

CountyNews

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES ■ WASHINGTON, D.C.

VOL. 48, NO. 1 ■ JANUARY 11, 2016



Jerry Abramson, deputy assistant to the president and director of intergovernmental affairs, kicks off a briefing for presidents and executive directors from state associations of counties in the Indian Treaty Room at the Old Executive Office Building. They would also hear from (right) Elias Alcantara, Roy Austin and Lynn Overmann, administration officials. The National Council of County Association Executives and their officers make an annual visit to Washington, D.C. in early January to meet with administration and congressional officials about federal legislation and programs that would impact county governments. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Good news for counties in final spending bill: PILT fully funded, Cadillac tax put off

By NACo LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS STAFF

Averting the Ghost of Shut-downs Past, Congress passed and President Obama signed a \$1.15 trillion FY16 spending bill that boosts overall federal spending by approximately 5 percent. To lend

even more holiday cheer, counties fared very well in the FY16 appropriations process. Major highlights include:

- delays for two years the 40 percent excise tax on employer-sponsored health care
- fully funds the Payments in

Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program at \$452 million

- preserves Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program funding at \$3 billion
- increases HOME Investments

See **BUDGET** page 2

County economies: recovery continues in 2015

By BRIAN KNUDSEN
RESEARCH ANALYST

As citizens prepare to cast their first votes in presidential primaries, NACo has released its annual look at economic recovery patterns across the nation's 3,069 counties *County*

Economies 2015: Opportunities and Challenges analyzes the annual changes of four economic performance indicators — economic output, also known as gross domestic product (GDP), employment, unemployment rates and home prices — between 2014 and 2015,

across county economies. In addition, it explores 2013–2014 wage dynamics as well as 2009–2014 trends in productivity and wages.

2015 was a year of continued recovery from the recession. An

See **ECONOMIES** page 6

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NACo and counties step up efforts to fight elder abuse
► **Pages 8-9**

Jan. 12 : Deadline to submit policy resolutions for consideration at the Legislative Conference
► **Page 3**

Counties in Pennsylvania and Illinois get relief from state budget stalemates ► **Page 13**

CDBG, workforce training programs get FY16 funding increases

BUDGET from page 1

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- » Overall, nondefense spending increases from \$493.5 billion to \$518.5 billion
- » Remote sales tax legislation excluded from final omnibus bill
- » Funding increased for Essential Air Service program

Partnership (HOME) program by \$50 million to \$950 million

- increases the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) funding by \$30 million to \$210 million

- increases funding for many county-administered programs, including the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Mental Health Block Grant and the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG); and

- preserves \$500 million for the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program, which counties can access for surface transportation projects, despite proposals to eliminate all funding for TIGER.

Overall, nondefense spending increases from \$493.5 billion to \$518.5 billion. These spending levels adhere to the caps set by the two-year budget agreement enacted in early November.

The following items are additional key funding levels and provisions in the omnibus spending bill that are important to counties.

Agriculture and Rural Affairs

Water and Waste Disposal Programs Funding Increased: The

measure provides \$522.32 million for the Rural Water and Waste Disposal Program (an increase of \$57.37 million from FY15 levels). This program helps rural communities address the backlog of clean water and waste disposal projects.

Distance Learning, Telemedicine and Broadband Program Funding Stays Level: The bill provides level funding of \$10.37 million in broadband grants for the Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program and \$24.08 million in direct loans for broadband transmission and Internet services in unserved rural areas.

Rural Communities Facilities Program Changes: The bill provides a level \$2.2 billion in direct loans, \$148.31 million in

guaranteed loans (an increase of \$75.09 million from FY15 levels) and \$38.78 million in grants (an increase of \$12 million from FY15 levels) to help fund rural hospitals, schools and health clinics.

Housing Insurance Fund Program Gets Small Boost: The bill provides a level \$900 million for Single Family Housing Direct Loans. The bill also includes \$1.39 billion for the Rental Assistance Program (\$301.2 million above FY15 levels), which provides assistance for affordable rental housing for low-income families and the elderly in rural communities.

Community, Economic and Workforce Development

Economic Development Administration (EDA) Funding Increased: The omnibus includes \$261 million for EDA in FY16, an increase of \$10 million. EDA provides grants and assistance to spur private sector job creation and economic development in local communities. The agreement also provides \$15 million in assistance to coal-reliant communities.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Programs Extended: The Employment and Training Administration is funded at \$10.1 billion in the omnibus. The WIOA Title I programs are funded at \$2.7 billion for FY16. This is a \$100 million increase over FY15 levels. WIOA Title I programs provide funding to states and local governments to assist with employment, education and training opportunities for adults and youth.

Environment, Energy and Land Use

Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) Rider Excluded from Omnibus: Even though there was a strong push to include provisions that would either prohibit funding or require a rewrite of the WOTUS rule, these efforts failed.

Water and Wastewater Funding Programs Receive Nearly Level Funding: The Clean Water (CW) and Drinking Water (DW) State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs were funded at \$2.3 billion. CWSRF was funded at \$1.4 billion and DWSRF was funded at \$863 million — slightly below FY15 levels.

Brownfields Receive Level Funding: The Brownfields Infrastructure Grant program received

\$80 million and the Brownfield Grants for States received \$47.74 million — the same as FY15.

State and Local Air Quality Management Grant Funding Remains the Same: State and Local Air Quality agency grants play an essential role in preventing and controlling air pollution at the local level. Congress appropriated \$228.21 million, the same that was allotted in FY15.

Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs

Internet Tax Freedom Act Extended: As expected, the omnibus extends the Internet Tax Freedom Act (ITFA) for another 10 months to Oct. 1. ITFA, enacted in 1998, was originally intended to be a temporary prohibition of state and local taxation of Internet access services, even though it currently allows seven states (Hawaii, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas and Wisconsin)

in FY15.

The agreement also directs SAMHSA to work with the National Institute of Mental Health to ensure that the increased funding available through the Mental Health Block grant goes toward evidence-based programs that address the needs of individuals with early serious mental illness, including psychotic disorders.

Prevention and Public Health Fund Fully Allocated: The omnibus fully allocates the \$932 million available for FY16, including \$40 million for Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity Grants, \$160 million for the Preventative Health Services and Health Services Block Grant and \$324 million for Section 317 Immunization Grants.

Human Services and Education

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Funding Decreased: The FY16 bill sets funding for SNAP at \$80.85 billion.

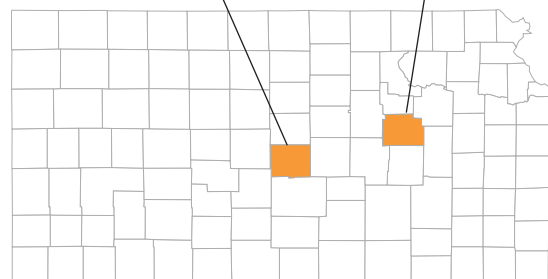
SpeedRead » » »

- » Budget measure delays 40 percent excise tax (Cadillac tax) on employer health care plans for two years
- » PILT, fully funded at \$452 million
- » Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program funding is preserved at \$3 billion

GET TO KNOW...

Rice County, Kan.

Morris County, Kan.



Rice County, Kan.

Despite its name, Rice County does not grow rice. However there are **large deposits of salt** found within the county's borders and two salt mining companies are still in production.

Morris County, Kan.

is home to Council Grove, **the last place on the Santa Fe Trail at which pioneers could purchase supplies** before finishing the final 600 miles of trail. There are still ruts located near Council Grove from the wagons and caravans that used this trail.

grandfathered under the original law to collect taxes on the services.

Remote Sales Tax Legislation Excluded from Final Omnibus: Despite a strong effort from remote sales tax legislation champions in the House and Senate, bills like the Marketplace Fairness Act (S. 698) and the Remote Transactions Parity Act (H.R. 2775) did not make it into the final cut of provisions to be included in the year-end spending package. Legislation to allow state and local governments to enforce existing sales taxes on remote sales, like purchases made over the Internet, has been a long-standing priority for NACo.

Health

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Funding Increased: The HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Mental Health Block Grant is funded at \$533 million for FY16, \$50 million more than the FY15 level. The Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant is funded at \$1.82 billion for FY16, \$38 million more than

This represents a \$1 billion decrease from FY15 funding levels. SNAP funding flows from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to states, which in turn distribute benefits, in some cases through county governments, to qualifying individuals. NACo supports funding SNAP at the highest possible level.

Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) Slightly Increased: SSBG receives \$1.70 billion through this omnibus bill for FY16, a slight increase over FY15 funding levels. SSBG funds can be used for nearly 30 different types of services for vulnerable populations, including adult and child protective services. In 10 states, SSBG funding is provided directly to counties to administer programs.

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Boosted: The FY16 bill sets CSBG funding at \$751 million for FY16, also a small increase over the previous fiscal year.

Justice and Public Safety

See BUDGET page 5

SUBMIT YOUR RESOLUTIONS

The NACo resolutions process provides members with the ability to participate in national policy decisions affecting county governments. During the Legislative Conference, NACo's 10 policy steering committees and Board of Directors consider legislative and policy resolutions that will guide NACo advocacy until the NACo Annual Conference in July 2016.

In preparation for NACo's 2016 Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 20–24, NACo members are invited to submit interim policy resolutions.

The American County Platform and the association's policy resolutions are carefully considered statements of the needs and interests of county governments throughout the nation. These policy statements serve as a guide for NACo members and staff to advance the association's federal policy agenda before the White House, Congress and federal agencies.

When submitting resolutions, please work with the appropriate steering committee staff liaison to adhere to the following guidelines. Names and contact information are available online: www.naco.org/advocacy/legislative-staff

HOW TO SUBMIT AND FORMAT RESOLUTIONS

All resolutions must be sub-



mitted electronically via email to resolutions@naco.org by **Jan. 20**. Submissions **MUST** identify the title and issue area in the email subject line (e.g. Social Services Block Grant, Human Services and Education). Resolutions should be concise and no more than one page in length.

The standard format includes:

- **Issue:** Short sentence stating the purpose of the resolution
- **Proposed Policy:** Concise statement specifying a position or action by NACo and/or other entities

• **Background:** 1–2 paragraph statement clearly outlining the county interest in the particular issue

• **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Short statement addressing the potential impact(s) for counties in the specific issue area

• **Sponsor:** Name and contact information of NACo member sponsoring the resolution. It is important to include contact information so that the NACo staff can follow up if there are any questions or additional information required

IMPORTANT REMINDER:

If you plan to submit a policy resolution, you (or a designated representative) must appear in person at the steering committee meeting at the 2016 Legislative Conference to introduce and explain the resolution.

