnson

County's Mental Health Intercept Project to stabilize those inmates in the community instead of behind bars. The project's work earned the county two federal grants totaling \$525,000 to fund new programs, according to the *Kansas City Star*.

One grant funds a mental health expert who will go with police to handle calls involving mentally ill people and a diversion case manager, to steer mentally ill inmates into community programs. The second grant will be for a team — with experts on mental health, substance abuse and vocational services — that will enlarge the work release program.

• **McPHERSON COUNTY** will offer **free defensive driving classes** to county employees.

All employees who operate county vehicles must take the course, which is strongly recommended for all other employees that submit mileage reimbursement requests, the *McPherson Sentinel* reported. Certificates issued through the program will be valid for three years and could qualify participants for reduction on their individual car insurance rates.

► MISSISSIPPI

MADISON COUNTY commissioners established a **daytime curfew** for children, matching one in the city of Jackson.

The curfew requires children to be in school between 8 a.m. and

2 p.m. It includes two additional resolutions that authorize Juvenile Court Services and the Sheriff's Department to enter into an agreement with the Jackson-Madison County School System.

The Sheriff's Department now has the right to stop children under the age of 18 without probable cause during school hours. The first offense prompts a warning letter. On the second offense, Juvenile Court will issue the parents of the child committing the offense a \$50 fine, at the discretion of the judge, the *Jackson Sun* reported.

► MONTANA

RAVALLI COUNTY commissioners have voted to ask state and federal agencies to reinstate **regional wolf management** to protect the region's hoofed-animal population.

The vote echoes that of the County Fish and Wildlife Association and comes in response to a federal judge reinstating Endangered Species Act protections for wolves in Montana and Idaho this summer.

The request cites a part of the Endangered Species Act that authorizes management of the area's experimental wolf populations, a rule that applies to states that have approved wolf management plans.

Commissioners argued that by the time wolf management returns

See NEWS FROM page 10



Photo courtesy of Howard County, Md.

► MARYLAND

HOWARD COUNTY Department of Fire & Rescue Services joins its many colleagues across the country in going pink during October to help promote and raise awareness for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The campaign kicked off with a station-lighting ceremony Oct. 1. Howard County fire personnel will put away their normal uniform shirt for the entire month of October in favor of a pink breast cancer awareness shirt.

The H.R. Doctor Is In

By My Simple Example

The key role of a leader in a family and in a public or private organization is to communicate goals, principles and visions to others in a compelling and inspiring way. Extraordinary communications skills also include coaching and constructive criticisms, as well as praise and recognition. The most successful leaders get it when it comes to this vital role.

Conversely, leaders who experience repeated business failures, frustrations, and many human resources problems such as high turnover or departures by the best and the brightest, are those who ignore the impacts of their communications on others.

Example is critical to communications excellence. Example is also unconscious as well as deliberate.

The role-modeling and mentoring, both positive and negative, done by leaders can range from a specific coaching appointment time on the calendar, an unconscious act of walking by a person and not acknowledging their existence, or walking by a person in distress in order to get to some allegedly important meeting. It involves ignoring or taking full advantage of the precious Genuine Encounter

Moments (GEM) in life, when a person in need seeks out help and advice from the leader, or the leader sees an opportunity to encourage, motivate or correct

How hard is it really to be civil in behavior and in communications — even if others don't mirror that approach?

behavior. Bypassing a GEM or letting such a GEM opportunity tarnish because of indifference is a serious leadership failure.

So is raising your voice and criticizing in public rather than in private. It is a manifestation of bullying behavior stemming from an over inflated view of what one's rank or title as an elected or appointed official permits them to do. This is the kind of behavior also common to the harasser and the perpetrator of violence.

An early HR Doctor article focused on Public Enemy No. 1 in our lives — the arrogance of

pride or, from the Greek, hubris. The idea was to create and apply in every agency a new medical procedure, an "ego-suction." The purpose would be to remove portions of the ego of elected officials and their appointed colleagues when these functions become over-inflated to a level where other qualities, such as empathy and humility, are pushed out.

There is a growing need in America for ego-suction to be covered by health insurance with no co-pay. Perhaps in the next reform package. If there is any doubt, just look at the pundits who use or are used by the media to showcase their skills as demagogues. The raised

voice of incivility is a prime weapon in such a person's arsenal. It's easy to find them. They are everywhere, and their shouting behaviors are getting louder and louder.

What can be the best source of a great example for leaders? The HR Doctor can find none better than the one in a comment once made by Mario Cuomo, former governor, presidential candidate, and most eloquent speaker and more. The comment described his number one teacher and mentor, the one who had the greatest impact on his future behavior and outlook. That was his father who taught him by the simple eloquence of his example.