**See this story online to download a sample policy resolution and a comprehensive overview of the policy process.*



Public Lands Steering Committee member, Rachel Richards, commissioner, Pitkin County, Colo., debates a policy proposal at the 2015 Legislative Conference. Proposed policy resolutions for the 2016 conference are due to NACo, Jan. 20. Photo by Jack Hernandez.

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE By Sallie Clark



Happy New Year! I hope your holiday season was filled with happiness. As we welcome the New Year, I'm pleased to announce some dynamic changes you'll see in the next issue of *County News*. To help us tell the county story, we will debut a freshly redesigned publication that is consistent with NACo's new brand and award-winning website.

We will continue to produce high-quality content and add new features designed to highlight the innovative leadership of our members. Articles will feature larger images, vivid colors and original illustrations to better engage readers. We'll also launch a new online version with interactive features and a weekly e-mail, "CN Now," which will include articles that appear in the County News print edition along with legislative updates, webinar and grant announcements, blog postings and other updates.

I look forward to an exciting year ahead as we continue to share why counties matter to those in our nation's capital, our state legislatures and our local communities. The "counties matter" message is resonating on Capitol Hill, and our advocacy efforts this past year have resulted in several significant victories, including:

- passage of the FAST Act, landmark surface transportation legislation that supports local decision-making and secures federal investments of \$3 billion for locally-owned infrastructure and \$776 million for off-system bridges, which are primarily owned by counties and other local governments
- fighting unfunded federal mandates like the EPA's "Waters of the U.S." and other uncompensated regulations related to the environment, justice, human services and county employees
- securing \$452 million to fully fund the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program for more than 62 percent of the nation's counties that have non-taxable federal land, and
- staving off constant threats to reduce or eliminate the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds, which have helped counties and other public entities over the past decade finance more than \$3.7 trillion to build schools, hospitals, roads, public safety facilities and critical infrastructure.

Despite our wins, we continue to face major threats as well as opportunities when it comes to federal legislative and regulatory issues that impact counties. That's why it's very important that you join me

at NACo's Legislative Conference Feb. 20–24 in Washington, D.C.

Decisions in Washington may seem distant and unrelated to our work, but they have long-lasting and often costly impacts on counties' ability to lead. We must deliver a strong message to leaders on Capitol Hill that federal policies matter to counties and counties matter to America.

If you haven't already done so, register today at www.naco.org/leg.

CORRECTION

Dane County, Wis. Supervisor Dennis O'Loughlin was misidentified in a photo caption in the Dec. 14, 2015 edition of County News. County News regrets the error.

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Published biweekly except August by:

National Association of Counties

Research Foundation, Inc.

25 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.

STE. 500, Washington, D.C. 20001

(202) 393-6226 | FAX (202) 393-2630

E-mail | cnnews@naco.org

Online address | www.countynews.org

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Mail subscriptions are \$100 per year for non-members. \$60 per year for non-members purchasing multiple copies. Educational institution rate, \$50 per year. Member county supplemental subscriptions are \$20 each. Send payment with order and address changes to NACo, 25 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.

POSTMASTER:

send address changes to

County News, 25 Massachusetts Ave. N.W.,

Ste. 500, Washington, D.C. 20001

(USPS 704-620) ■ (ISSN: 0744-9798)

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Research Foundation, Inc.



HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR COUNTY?

The American Community Survey sheds light on the nation's counties

By **DEB STEMPOWSKI, CHIEF**
AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY OFFICE.

The American Community Survey (ACS) is an ongoing survey that provides vital information on a yearly basis about the nation and its people. Through the ACS, we know more about jobs and occupations, education, veterans, and whether people own or rent their home, among other topics.

The ACS is of particular importance to county governments because of its ability to provide accurate data at the county, city, and neighborhood level. These data have been helping communities gauge and improve their economic and social wellbeing since 2005.

When operating under the constraints of a limited budget, it is vital to identify the potential investments that can have the greatest impact on a community. ACS data allow decision makers to quantify the impact of a proposed initiative. Information that can aid decision-making includes topics such as:

- which industries are growing and which are contracting
- the state of the current housing stock and rental-housing market
- Which segments of the population are most in need of public assistance
- which levels of education are citizens reaching, and
- where are people commuting to and at what times of the day.

ACS data not only provide a current snapshot of your community, they are also powerful forecasting tools. By combining data on age, births, migration, employment status and poverty, county governments are able to anticipate needs before they arise. This helps public planners ensure resource allocations made today will address the needs of tomorrow. It also gives government officials the ability to identify costly problems before they occur, such

as labor shortages and erosions of the tax base.

Local governments can also use ACS data to secure state and federal funds. Every year, states and counties are issued billions of dollars in grant money based on eligibility for various programs. Often, these eligibility formulas use ACS data. Reliable data is the only way federal, state, tribal and local governments are able to ensure tax dollars are spent on the areas of greatest need.

Local officials have a responsibility to address the needs of all members of a community. This can be difficult for certain small groups whose needs are not well understood. The ACS gives a voice to traditionally underrepresented groups such as veterans, single mothers, racial minorities, the elderly and people with disabilities.

SpeedRead » » »

- » American Community Survey provides data at the county level.
- » Local governments can use ACS data to secure state and federal funds.
- » Through its website, the Census Bureau provides a variety of tools for accessing the data.

Data on these types of groups allow decision makers to ensure all members of the community are being considered and have access to the resources they require.

The public sector is not the only data user in the community. In the

same way the government relies on accurate data to make its resource allocation decisions, so too do private businesses. Large corporations can determine where best to open new facilities, franchises can evaluate options for new locations, and individuals can locate potential customers for their small businesses. In addition, local nonprofit groups depend on ACS data to measure demand for, plan and fund their services.

It is important to educate community members on the benefits of using the data and participating in the survey. The more informed businesses are, the greater their potential to provide jobs and improve the local economy. When citizens are made aware of the data at their disposal, they are better able to gather resources for their respective causes.

By encouraging participation in the survey, local governments can ensure the data are of the highest quality and are collected in the most efficient way possible.

Through its website, the Census Bureau provides a variety of tools for accessing the data. Reports such as Narrative Profiles contain a number of graphs and charts that are ideal for presentations. QuickFacts is an easy way to compare data on different counties within a state.

The American FactFinder allows users to access thousands of pre-tabulated tables on a variety of topics. To learn more about the ACS and data tools, or for customer service, visit census.gov/acs.

In the County Explorer, NACo aggregates ACS data to give a comprehensive demographic picture of each county in the U.S.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How are respondents chosen for the survey?

A: Statistical formulas are used to sample the nation's addresses. This means particular addresses, not people, are chosen to participate.

Q: How do respondents know their information will be kept confidential?

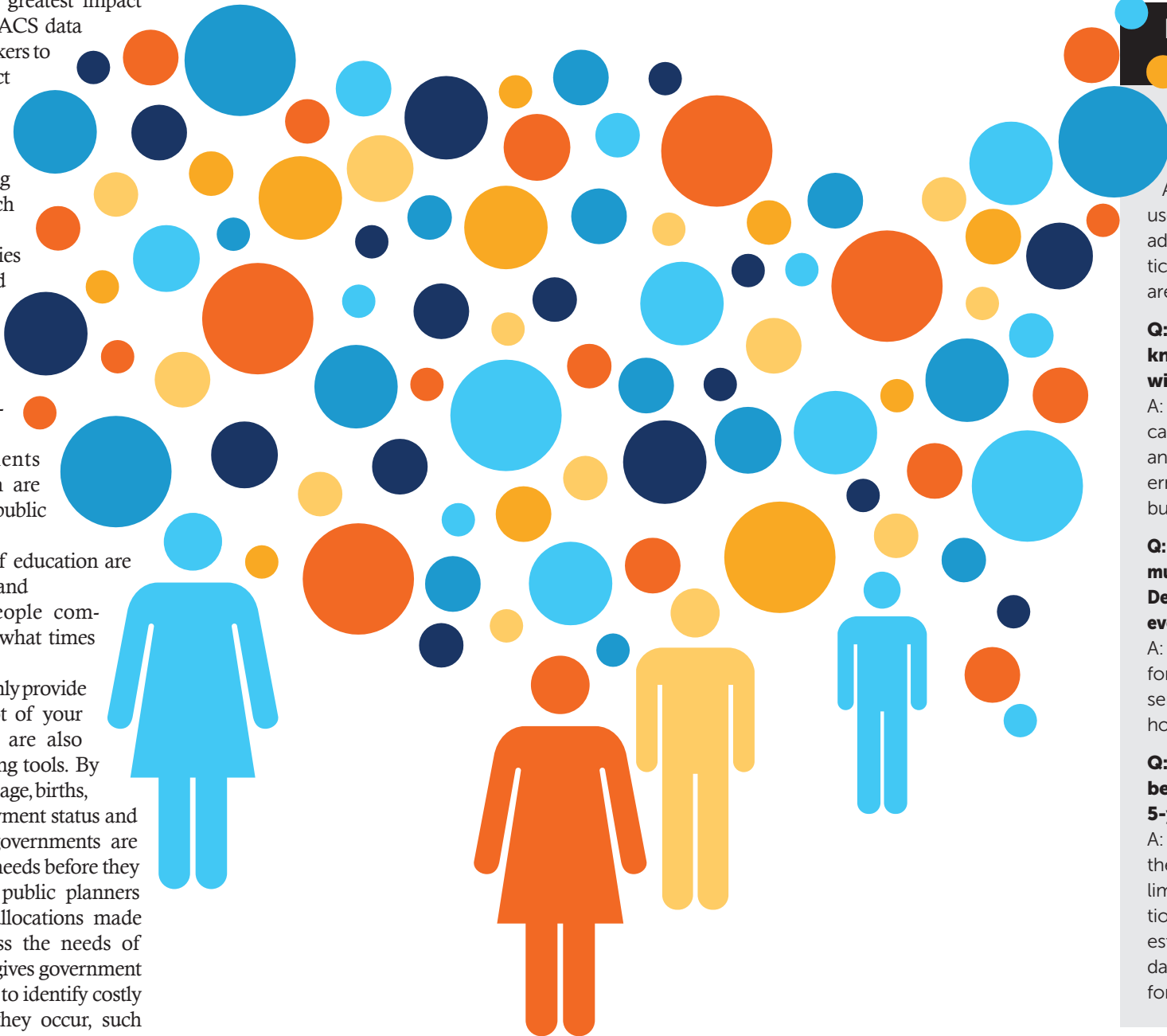
A: By law, the Census Bureau cannot share respondents' answers with any other government agency or private business.

Q: Is the American Community Survey related to the Decennial Census conducted every 10 years?

A: Yes, it replaced the "long form" that was previously sent to a percentage of households every 10 years.

Q: What is the difference between the 1-year and 5-year estimates?

A: The 1-year estimates are the most current but are limited to areas with populations of 65,000+. The 5-year estimates pool 60 months of data but provide estimates for all areas.



TIGER grant funding for transportation programs remains the same in FY16

BUDGET from page 2

Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) Avoids Carve Out: The Byrne JAG program is funded at \$476 million, which represents a \$100 million increase over FY15 funding. However, this additional \$100 million is allocated for the provision of security at the Democratic and Republican national conventions in 2016 and will not actually increase funding for the program.

Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA) Programs Funded: Programs under MIOTCRA are funded at \$10 million, a \$1.5 million increase over FY15 funding. MIOTCRA grants are available to state, tribal and local governments to develop programs designed to improve outcomes for individuals with mental illness involved in the criminal justice system.

Second Chance Act Funding Stable: Programs under the Second Chance Act are funded at \$68 million, which is the same as FY15 funding. The Second Chance Act provides resources to states, local governments and nonprofit organizations to improve outcomes for individuals returning to communities from prisons, jails and juvenile facilities.

Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) Retain Funding: Funding for EMPG remains level at \$350 million. Counties use EMPG funds to build and sustain core capabilities across the prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery mission areas. Many local governments use EMPG for emergency management training and necessary equipment.

Public Lands

Forest Management and Fire Funding Reform Excluded from Omnibus: House and Senate negotiators failed to reach an agreement on provisions that reform federal forest management and wildfire suppression funding practices.

NACo continues to support federal reforms to end the practice of “fire borrowing” and improve forest management and hazardous fuels reduction on federal lands.

The law does provide \$4.2 billion to fully fund the 10-year average for wildfire suppression. It also includes \$545 million for hazardous fuels reduction activities and an additional \$360 million to support the U.S. Forest Service timber program, an

increase of \$40 million across the two programs.

Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) Reallocated toward Stateside Projects: Congress provided a total of \$450 million to support activities under the LWCF. Of these funds, approximately 25 percent are made available to the “Stateside” grant program, competitive grants available to counties and other local governments to establish locally supported outdoor recreation projects and facilities. As a matter of comparison, in FY15 the “Stateside” grant program received about 16 percent of total LWCF funds. Approximately 50 percent of FY16 LWCF funds are made available for federal land acquisition programs. In FY15, more than 60 percent of LWCF funds were devoted to federal land acquisition.

National Park Service (NPS) Receives Additional Funds to Address Maintenance Backlog: The NPS received an increase of \$237 million — \$2.9 billion in total funding for FY16 — to support its operations for the coming year. Of the \$237 million increase, the NPS must use \$94 million to reduce maintenance backlogs and address other priority issues related to the NPS centennial this year.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Receives Additional Funds to Reduce Grazing Permit Backlog, Conserve Sage-Grouse Habitat: The omnibus spending bill included an increase of \$1.5 million (\$79 million in total) in FY16 to make additional resources available to reduce the backlog of grazing permit applications. The bill also included \$60 million within the Bureau of Land Management budget for sage-grouse habitat conservation activities. Total funding for the BLM reaches \$1.2 billion for FY16, a \$117 million increase over FY15.

Policy Riders Address Public Lands Concerns: The bill contains a number of policy riders to address public lands policy concerns including:

- a provision requiring the Department of the Interior and the Forest Service to report on nonemergency closures of public lands to hunting, fishing, shooting and other recreational activities
- a prohibition on funding the Fish and Wildlife Service’s efforts to issue further rules to place sage-grouse on the Endangered Species List
- a prohibition on the Department of the Interior from administratively

SpeedRead » » »

- » Mental health and substance abuse funding increased
- » Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rider excluded from Omnibus
- » Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) reallocated toward ‘Stateside’ projects

creating new wilderness areas, and

- a directive that the Forest Service, National Park Service and BLM work with state and local governments in drought-stricken regions to facilitate the prompt removal of hazardous trees on these lands and to prioritize funding to reduce the threat of wildfire.

Telecommunications and Technology

Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act of FY15: The omnibus appropriations bill includes the Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act of FY15 (S. 754), which will create a legal pathway for the federal government to exchange cyber-threat data with state and local governments, as well as the private sector. The bill is also intended to help prevent cybercrimes and data breaches like the ones that have compromised the sensitive data of millions of consumers, as well as current and former federal employees.

National Cybersecurity Protection Advancement Bill: The omni-

bus appropriations bill also includes the National Cybersecurity Protection Advancement Act of FY15 (H.R.1713). This bill directs the Department of Homeland Security to establish a National Cybersecurity Preparedness Consortium, which among other duties, would train state and local first responders and officials to prepare for and respond to cyber-attacks, as well as incorporate cybersecurity emergency responses into existing state and local emergency management functions.

It also expands the role of the National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center (NCCIC) to collaborate with state and local governments on cybersecurity risks and incidents.

Transportation

Level Funding for the TIGER Grant Program: The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant program receives the same funding as FY15 — \$500 million. It provides discretionary grants to transportation projects of national or regional significance.

\$2.18 Billion for New Starts Projects: New Starts Projects are funded at \$2.18 billion, \$1 billion less than requested by the president but slightly above FY15 appropriations levels, which will fully fund all current Full Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) projects, as well as support new projects anticipated to receive FFGA awards in FY16. This amount will also provide funding for all pending small starts projects included in the president’s request

and an additional \$50 million for core capacity projects.

Funding for Federal Highway and Transit Programs Funded through the Highway Trust Fund is Consistent with the Levels Set by the FAST Act: Federal transit programs receive \$11.76 billion in funding, while highway programs are provided \$42.36 billion.

Funding Increased for Essential Air Service: The Essential Air Service receives \$175 million, a \$20 million increase from FY15, with an overall estimate of \$275 million available for the program when combined with over-flight fees collected for the mandatory portion of the program. Combined, the discretionary and mandatory funding subsidizes airlines for continued commercial service to eligible communities.

Airport Improvement Program Receives Level Funding: The Airport Improvement Program receives \$3.35 billion, which is consistent with levels authorized by the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012. The program provides grants to airports for development and planning.

\$5 million to Carry Out the Small Community Air Service Development Program: The Small Community Air Service Development Program receives \$5 million for FY16, about \$500,000 less than FY15. The program provides grants to help small communities address air service and airfare issues.

QUICK TAKES

STATE RECORD: HEAVIEST ONE-DAY SNOWFALL

LOCATION	COUNTY	INCHES	DATE
Georgetown, Colo.	Clear Creek County	63	Dec. 4, 1913
Thompson Pass, Alaska	Valdez-Cordova Census Area,	62	Dec. 29, 1955
Mount Washington, N.H.	Coos County	49	Feb. 25, 1969
Millegan, Mont.	Cascade County	48	Dec. 27, 2003
Gunn’s Ranch, Wash.	Okanogan County	48	Jan. 21, 1935
Deadwood, S.D.	Lawrence County	47	March 14, 1973
Watertown, N.Y.	Jefferson County	45	Nov. 15, 1900

Source: Snowiest Places in United States by Liz Osborn CurrentResults.com

Economic recovery spreading, but improvement remains geographically uneven

ECONOMIES from page 1

additional 462 county economies returned to pre-recession unemployment lows in 2015, two-and-a-half times more than in the previous year. Home prices recovered at a similar rate. Job growth accelerated and home prices saw faster gains in two-thirds of county economies.

However, at the same time, GDP recovery almost stalled. A majority of oil-and-gas county economies saw declines in GDP in 2015. Overall, GDP fell in 36 percent of county economies. Ninety-one county economies slid into recession on GDP in 2015.

Nevertheless, the economic recovery is spreading. By 2015, some 214 county economies recovered to pre-recession levels

on all four indicators (GDP, unemployment rate, employment and home prices), close to a three-fold increase over 2014. Large county economies — counties with more than 500,000 residents — also are making progress. For the first time, 17 of the 126 large county economies are fully recovered, with most of these in California and Texas.

However, there remains room to improve for many county economies. By 2015, only 7 percent of county economies had recovered on all four indicators. While 16 percent of county economies have not returned to pre-recession levels on any indicator in states such as Florida, Georgia, Illinois and Mississippi.

These disparities in recovery and growth across county economies help explain why Americans don't

FOLLOW THE NUMBERS

You can find the county economic analysis at www.naco.org/CountyEconomies. To access the companion interactive maps and the individualized county profiles, go to NACo's County Explorer interactive map www.naco.org/countyexplorer.

The January update of NACo's interactive tool will feature the economic data from the County Economies analysis.

feel improving national economic numbers. Many also don't yet see them in their paychecks.

On the one hand, wages increased for about two-thirds of county economies in 2014, when

taking into account the cost of living and inflation. More than three-quarters of county economies in states such as Florida, New Jersey and Ohio saw increases in their adjusted wages.

However, wages did not keep up with productivity gains everywhere between 2009 and 2014, reflecting an uneven geography of opportunity. Twenty-eight percent of county economies had falling wages, yet their productivity increased in the period analyzed. This is the case for a majority of counties in New Jersey and North Carolina. Another 13 percent of county economies declined on both real wages and productivity over that same period.

"This uneven recovery across county economies contributes to the challenges that counties already confront," said Emilia

Istrate, NACo research director. "Counties face a triple threat from uncertainty around federal policy, from tax reform, and from entitlement reform and appropriation cuts not accompanied by reductions in unfunded mandates. Counties are doing their part under difficult conditions by investing in economic development, infrastructure and providing services.

"County Economies 2015 highlights that it is on the ground at the local level where Americans feel the national economy," she added. "Economic recovery and growth continues to spread, but many county economies are not yet feeling the effects. These opportunities and challenges point to the continuing need for a strong local-state-federal partnership to secure a strong economy."



COUNTY INNOVATIONS AND SOLUTIONS | Coconino County, Ariz.

Rotations Give Promising County Employees Management Perspective

PROBLEM: Looming retirements were revealing possible management vacuums.

SOLUTION: Rotating assignments in different departments gave up-and-coming personnel a wide view of county operations.

By CHARLIE BAN
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Like many organizations, Coconino County, Ariz. looked at its staff and saw more than a touch of grey.