We need much more of this type of positive leadership in our organizations, in the religious community and right in our own families. How hard is it really to be civil in behavior and in communications — even if others don't mirror that approach? Who knows but even members of Congress might benefit tremendously by being in the ego-suction clinical trial group and by being standard bearers for simple and civil example.



Phil Rosenberg
The HR Doctor
www.hrdr.net

Dallas County reaps dividend from alternative sentencing program

NEWS FROM *from page 9*

to the state, it may be too late to ensure the viability of the region's hoofed-animal population, such as deer and elk, and hunting economy, the *Ravalli Republic* reported.

► NEW YORK

• A federal judge has tossed out a **land-claim lawsuit** the Onondaga Nation filed against **ONANDAGA COUNTY** and several other entities.

The Indian nation alleged that land from the Canadian border to Pennsylvania had been illegally taken by the state in the 1700s and 1800s, when it negotiated treaties that violated federal laws, *The Post-Standard* reported.

In his ruling, U.S. District Judge Lawrence E. Kahn said the case was brought too late and would disrupt generations of land development.

• The **TOMKINS COUNTY** Legislature has formed a **broadband committee** to consider the best ways to promote high-speed Internet connectivity countywide, and to advise the legislature, the *Ithaca Journal* reported.

"Affordable access to the Internet is often taken for granted by people who already have it, but many of Tompkins County's residents are unable to connect," Legislature Chairwoman Martha Robertson said. "Broadband service has become as essential for economic activity and educational opportuni-

ties as roads and electricity...."

Committee members will include representatives of government IT, telecommunications companies, education, county staff and community members.

► TEXAS

DALLAS COUNTY's alternative sentencing program is paying big dividends since it began in September 2009. The program, designed to replace work-release, has saved \$366,016 in its first year — almost twice the \$200,000 county commissioners budgeted for the program, according to *The Dallas Morning News*.

Under the program, persons convicted of misdemeanors — or who have had felonies reduced to misdemeanors — are allowed to live at home and go to work or school while wearing GPS-enabled monitors.

The program has had a success rate of 97 percent, with 273 offenders having completed their time, out of 281 closed alternative sentencing cases. It recently began monitoring some pre-trial bond cases.

► WISCONSIN

• Establishment of a seven-county family care district could be **BROWN COUNTY's** ticket out of the **long-term care** business. The County Board recently approved an enabling resolution. Family care was established by the state in 2007 and allows persons in need of long-term care to decide where they

wish to live while receiving services.

Brown would be part of a district that includes **DOOR, KEWAUNEE, SHAWANO, OCONTO, MENOMINEE** and **MARINETTE counties**. The county's involvement is significant, since 55 percent of the long-term cases in the seven-county region reside in Brown County.

The county must pass a second resolution outlining its financial participation in the district in about a year.

• The **MARATHON COUNTY** and city of Wausau human resources won't be merging departments, as had been proposed. But while closing one door, Marathon's County Board opened another.

The County Board and Wausau City Council had **approved the merger**, but the board's executive committee rejected it after Wausau Mayor Jim Tipple and the City Council made changes to it.

However, members of the executive committee said they would consider contracting out human resources services to villages and cities, including Wausau. The county's Human Resources Committee will look into how such a system might operate, according to the *Wausau Daily Herald*.

(News From the Nation's Counties is compiled by Charles Taylor and Charlie Ban, staff writers. If you have an item for News From, please e-mail ctaylor@naco.org or cban@naco.org.)

What's in a Seal?



» **Orange County, Texas**

www.co.orange.tx.us

Orange County, Texas was formed in 1852 from portions of Jefferson County. It was named after the orange fruit, the common citrus fruit grown by the early settlers near the mouth of the Sabine River. Due to periodic spells of cold winter frosts in Orange County, it is no longer the home of orange trees and citrus orchards.

During World War II, Orange County was the home of a large amount of shipbuilding for the navies of the United States and allied countries. The major shipbuilder, the Consolidated Steel Corp., was located in the town. During the war, the Consolidate Steel employed as many as 20,000 people at its shipyard in Orange, Texas.

The seal features the county name along the top and "State of Texas" along the bottom with a lone star in the middle. This symbolizes Texas as an independent republic and is a reminder of the state's struggle for independence from Mexico.

(If you would like your county's seal featured, please contact Christopher Johnson at 202.942.4256 or cjohnson@naco.org.)

Research News

Downturn Creates the New Poor

In mid-September, the U.S. Census Bureau released the latest statistics on poverty in America.

In 2009, 11 percent of all families (about 8.8 million families) were classified as below poverty level.

The data, from a report called *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States; 2009*, reveals the poverty rate in 2009 was the highest reported since 1994 and reflects the largest number of people in poverty in the 51 years that the estimates have been available.