With nearly one-fifth of its county workforce eligible for retirement in the next five years, and much of that predicted in the management ranks, several departments faced serious turnover that could kick off a time-consuming and expensive hiring processes.

At the same time, the county had a talented workforce in place, and many could rise to meet the coming challenges if they just had the right view of what was needed. That particular view included more than just their department.

"They don't get that opportunity when you're in a particular department and function," said Supervisor Liz Archuleta. "It's easy to get tunnel vision doing your job, but our managers need a wider view. We have the personnel

to grow our own leaders, though, if we gave them a chance to grow."

That chance is now the Developing Organizational Talent program, DOT, which places county employees in a year-long rotation, with four-month stops in three departments to give them a chance to see how various components of county government fit together. The first class of two finished their rotations in January 2015.

Richard Baron, a process and project coordinator in the county's information technology department, worked in the human resources and finance department, the county manager's office and the adult probation department.

"That was the first, and hopefully last time I ever wore a bulletproof vest," he said. "I had a moment, when they were measuring me for it, when I wondered how I got into all of this."

He and Public Health Services District Program Manager Jocelyn Beard, were selected from among other applicants by the county manager's executive team. Their departments were responsible for their salaries while they were away.

However out of water Baron was, he got to bring his perspective to the adult probation department and demonstrate the DOT program's immediate benefit for the county — participants lending their expertise to different departments.

"You realize so many departments may be working with the same client but without much coordination," he said. "I noticed that some of the people we made visits to in the probation department were also being helped in other ways: educational assistance, utilities, job training, but it would be easier for them and the county

to have a one-stop shop for all of their needs."

So Baron had a hand in that project. Throughout the year, he estimated that he was part of 35 ad hoc projects, in addition to his duties during his rotation.

His time in the finance office gave him a view of the county budget he imagined few citizens ever saw.

"When you look at the overall county budget, it seems like so much money, but then you learn how much is allocated automatically, so the budget decisions the supervisors have to make are a lot more detailed than you'd expect. Just learning the terminology gave me a new perspective on the county's operations."

His rotation in the county manager's office introduced him to the macro scale of county operations. One of his projects there was coordi-

nation of a United Way campaign. He and Beard were never in the same department, and the two hadn't met prior to the DOT program, but they became friends and worked closely over the year.

Overall, it was a program Baron relished and sure enough, he is eager for the chance to continue his development when management positions open.

"It just exposed me to process improvement outside of the IT realm, plus it was a great way to learn how the county operates. I saw the bigger picture and how different departments relate," he said.

Archuleta anticipates the program will grow in popularity and the county's adoption will resonate with employees. There's no cost, unless someone's position is grant-funded.

"It shows we're investing in our employees, that our employees are an important resources," she said. "We have the county's next leaders already working here. We just have to give them the opportunity."

Baron came back to the IT department and after reclaiming his desk, reflected on the yearlong tour of county administration.

"It's like the Wizard of Oz, going from black and white to color," he said. "I learned in the last 13 months than I would in the typical five year career progression."

County Innovations and Solutions features noteworthy and award-winning programs.



Mental illness isn't a crime, panel says

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

It seemed like a good idea at the time, decades ago: “deinstitutionalizing” the mentally ill from dreary state hospitals in favor of treatment in local communities. But government dollars didn’t follow the patients in sufficient amounts.

All too often, this has led to “re-institutionalization” — out of hospitals and into jails and prisons. The patients of yesteryear have become today’s inmates, and experts say their numbers are overwhelming local jails, driving up corrections costs and, perhaps most importantly, wrongly funneling people with mental health problems into the criminal justice system.

Reversing that trend was the topic of a recent workshop at the Safe and Secure Counties Symposium in El Paso County, Colo. on Dec. 3.

A judge, a jailer and a behavioral health professional shared strategies to decriminalize mental illness that are working in counties around the country — innovative policies and programs that could be replicated in other communities.

Last year, more than 2 million adults with mental illnesses were incarcerated in the United States, NACo President Sallie Clarke said at the event. “Many would not be in jail if they were receiving the care that they need,” she said. NACo and its partners’ in the Stepping Up Initiative are addressing the problem and will host a national summit in April in Washington, D.C.

On any given day, some 360,000 persons with serious mental illnesses are in U.S. jails and prisons, Miami-Dade County Judge Steve Leifman told the audience, and another 790,000 are under correctional supervision outside of jails.

Jail expenses are crippling counties, which spent more than \$70 billion on incarceration costs last year, he said. “I don’t know how you’re going to build another road, a sewer plant, a school or a hospital if we don’t get this under control.”

Cherryl Ramirez, executive director of the Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs, discussed policies and programs that are working in counties in her state. Douglas County, Neb. Corrections Director Mark Foxhall added the jail-and-prison perspective.

Both agree that community resources play a pivotal role in keeping individuals with mental health and substance use disorders out of jails in the first place — through



(l-r) Cherryl Ramirez, Mark Foxhall and Judge Steve Leifman field questions on diverting mentally ill persons from jails during a session at the Safe and Secure Counties Symposium. Photo by Charlie Ban

programs such as mental health courts, crisis intervention training for police and rapid rehousing of homeless mentally ill persons after their release from jails.

Using grant funding, Yamhill County, Ore. (pop. 100,000) hired a community outreach specialist who screens detainees for mental health issues at the time of booking, said Ramirez, who is also the current president of the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors.

This can result in referrals to appropriate treatment rather than jail time. The county witnessed a 12 percent reduction in length of jail stays for persons with “high mental health needs,” in the first six months of 2013 compared the same period in 2011, she said.

Multnomah County (pop. 766,000) has a 911-call Mental Health Transfer Protocol that works with its crisis hotline to route mental health emergency calls to crisis counselors who can defuse volatile situations rather than have police respond which could result in an arrest.

To reduce homelessness as a contributor to recidivism, the county created a Stabilization and Treatment Preparedness (STP) Housing Program in partnership with the county’s community justice and health departments, Ramirez said. STP provides a 24-hour dormitory-style facility with 16 beds, providing males who have mental health issues with short-term, transitional housing upon their release from jail or prison.

All three speakers touted peer support and counseling as important factors in diverting mentally ill persons from jails. The peers are people who are managing or recovering from mental illness or substance use disorders who have prior personal

experience with the justice system. In Douglas County, a certified peer support specialist — a former “frequent flyer” due to recidivism — provides mental health services, Foxhall said.

“We need more people like that to help people who are going through it,” Ramirez said.

Leifman said the fact that community mental health systems are “horribly under-resourced,” is another problem that results in persons with mental health problems landing in jail. He outlined a series of “essential elements” that can help to reverse the criminalization of mental illness — pre- and post-incarceration.

It begins with “sequential intercept mapping,” documenting existing services and gaps in programming where mentally ill persons interact with systems such as corrections, courts and community mental health resources.

Miami-Dade has had success with crisis intervention policing, in which law enforcement officers are taught to recognize different types of mental illnesses, de-escalate mental health or substance-use-related crises and direct troubled persons to appropriate treatment and not the criminal justice system.

Trauma-informed care is also important. Ninety-two percent of incarcerated women with serious mental illness were sexually abused as children, Leifman said. Systems of care need to respond in ways that are sensitive to the trauma they may have experienced. Otherwise mental health issues may continue to flare until the root causes are addressed.

Leifman said at least 50 percent of the mental health population in jails are homeless at the time of arrest and will need supportive housing and employment upon release to lessen the chances of recidivism.

“You can’t expect someone to recover if they leave the jail and

they’re homeless, need supportive employment,” he said. In addition, persons exiting jail need systems

in place to connect them with any public or private benefits, such as insurance, to which they may be entitled. “Without those benefits, they can’t have the insurance to get the services they need, so they’re going to recycle otherwise,” Leifman said.

He also stressed the need for early identification of mental health issues, even in school-age children. In Miami-Dade, primary and secondary school staff receive training to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness in students.

“Why wait?” he asked rhetorically. “Are we waiting for them to get sicker and end up in the criminal justice system, when we know that good services can keep them out?”

(Beverly Schlotterbeck, executive editor, and Charlie Ban, senior staff writer, contributed to this report.)

WORD SEARCH

Buncombe County, N.C. Facts

Learn more about this featured county in ‘What’s in a Seal?’

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- ASHEVILLE** (County seat)
- BILTMORE HOUSE** (Largest private home in the U.S., built by George Vanderbilt)
- BLUE RIDGE** (Range of the Appalachian Mountains)
- BURKE AND RUTHERFORD** (Counties from which Buncombe was created)
- CONTINENTAL DIVIDE** (County lies on western slope of eastern Continental Divide)
- CORN** (Key agricultural crop in late 19th century)
- DESOTO** (Spanish explorer)

- EDWARD BUNCOMBE** (Revolutionary War hero, county's namesake)
- FRENCH BROAD RIVER** (Third oldest river in the world; flows south to north through county)
- MADISON** (Neighboring county to the north)
- MCDOWELL** (East adjacent county)
- THOMAS WOLFE** (Author of Look Homeward, Angel born in county [Asheville])
- TOBACCO** (Commodity that displaced corn as key money crop)

Elder abuse

Analysis: Federal funding to fight elder abuse falls short

By HADI SEDIGH
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Later this month, NACo's Healthy Counties initiative will hold its annual forum for county and community health leaders to discuss ways to improve the health of their communities. This year's forum in Salt Lake County, Utah will focus on the needs of the elderly, including ways counties combat elder abuse.

The following article analyzes the role the federal government plays in this effort.

Federal funding that aids state and local governments' efforts to fight elder abuse through Adult Protective Services (APS) and other local initiatives flows

through three federal programs:

The Older Americans Act (OAA) first became law in 1965, along with Medicaid and Medicare, as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society reforms. OAA is a foundational piece of the federal government's efforts to serve older adults. States must pass OAA funding through to Area Agencies on Aging, 30 percent of which are county-based. While OAA programs are mostly aimed at providing in-home support and nutrition services for seniors, the act was amended in 1992 to establish programs to fight elder abuse.

Despite this change to the law, elder-abuse programs receive a miniscule portion of overall OAA funding. In FY15, when OAA

received about \$1.9 billion in total funding, elder-abuse programs received about \$30 million, or less than 2 percent of total funds for OAA programs. Counties and county-based Area Agencies on Aging may be eligible for certain grants under these programs, but OAA is generally not a significant source of elder-abuse prevention funding at the local level.