According to the report, poverty increased for every type of family. Married couple families had a poverty rate of 5.8 percent, with 3.4 million in poverty, and female head of household families had a rate of 29.9 percent, or 4.4 million of these families in poverty.

The federal Office of Management and Budget defines the poverty threshold in 2009 as \$21,954 for a family of four. Rates of poverty increased from 2008 to 2009 in the Midwest, South and West, but the rate for the Northeast was not statistically different.

The impact of the new economy has hit people in all walks of life, and the phrase now being used in the media to describe them is the “newly poor.” Many of the newly poor formerly considered themselves middle class, but because of job

reverses, unemployment, upside-down mortgages and foreclosures they can no longer lay claim to that status. In reality many of them were actually just below middle class, but claiming the lifestyle on a two-paycheck income. The lifestyle easily fell apart when one of the working members of a household lost his or her job. The strain of trying to make it on one paycheck often proves to be too much.

Many types of people are being caught by the slow economy. College and other post-secondary education graduates are finding it tough to break into the working world. At the same time many people who are working are being affected by cutbacks in the availability of state and county funding for subsidized childcare and find themselves on long waiting lists for the fewer available slots. According to data from the Census Bureau, childcare can cost up to one-third of the total household budgets of low-income families. Others are seeing their jobs phased out or their employers going out of business.

In La Crosse County, Wis., county staff conducted an analysis of the increased demand on its human services because of the recession. They examined the increased case loads in all of their human services agencies attributed

to the downturn in the economy. The following results were found:

- Crisis contacts in Mental Recovery Health Services increased from 3,700 in 2008 to 4,200 in 2009.

College and other post-secondary education graduates are finding it tough to break into the working world.

- Economic support cases increased by 150 between January and December 2009, and

- Food share cases increased by 500 between 2009 and 2010, and total benefits support increased from \$817,539 in 2009 to nearly \$1.17 million in 2010.

Sterns County, Minn. reports that the number of people seeking food support was 5.5 percent higher than in January 2009. County officials believe that many of the new recipients are people who have experienced job loss. Altogether, 8,810 people sought some form of support from the county human services department in April 2010, double the number receiving it in April 2007.

The cost of these services jumped from \$370,000 a month in 2007 to about \$1 million a month in 2010. Nearby Sherburne and Benton counties are experiencing similar increases.

Meanwhile county human services departments are facing budget cuts themselves just as demand is increasing. Facing a \$60 million shortfall for the county's 2011 fiscal year, King County, Wash. Executive Dow Constantine recently proposed to zero out all general funding for human services.

After already gutting the nearly \$20 million that the county budgeted for human services only two years ago, there was little left for the executive to cut. Washington state counties do not have a legal mandate to fund these services.

The Oregon Food Bank Network, which serves counties in Oregon, and Clark County, Wash.

conducted a Hunger Factor Assessment of its recipients. Some of the information they found includes:

- 31 percent of surveyed households listed long-term unemployment as the reason they sought emergency food. That compares to 22 percent in 2008 at the beginning of the recession

- 28 percent of adult recipients are unemployed and looking for work, compared to 20 percent in 2008

- the average length of time of unemployment was 15 months

- 16 percent of adult recipients work full time, compared to 21 percent in 2008, and

- 52 percent of respondents cite “to be employed” as critical to improving their situation (compared to 45 percent in 2008).

(Research News was written by Jacqueline Byers, director of research.)

Job Market / Classifieds

► DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC UTILITIES – CAROLINE COUNTY, VA.

Salary: DOQ.

Caroline County is seeking a Director of Public Utilities. This is a professional, administrative position responsible for managing underground utilities including treatment and distribution, solid waste collection and disposal and capital improvement projects. Oversees approximately 30 full-time employees with direct supervision over one managerial position. Reports to the County Administrator.

The successful candidate must possess excellent leadership ability, management skills, communication skills and contract negotiation skills. Candidates with four year college degree in public administration, business, management or engineering will be equally considered. Requires at least seven to 10 years of progressive related experience, including three (3) years of supervisory experience, or any equivalent combination of training and experience which provides the required knowledge, skills and abilities. A valid Virginia driver's license and good driving record are also required. Starting salary DOQ. Excellent benefit package including

state retirement benefits.

Interested candidates should submit a completed county application, resume and cover letter to County Administrator Percy Ashcraft at P.O. Box 447, Bowling Green, VA 22427. Call 804.633.5380. Position open until filled. Applications may be obtained from the County Administrator's Office or online at www.visitcaroline.com. Caroline County is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

► COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR – PATRICK COUNTY, VA.

Salary: DOQ.

The Board of Supervisors of Patrick County seeks a professional individual with strong leadership skills for the position of County Administrator.

Please submit a current resume, county application, and professional references to the Patrick County Board of Supervisors Chairman, P.O. Box 466; Stuart, VA 24171 or e-mail information to trose@co.patrick.us. Applications will be accepted through Oct. 29 at 5 p.m. or until position is filled. EOE/ADA.