The Elder Justice Act (EJA), enacted in 2010 as part of the Affordable Care Act, represents an effort by Congress to provide a funding stream specifically to address elder abuse and support adult protective services (APS) programs, including those operated by counties. However, the level of funding the legislation has received since it was enacted is

negligible and may reflect federal appropriators' current prioritization of elder-abuse prevention efforts.

At its enactment in 2010, EJA authorized \$777 million in funding for the four years spanning FY11–FY14. In that span, the legislation received a total of \$8 million in actual funding; moreover, this funding was not appropriated for the EJA, but rather was transferred from the Prevention and Public Health Fund.

EJA finally received \$4 million in appropriated funding in FY15, and is set to receive \$8 million in FY16. Counties are eligible for grant programs funded through EJA, including a current U.S.

See ABUSE page 9



ABUSE from page 8

Department of Justice grant opportunity that will provide legal assistance and support services to victims of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation, and to promote pro bono capacity building in the field.

Given its authorization levels, the Elder Justice Act has great potential to provide support for local programs that target elder abuse, but until appropriators begin to fund the programs established by the legislation, that potential will far outweigh the act's impact.

OAA and EJA are not the only federal acronyms that play a part in funding local elder-abuse prevention efforts; SSBG, which stands for the Social Services Block Grant, is perhaps the most important piece in this conversation. SSBG is a block grant that provides funding that can be used for nearly 30 different types of services for vulnerable populations, including APS — adult protective services.

SSBG is generally of great importance to counties because in 11, mostly highly populated, states such as California, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia SSBG funding is passed directly to counties to administer social services programs.

In a 2012 survey conducted by NACo and its affiliate, the National Association of County Human Services Administrators (NACHSA), counties from states that administer SSBG locally singled-out APS as the most common use of SSBG funds. Many respondents also stated that SSBG funds are the only federal funds that can be used for county APS programs (the survey was conducted before the Elder Justice Act received any funding).

In a typical response, from Wilson County, N.C., officials state that SSBG is the main funding source for adult services within the 100 county departments of social services in North Carolina. "In fact, most of our counties only use SSBG for adult services because there are simply no other funding sources. Without SSBG funds, our state's ability to provide services to abused, neglected and/or exploited seniors and disabled adults would be crippled to the point that these very services could become almost nonexistent in many North Carolina counties."

In FY16, SSBG is set to be funded at \$1.7 billion. While it is difficult to determine what percentage of these funds would ultimately help counties battle elder abuse, it is clear that SSBG is a pivotal part of counties' efforts to protect their elders.

Financial crime finds victims in aging population

By CHARLIE BAN
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

It could be an offer for mid-grade home repairs. An email that's a little off. An unscrupulous caregiver, which could include an heir.

Financial exploitation is an increasing danger to elders, and counties aim to stop and prevent that and other kinds of abuse.

There's no comprehensive measure of elder abuse. National incidence has not been catalogued since 1998. Definitions of abuse and even applicable age — 60 or 65 — vary among the 50 states. But some data from adult protective services agencies does show an increase in elder-abuse reports.

In Orange County, Calif., adult protective services reported 9,057 unduplicated reports taken in 2014, up from 7,238 in 2011. Over that same time, the proportion of financial abuse cases increased to 31 percent of reports, up from 28 percent in 2011.

Part of that is due to a population that is living longer and the greying of the baby boom generation, but part is increasing awareness and reporting. County adult protection and human services departments, which are most often the local agencies charged with combating elder abuse, recognize that vigilance and observation are key.

"Ninety-nine percent of elders do not self-report abuse," said Ramona Williams, elder-abuse program coordinator in Milwaukee County, Wis. "We hear about it from our 'eyes and ears' in the community."

Montgomery County, Md., for example, recently launched an advertising campaign warning bus riders to look for specific signs of abuse in their friends, family and neighbors.

"People are realizing that protecting against elder abuse is a growing industry," said Mario Wawrzusin, Montgomery County's administrator for adult protective services, assessment and case management services. "Child welfare got a lot of press in the '60s and '70s, and now the people who were making that push are to the age where some of them need someone else looking out for them. Not everyone, of course, but the main thing is that folks are starting to realize this isn't a closet issue."

What is It?

Elder abuse can include physical, emotional or sexual mistreatment by another person. But none offer the opportunity for self-enrichment like financial exploitation.

"Financial bleeds into other types of abuse," Williams said, "Where you see something else happening, there's a good chance they're being preyed on financially, too."

Isolation — which becomes a slippery slope following retirement, friends dying, snow birding and otherwise moving away — only makes elders more vulnerable, so programming to keep seniors engaged and involved in their communities can help

99% OF ELDERS DO NOT REPORT ABUSE

— RAMONA WILLIAMS, ELDER ABUSE
PROGRAM COORDINATOR IN
MILWAUKEE COUNTY, WIS.



fortify them.

The Licking County, Ohio Aging Program maintains an adult day center with an on-duty nurse with a variety of activities common among senior centers. They include topics such as elder real estate law, identity protection and computer literacy. The program also offers services to home-bound seniors.

Financial exploitation is widely believed to be vastly underreported, with a 2000 study estimating that reported abuse accounts for only one of 25 actual incidents. Fraud via social media has accelerated the opportunities for an entire industry of criminals to reach potential victims.

Counties' Ammunition

County human service departments vary in how much they can act on a senior's behalf. Milwaukee County works with police and banks, but cannot independently pursue legal action.

"We can support the investigation, share records with police, but it takes the victim or their legal representative to ask for charges," Williams said.

In contrast, Montgomery County can pursue legal action.

"We share our intakes with police and state's attorneys so we can approach this in a joint fashion," Wawrzusin said.

Montgomery County maintains a monthly meeting of its elder abuse task force, which includes the county's police department, the ombudsman

program funded by the Older Americans Act, adult protective services, licensure and regulatory services, the office of the state's attorney and the office of the county attorney.

"We meet monthly, but we're all on speed dial," Wawrzusin said.

With all of those partners, it's easy to find someone who can do outreach to community groups.

"Everyone brings their own professional prospective, but we always warn about the red flags," he said. "Bruises, changes in behavior, spending changes. Is there someone new in their life?"

According to Williams, prevention of financial exploitation is priceless.

See CRIME page 10

Financial scams pose a serious risk for older citizens

CRIME from page 9

“Our goal is to try to stop the bleeding going forward, but we rarely see any real restitution,” she said. “Sometimes we can work with a perp to refund the money back, but the threshold for white collar crime is pretty high, around \$50,000.”

Wawrzusin agrees. “Once they have your money, it’s incredibly hard to get it back,” he said. “With online schemes, it could be out of the country already.”

He also warned against a pernicious aspect that may subconsciously play into caregivers’ actions. “If someone stands to inherit a lot of money, money that could be drained if expensive care is needed, there’s a little motivation to save,” he said.

The Realities of Aging

The people in the best position to speak up about abuse—the victims—often either don’t or can’t.

“It’s insidious,” Williams said. “They go about their daily lives and if they have early onset dementia, they lose capability without realizing it. It can become a domino effect for so many other health problems.”

Problems like alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness, hoarding.

And volunteering those problems can seem like signing the death warrant for a life they relish.

“The biggest fear is that they’d be on a bullet train to the nursing home,” she said. “That’s a very pervasive thought. They don’t want to reach out for help because if they can’t help themselves, there must be no other choice.”

“Plus, especially at this age, you’re dealing with very stoic people—the ‘Greatest Generation.’ They gut things out; they don’t expose their problems. To many of them, reaching out to the government is the same as going on welfare.”

Milwaukee County works to ease fears of nursing home admission.

“The older someone is, the less you want to do to disturb their situation,” she said. “If we can keep someone in place, we want to do that. You can see someone deteriorate faster, physically and emotionally, [when they leave their home].”

She worries, though, that dementia, while a real threat, is often misdiagnosed.

“Dementia has become the new cancer,” she said. “We need better assessment between mental health and dementia. Make that the last diagnosis, instead of the first.”

TOP 10 COUNTIES WITH HIGHEST 2004-2014 GROWTH RATE OF 65 YEARS AND OLDER POPULATION

COUNTY	STATE	2004-2014 GROWTH RATE OF 65 YEARS AND OLDER POPULATION
SUMTER COUNTY	FL	309.9%
SAN JUAN COUNTY	CO	226.7%
SAN MIGUEL COUNTY	CO	203.0%
SUMMIT COUNTY	CO	193.8%
DOUGLAS COUNTY	CO	187.1%
ALEUTIANS EAST BOROUGH	AK	159.3%
EAGLE COUNTY	CO	152.3%
CLEAR CREEK COUNTY	CO	148.0%
FORSYTH COUNTY	GA	147.3%
BROOMFIELD CITY AND COUNTY	CO	147.1%

Sources: NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Population Estimates Program (PEP), 2014; U.S. Census Bureau - Population Estimates Program (PEP), 2010



Healthy Counties Forum features focus on aging adults

By ANDREW WHITACRE
HEALTH ASSOCIATE

Older adults and the challenges they face will be the focus of a Healthy Counties Initiative forum in Salt Lake County, Utah, Jan. 27-Jan. 29. NACo’s Healthy Counties Initiative hosts an annual forum — this year in partnership with the Salt Lake County Innovation Sum-

mit — to hear from health leaders and engage other county elected officials on important health topics affecting counties.

One session will examine community-level interventions that address the behavioral health needs of aging adults. Among the speakers is National Association of Area Agencies on Aging CEO Sandy Markwood, who will explore the

intersection of behavioral health, older adults and the county system and engage attendees in an active dialogue on county needs and potential solutions.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) plays a critical role in providing services and resources to aging veterans, including needs such as heating assistance and housing. In Salt Lake County,

the VA trains local nonprofits and community organizations to connect aging veterans to VA resources offered. During a mobile tour, Jan. 28, attendees will have a chance to visit a VA center and learn about how the federal agency trains and engages community partners to reach aging veterans.

The forum will kick off with an exclusive Sundance Film Festival

screening and include addresses from DJ Patil, Ph.D., the Obama Administration’s deputy chief technology officer for data policy; Jennifer Pahlka, founder and executive director, Code for America; and Emily Gustafsson-Wright, Ph.D., fellow, The Brookings Institution.

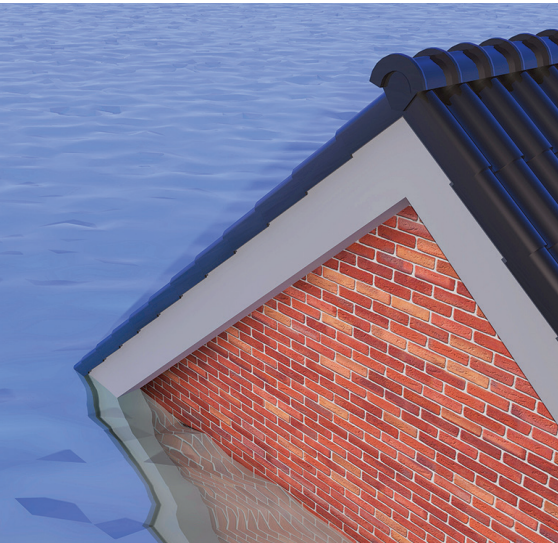
For more information and to register for the forum, visit www.innovationsummit2016.com.

NACo NEEDS YOUR COUNTY’S INPUT

How does your county use flood-risk models, data tools or other resources to address flooding’s impact? If you or one of your county colleagues can provide input, please assist by completing a short survey. The goal is to identify resources that can be integrated into local planning processes to reduce risk and promote overall community resilience.

To help, we ask you to complete this survey by Wednesday, Jan. 27.

GO HERE: [HTTPS://WWW.SURVEYMONKEY.COM/R/FLOODRISKMODELING](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/floodriskmodeling)



Financial Services News

Drop in Energy Costs Nets Benefits...Mostly

By JOEL GRIFFITH

FINANCIAL SERVICES CENTER

With the rout in oil and natural gas prices stretching on for more than 7 months, end users certainly are feeling the benefits. Consumers are enjoying gasoline averages at around \$2 per gallon.

For someone accustomed to filling up once a week, this represents a savings of \$30 per week — more than \$1,500 each year. Furthermore, declining heating and cooling costs and

more affordable air travel benefit all consumers.

More broadly speaking, the decline in energy costs has strengthened the economy in a potentially more important manner. In a globalized economy, U.S. manufacturers compete with producers from regions of the world with far more lax government regulations and a supply of labor far less costly than in the U.S. Our dramatically increased domestic energy supply along with the corresponding shift to lower prices provides our

manufacturing sector a fighting chance to thrive in this global environment.

But despite the broader benefits from this, negative impacts are being felt or anticipated in certain regions and sectors. Each month, the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas releases its Texas Manufacturing Outlook Survey. Index readings above “0” indicate expansion while those below “0” indicate contraction.

In December, the “general business activity” component of the survey sank to minus 20.1, the 12th month of contraction. In addition, the “new orders” component dropped to minus 8.9, for the 11th time in the past 12 months. These indicators suggest the Texas manufacturing sector is experiencing weakness not seen since the depths of the Great Recession.

Of course, many factors other than oil prices are contributing to this weakness. But a review of some of the comments highlighted in the report from factory respondents is enlightening. For instance, a metal fabricating product manufacturer says, “The price of oil is really impacting

our customer base and, in turn, purchases of our product. It is getting ugly.” In addition, a machine manufacturing factory reports, “Weak oil and natural gas prices are having a material adverse effect on our business.”

Although anecdotal, these comments combined with the survey results suggest a continuation of tepid economic growth in the U.S. is quite possible in 2016.

Fortunately, the negative impacts from lower oil prices should be concentrated in states with higher levels of employment related to the oil and gas producing sectors.

A 2015 report by Wells Fargo Securities analyzed data from the U.S. Department of Labor in order to show which states rely most on the oil and gas industry for employment.

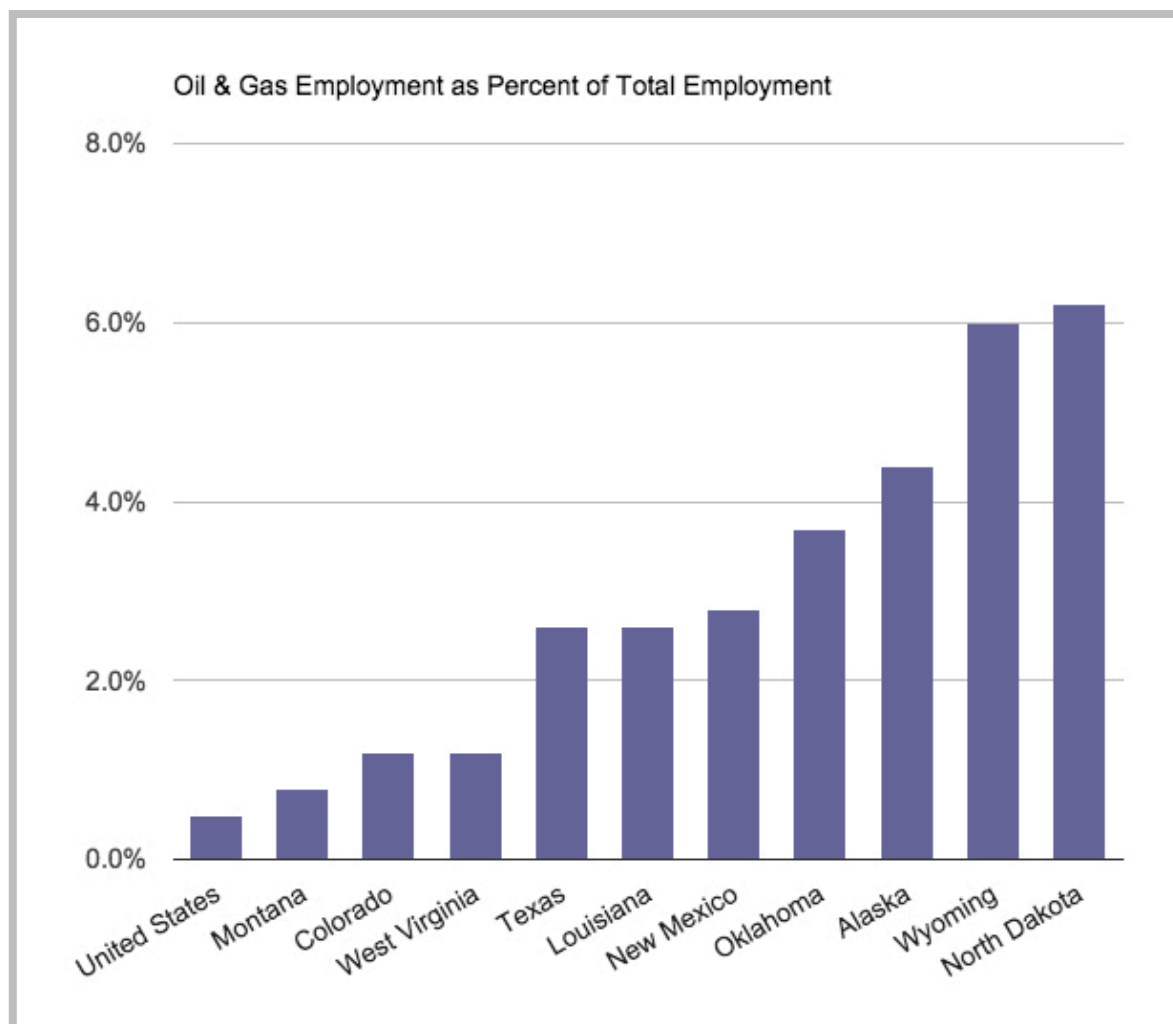
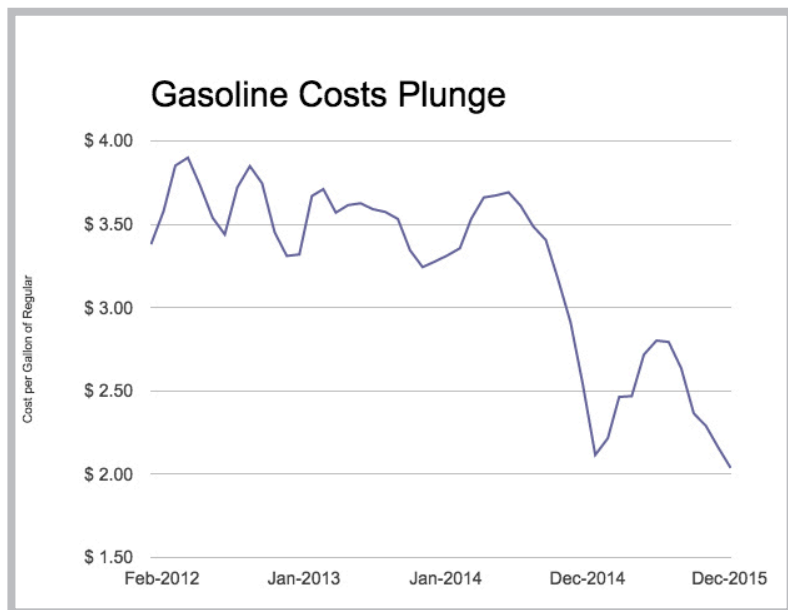
Although only one of every 200 workers across the nation are employed in this sector, nine states at the time of the analysis experienced rates at least twice that high. In these states, the

steep drop in energy prices will likely lead to diminished rig counts, lessened business activity, slashed capital expenditures and slower employment growth.

Financial officers in states and counties with higher dependence on the energy sector should be cognizant that tax revenues may be constrained until a rebound occurs. This demands fiscal prudence and a refocusing on essential government services.

Furthermore, government officials should pursue a taxation and regulatory environment that attracts business development across all sectors—including energy. Fostering a business-friendly climate ensures that opportunities for prosperity will abound regardless of performance of any one industry.

(Griffith is a general program manager with NACo’s Financial Services Center. You may reach him at 202.942.4238 or jgriffith@naco.org)



NACo on the Move

► NACo Officers and County Officials

• NACo First Vice President **Bryan Desloge** represented NACo at the Mississippi Association of Supervisors Mid-Winter Legislative Conference in Hinds County (Jackson), Jan. 5–6.

► NACo Staff

• **Bert Jarreau**, NACo chief innovation officer, was a panelist at the invitation-only CES Government Conference that took place in Las Vegas, Jan. 3–4. He participated in the plenary roundtable panel discussion, “Body Worn, Surveillance and Data Security,” which explored the challenges presented by video and emerging technological capabilities.

• **Akera Gamble** is NACo’s leadership development manager. As part of the conference and leadership development team, she focuses on leadership and professional development content.

Gamble previously worked with the American Camp Association as a professional development specialist.

She received a bachelor’s degree in communications from Old Dominion University and a master’s degree in marketing from the University of Maryland.