For more information and county application, please visit our website at www.co.patrick.va.us.

Financial Services News

U.S. Communities Unveils New Online Marketplace

U.S. Communities, the largest national local government cooperative, has announced a new online system that enables participating public agencies to access and purchase goods and services from multiple U.S. Communities vendors at one time. The integrated, online marketplace is available to registered users on www.uscommunities.org.

Any public agency, including local and state government, school districts and nonprofit organizations, can take advantage of the savings and products available through the program. The new online marketplace offers access to thousands of products from multiple suppliers with a single payment and order. Current products available through the marketplace include technology

products, school and classroom supplies, labware, homeland security and safety supplies, electrical items, janitorial supplies and maintenance equipment.

These products are available through existing contracts between U.S. Communities' lead public agencies and suppliers such as School Specialty, HD Supply, Insight, Tech Depot, Graybar, Fisher Science Education, BSN and US Games, Hagemeyer and Zep. Offerings from additional U.S. Communities suppliers will be available through the online system in coming months.

“We are pleased to offer another new solution that delivers value and cost savings to public agencies,” said Steve Hamill, general manager, U.S.

Communities. “Our new online marketplace is a convenient platform that simplifies the purchasing process and provides agencies with real-time access to the best overall government pricing across our nationally recognized suppliers.”

U.S. Communities is also offering weekly webinars to educate participating agencies on the new portal. There is no additional cost to purchase online and no minimum purchase requirement for participating public agencies.

To register for a webinar, go to www.uscommunities.org ► News and Events ► Webinars.

(Financial Services News was written by Nancy Parrish, director, NACo Financial Services Corporation.)



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NACo urges automatic federal Medicaid assistance increases

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stated. This would be detrimental to the wide range of services and programs counties provide their residents — such as ensuring public safety, operating hospitals and building infrastructure — at a time when counties are coping with diminished revenues.

In the letter, NACo called on the commission to evaluate the consequences its recommendations will have on local governments, and to make sure they neither result in cost-shifting to state and local governments, exacerbating fiscal strain, nor impose underfunded or unfunded mandates on state and local governments.

Naake also urged that Congress, the federal government and agencies should “meaningfully engage” local governments on deficit-reduction solutions by inviting state and local officials to participate in current and future deliberations.

“Counties stand ready to work in partnership with the federal government to help achieve the goal of deficit reduction and continue our role as a provider of services to the citizens of this country,” he wrote.

NACo also asked that the federal government not abandon the payment in lieu of taxes program, which reimburses public lands counties for services they provide. The association also urged the commission to see infrastructure spending as an economic driver that creates economic expansion and deficit reduction over the long term. This includes targeted federal investments in transportation, broadband, businesses incubators, water and wastewater infrastructure, community facilities, community and economic development through the community development block grant program.

Further, NACo asked that the commission, when considering entitlement reforms, remember that Medicaid provides essential core funding for the local health care safety net for vulnerable populations.

“With that in mind, we would urge the Commission to include an analysis of the costs to state and local governments of proposed reforms to Medicaid, alongside projections for the federal treasury,” Naake wrote.

In that regard, NACo encouraged the commission to make increases to Medicaid’s federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) automatic and triggered by specific indicators of economic distress. The letter noted that the increased FMAP provided by the Recovery Act — and recently extended by Congress — has been a lifesaver for states and counties.

The “pass-through” requirement for states that require their counties to contribute to the non-federal share of Medicaid has also been extremely important, Naake wrote. “When the economy is down, more individuals will be eligible for Medicaid at precisely the same time that states and counties experience revenue shortfalls ... Congress should change the

law permanently so that Medicaid can fulfill its role in the safety net as well as counter-cyclical spending,” he wrote.

The letter also addressed tax reform, urging the commission to preserve local governments’ ability to finance their legitimate functions.

“Tax-exempt financing is a component of that ability and should be

preserved as an affordable option for local governments to use for budgeting and financing of long-range investments in the infrastructure and facilities necessary to meet the demand for government services,” Naake wrote.

Expressing appreciation of the magnitude of the task ahead, he added: “There are many tough deci-

sions yet to be made at all levels of government.... While none of the decisions will be easy, [counties] are ready to continue our intergovernmental partnership and welcome consultation or any questions you may have.”

The complete text of the letter is available on NACo’s website at www.naco.org.

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NACo webinars on the calendar for Fall 2010

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October 7: Exploring Carbon Credit Revenue from County Parks and Open Spaces
October 14: How Smart Growth Can Put Your County on a Path to a Green Economy
October 19: Rural Counties and Health Reform: Opportunities for Improved Care
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October 28: Justice for all: Effective County Juvenile Justice Efforts
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