• **Michelle Price** will assume project management responsibilities for the NACo Healthy Counties Initiative as the new health program manager. Price began Jan. 4.

Previously, she worked as an associate for Gilbert LLP where she represented nonprofits in the areas of public health, education, women’s and civil rights.

She received her bachelor’s degree in communications from University of Pennsylvania and her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.



Price



Gamble



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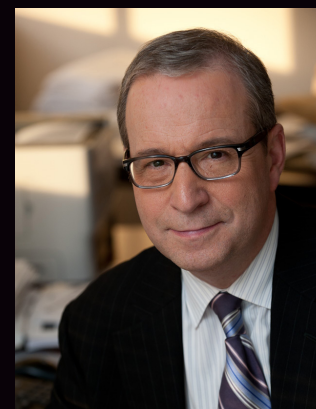
MARRIOTT WARDMAN PARK HOTEL
WASHINGTON, D.C.

FEDERAL POLICIES MATTER TO
COUNTIES
MATTER TO AMERICA



CHRIS WALLACE

Award-winning veteran journalist
& host of Fox News Sunday



RON BROWNSTEIN

Two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist &
editorial director of the National
Journal Group

Money released for Pa., Ill. counties

By CHARLIE BAN
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

After six months without state budgets, Illinois and Pennsylvania have released money to their counties, which had been basically fasting to get by in the interim.

Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf (D) line-item vetoed the budget the Republican-controlled Legislature passed just before Christmas, but released \$3.3 billion in expedited back payments to counties, human services and schools. During the impasse, the state treasury conducted audits of the payments ahead of time, which allowed the 16,400 payments to go out much faster than the typical two-week turnaround following approval.

Doug Hill, executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, said the relief came none too soon. Social services providers for counties have either gone unpaid since July 2015, counties had paid from their reserves or either party had taken out loans to keep organizations afloat.

"There's no telling yet what will happen about the interest counties and their providers will have to pay for the loans they took out," he said. "That will probably be resolved in the fiscal code bill that will have to pass."

Also left unresolved is a mechanism for keeping a state budget impasse from punishing counties in the future. The CCAP considered suing the commonwealth to release the back payments and explored ways of withholding tax revenue.

"We have to be careful to make sure counties are taken care of, in case this ever happens again, while also not making it easier, or okay, for this to happen again."

The Republican-controlled Legislature has remained far apart from Wolf on tax increases to fund schools, though Wolf's line-item veto is an improvement over his wholesale rejection of the first budget in the summer.

"With the primary-filing deadline coming in the middle of (January), and the primary season in April, I doubt we'll see any tax bill pass the House before then," Hill said. "We might end up seeing the Legislature putting together the 2016 and 2017 budget at the same time."

Also left unresolved was Wolf's proposal to begin restoring a \$10 billion cut to county social services over the course of the next three

years. That measure passed the Senate but fell three votes shy in the House.

In Illinois, local governments are beginning to receive some money, from motor fuel tax, emergency service tax, sales tax and gaming revenues.

"It's coming out slowly," said United Counties Council of Illinois Executive Director Michael McCreery. "There's about \$8 billion that's been held up."

Gov. Bruce Rauner's (R) spending bill only releases \$3.1 billion. He is holding up the budgeting process against Democrat supermajorities in the Legislature over changes to workers' compensation and collective bargaining rights.

Full back payment may not come, though, which forced St. Clair County Clerk Tom Holbrook to lay off three elections division workers.

"We're down millions," he said. "This move was predicated on the loss of state revenue, and I honestly don't know if we'll recoup any of it. It's all a ripple effect from the lack of prompt payment."

Staring into the coming primary election season, Holbrook is getting worried.

"We have 160,000 potential voters, and I am down to two clerks," he said. "We're about to have 1,000 elections judges bringing results in that we'll have to count."

Fiscal restraint has been key for McDonough County, west of Peoria.

"We're a conservative county, and when things are bad we tighten our belts a little more," said County Clerk and Recorder Gretchen DeJaynes. "This is on top of keeping office budgets level for three years."

County budget preparation in November was a challenge, too.

The motor fuel tax delay was costly for some counties, said Kelly Murray, executive director of the Illinois Association of County Board Members.

"Lots of counties had to put off road projects and we basically lost a construction season," she said. "Some of the delayed projects that would have been green lighted just ended up being cancelled."

Williamson County sued the state in December for less than \$140,000 in unmet salary reimbursements. That money, the Associated Press reported, would have paid the county's top prosecutor, public defender and supervisor of assessments. Pike County may also sue, the *Journal Courier* reported.

What's in a Seal?

Buncombe County, N.C.



Formed in 1791, Buncombe County, N.C. included most of Western North Carolina, which prompted many to call it the "State of Buncombe." Nine border changes later, it now spreads across 646 square miles on the western slopes of the Eastern Continental Divide. It has its mountains, it has people — Cherokee and European immigrants — but until 1927, it didn't have a seal.

A school contest changed that, and Woodfin Elementary sixth-grader Roy Fox's black-and-white sketch became the standard for the county. His seal was later colorized and the initial inscription, "men to match our mountains," was based

on lyrics to a popular song and altered in 1989 to "people to match our mountains."

The mountain air made Buncombe County an ideal spot for tuberculosis sanitariums.

Buncombe County is now a popular tourist destination, both for its outdoors life and sprawling Biltmore House, built by George Vanderbilt starting in 1890. The workforce necessary to build the largest private home in America brought an influx of skill and artistic talent to the county seat, Asheville. Asheville was also home to Thomas Wolfe, a pioneer in autobiographical fiction.

County Board Clerk Kathy Hughes assisted.



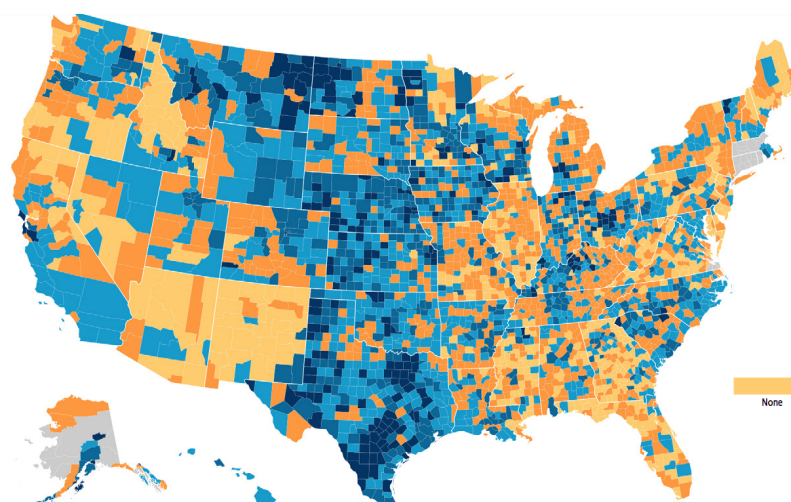
2.5 times more county economies recovered on unemployment rates in 2015 than in the previous year.

214 county economies recovered on all indicators by 2015.

28% of county economies had falling wages, yet their productivity increased between 2009 and 2014.

67% of county economies had rising adjusted wages in 2014.

36% of county economies had declines in economic output (GDP) in 2015.



2015 County Economies Recovered on # Indicators

Source: NACo Analysis of Moody's Analytics data.

www.NACo.org/CountyExplorer

IN MY OPINION

County voices heard at Paris climate summit

BY LARRY PHILLIPS AND BRETT PHILLIPS

(Larry Phillips was a delegate to the United Nations Conference of the Parties for Climate Change (COP21) in Paris representing local governments. He is the immediate past chair of the King County (Wash.) Council, from which he retired last month after 24 years in office.)

Local, regional and state governments played a critical role in the United Nations' Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris, forging — even forcing — a successful conclusion

But public policy alone — be it subnational or international — will not be enough to stem the global threat posed by climate change. Businesses and NGOs alike must also take action, and in Paris they showed great urgency by responding with a cascade of commitments that fueled the negotiations.

The private sector, which has much to gain by transitioning to a more cost-effective and resilient low-carbon economy, was headlined in Paris by business giants Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos who launched the

sions limits — which provides a clear signal to the global financial markets to move away from fossil fuels — the private sector has an unprecedented opportunity to increase its investments in clean and efficient energy solutions. More businesses should, and will, seize the moment.

Similarly, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the nonprofit community have an important role in the climate fight by leveraging their unique ability to build coalitions across the public and private sectors. Here, once again, our Northwest leadership and ingenuity was on display in Paris through the participation of the Seattle 2030 District and its parent organization Architecture 2030, which are moving cities toward carbon-neutrality.

Leadership by these organizations, and partners like them, resulted in the creation and launch of the Global Alliance for Building and Construction which, for the first time in history, is establishing an international framework to scale up climate action in the building sector (the built environment is responsible for more than 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions). Already more than 1,300 building-related climate actions have been launched by Alliance partners.

While the Paris agreement on climate is not perfect, it marks the end of the beginning as the world transitions to a low-carbon economy and future. Nearly 200 countries united in a victory for international policy, plans and most importantly, a path forward to reducing their carbon footprints — shifting to renewable energy alternatives, and using energy more efficiently.

As we move forward “post-Paris,” governments, businesses and NGOs must continue to work together, as they did at COP21, with common purpose around shared goals, strategy and action.

Now the truly hard — but not impossible — work begins: driving forward energy innovations, public policy solutions and incentives, and consumer choices to a new economy. That promise for a better future moving forward from COP21 is the untold story of the Paris agreement: an unprecedented collaboration between local and regional governments, NGOs committed to the task, and, most importantly, commitments from the private sector to invest in smart, clean and efficient energy solutions.

At a time when our politics — both at home and abroad — are increasingly polarized and divisive, it was truly inspiring to see the world establish a mandate for avoiding cataclysmic changes in climate and weather.

Governments must continue to provide the policies and incentives we need to enable transition; businesses must continue to increase their investments in innovation and technology, and NGOs must continue their critical role of advocacy

and thought-leadership. But above all, these groups must move forward collaboratively and decisively with the same spirit and resolve that was witnessed in Paris.

The future of the world is at stake, and there is much to do — so let's get to work!

(Brett Phillips also attended COP2 and is founder and chairman of the Seattle 2030 District, a public-private collaboration to reduce the environmental impacts of buildings in downtown Seattle.)



Then-King County, Wash. Councilman Larry Phillips (l) and his son, Brett, were delegates to the COP21 climate summit in Paris, France. Photo courtesy of Larry Phillips

to the negotiations. Known as “sub-nationals” in the international diplomatic community — they were “superstars” at the conference, represented, in part, by 1,000 locally elected officials from across the globe.

As “first responders” to the escalating impacts of weather catastrophes, they continually pressed the point that we can no longer wait for climate solutions to dramatically reduce carbon loading in the atmosphere.

The cost of lives lost and depleted financial resources are readily apparent to those who must repeatedly respond on an emergency basis to severe weather events and their aftermaths. Doing nothing, for them, is not an option, and they made that plainly clear to those negotiating the final agreement.

King County, Wash.'s contribution to this effort was well-received: our recently updated Strategic Climate Action Plan demonstrated what comprehensive actions are being taken to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Recognized as among the best local plans developed to date, it and many others set the stage for others to follow and act.

multi-billion dollar Breakthrough Energy Coalition which will seed investments in research and development for affordable and reliable clean energy.

This commitment was bolstered by hundreds of global businesses, from Apple to Xerox, which have pledged to significantly cut carbon emissions from their operations and invest in clean-energy technologies. Notably, Google announced during the Paris negotiations that it will power 100 percent of its global operations with renewable energy, making it the largest such purchase in history by a non-utility.

Locally, more than 250 companies have publicly joined the Washington (state) Business Climate Declaration calling for increased investments in a low-carbon future.

These are not philanthropic ambitions. Rather, these actions are an acknowledgment by our most successful business leaders of the pressing need to transition away from fossil fuels in order to secure our long-term economic prosperity. Put more simply: clean and efficient energy is smart for business.

With the Paris accord providing international consensus on emis-

Profiles in Service



Tim Brown

NACo Board of Directors
Senior Planner, Walton County, Fla.

Number of years active in NACo: 1

Years in public service: 25

Occupation: senior planner

Education: MPA, University of Central Florida; B.S., Indiana State University

The hardest thing I've ever done: is returning to work after a 26-day vacation.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Clive Cussler, Bill Clinton and Bill Gates

A dream I have is to: have a comfortable retirement.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: was a paratrooper in the U.S. Army stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: go on a 26-day Pacific Rim trip visiting Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong and mainland China.

My favorite way to relax is: to read.

I'm most proud of: traveling the world.

Every morning I read: the headlines on msn.com.

My favorite meal is: seafood.

My pet peeve is: political correctness.

My motto is: just another day in the trenches.

The last book I read was: *The Solomon Curse* by Clive Cussler and Russell Blake.

My favorite music is: Top 40.

My favorite president is: Bill Clinton.

My county is a NACo member because: of the value that NACo membership provides.

My favorite movie is: *Star Wars*.





News From the Nation's Counties

► CALIFORNIA

• Twenty-one is now the **minimum age for purchasing tobacco** and electronic smoking products in **SANTA CLARA COUNTY**. A law passed by the Board of Supervisors last year raised the age from 18 to 21 on Jan. 1. The county was the first in the state to pass such an ordinance; it applies in unincorporated areas.

A recent report by the Institute of Medicine estimated that raising the minimum age for the sale of tobacco products to 21 will eventually reduce the smoking rate by about 12 percent and smoking-related deaths by 10 percent.

County officials said an estimated 90 percent of tobacco users start before the age of 21, and that roughly 80 percent first try tobacco before age 18.

• **ORANGE COUNTY** will hire a **“homeless czar”** to coordinate dozens of county programs across several departments that target the county’s growing homeless population — a homeless population that rose by 5 percent over the last two years.

Duties will include aligning housing, health and other resources for greater efficiency, KPCC-FM News reported. “State programs don’t talk to federal programs that don’t talk to law enforcement,” said Orange County Supervisor Andrew Do. “Everyone is trying to solve a common problem but only from the limited perspective that they deal with.” He proposed the new position, officially called a “director of care coordinator.”

The employee will make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and chief operating officer on how to reduce end homelessness.

► COLORADO

A state requirement that **new voting systems** be purchased from a single vendor has left **JEFFERSON COUNTY** Commissioner Libby Szabo “baffled,” according to *The Colorado Independent*. Voting equipment in the state’s 64 counties will have to be replaced in the next two years to comply with a 2009 state law.

Szabo and officials from other counties have complained that requiring them to sole-source the equipment isn’t the cheapest option, could violate state law and is fiscally irresponsible. She said it creates a “monopoly” that can charge “whatever they want.”



ROANE COUNTY, Tenn. detectives climb down a mountainside to recover items stolen from a nearby church. Photo courtesy of Roane County Sheriff’s Office.

Colorado’s secretary of state says the new voting systems will cost up to \$9 million, and the state isn’t offering any assistance. Between 2002 and 2006, the federal Help America Vote Act helped counties across the nation to purchase new voting equipment.

► GEORGIA

A state lawmaker wants to **resurrect two counties, MILTON and CAMPBELL**, which were merged into **FULTON COUNTY** in 1931.

Rep. Brad Raffensperger (R) has pre-filed a resolution at the General Assembly calling for a constitutional amendment that would allow voters, by referendum, to recreate the former counties. Georgia’s constitution currently caps the number of counties at 159, *Johns Creek Patch* reported.

Raffensperger said retrocession would give taxpayers “more local control of their policies, taxes and quality of life....”

► ILLINOIS

COOK COUNTY is exceeding its target for **reducing greenhouse gas (GHG)** emissions from its buildings. According to the county’s 2015 Sustainability Report, GHG emissions fell by 11 percent since they were benchmarked in 2010.

This surpasses its target of an 8 percent reduction from 2010

through 2014, and is equal to keeping 20,400 passenger vehicles off of the road for a year, the report said.

Energy efficiency played a major role by updating building control systems and investing in renewable energy technologies, officials said. The report also noted that more the 500,000 tons of building materials have been diverted from landfills thanks to a 2012 county ordinance.

► KENTUCKY

With a stroke of the new governor’s pen, county clerks’ names will no longer be required on state marriage license forms.

Gov. Matt Bevin (R) signed an executive order recently removing the requirement. The order directs the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives to “issue a revised marriage license form to the offices of all Kentucky County Clerks. The name of the county clerk is no longer required to appear on the form.”

The clerk’s signature became an issue when **ROWAN COUNTY** Clerk Kim Davis refused to issue **marriage licenses to same-sex couples** because doing so violated her religious beliefs.

► MARYLAND

• Counties whose first responders helped quell rioting in Baltimore last April will be **reimbursed up to \$1.8 million**

by the city.

ANNE ARUNDEL, BALTIMORE, HOWARD and MONTGOMERY counties responded to riots and looting that erupted after the death of Freddie Gray. He suffered a broken neck while being transported in police custody.

At least one county has declined the reimbursement. **BALTIMORE COUNTY** Executive Kevin Kamnetz said, “The residents of Baltimore County recognize that a strong Baltimore City is key to regional strength and stability, and for that reason, the county will not seek reimbursement.”

• **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** has declared victory in its effort to **end veteran homelessness**, thanks to a \$500-thousand effort to create housing for ex-military personnel in need of it.

The money, appropriated by County Council, was used to house 18 homeless veterans and helped the county find housing for every homeless vet it could identify.

“Montgomery County now has a coordinated and efficient system, which has been developed with our community partners to ensure that every veteran in our county has access to the supports needed to move quickly from homelessness to permanent housing,” Councilmember George Leventhal said.

► TENNESSEE

In **ROANE COUNTY**, **stolen flowers, cases and pieces of headstones** from the Swan Pond Church cemetery were spotted in an area popular for illegal dumping.

Detective John Mayes said the stolen items were found by Roane County Road Superintendent Dennis Ferguson, and it took the help of several different organizations working together to sort the items.

► NORTH CAROLINA

FORSYTH COUNTY will vote on an agreement with Winston-Salem to form a **joint public art commission**. The Winston-Salem City Council approved the agreement Dec. 21.

The public art commission would expedite public art projects for the city, county, and participating towns and villages. Current city and county employees would provide basic administrative support for the commission, which would have nine to 11 members, with Winston-Salem appointing six members and Forsyth County appointing three to five, the Winston-Salem Journal reported.

► PENNSYLVANIA

One of the sweetest deals in Pittsburgh now costs more, now that **ALLEGHENY COUNTY** will **charge fees for events**, like weddings, held at the county courthouse.

For years, the county only received out-of-pocket reimbursements for costs of private events. From 2013–2015, 30 weddings were held at the Grand Staircase or in the courtyard, one of County Executive Rich Fitzgerald’s daughters’ among them. *The Post-Gazette* reported that brief wedding ceremonies during courthouse hours will continue to be free.

Pierce County voters to decide pot-sales area pot sales

NEWS FROM *from page 15*

►SOUTH DAKOTA

Hundreds of millions of dollars could be flowing into parched county treasuries if lawmakers pass a number of **little-publicized bills** that will be considered during the upcoming legislative session, the *Rapid City Journal* reported.

A summer committee of legislators who studied county government generated proposals that include an optional sales tax, a portion of alcohol taxes and requiring cities to reimburse counties annually for a share of judicial and law-enforcement costs. In the latter, cities would have to pay counties for a portion of those expenses equal to the city's share of the county's population.

►VIRGINIA

ACCOMACK and **NORTHAMPTON** counties will establish the Eastern Shore Regional Navigable Waterways Committee to speak on matters related to—what else—navigable waterways.

The committee will include members from both counties, including two members of each Board of Supervisors and three citizen members from each county.

The committee's purpose is to advise the boards of supervisors of each county on how to deal with the Eastern Shore navigation needs, as well as to advise on an appropriate form for the committee's structure and the suggested scope of its duties, according to the joint resolution, passed in December by the Accomack County Board, *DelMarVaNow* reported.

►WASHINGTON

The **PIERCE COUNTY** Council voted to lift the **ban on marijuana businesses** in unincorporated areas. The county will hold an advisory vote to see what residents of unincorporated Pierce County think about lifting the ban.

Voters in the county favored statewide legalization in the 2012 vote. The vote will be held in April and it could cost about \$425,000 if nothing else ends up on this ballot, according to K5 News.

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

The H.R. Doctor Is In God Save the 'King'

Each year I ask the *County News* to reprint the HR Doctor article below, honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is a reminder of the profound impact of the life of Dr. King on America's history as well as its heart and soul.

The treasure of lives like Dr. King's, Nelson Mandela, Gandhi and Mother Teresa, and so many others, represent the spirit of our species searching for improvement and hope. They are our real heroes, far more so than the athletes, actors and politicians we seem to worship. They represent the ideals we need to instill in our children.

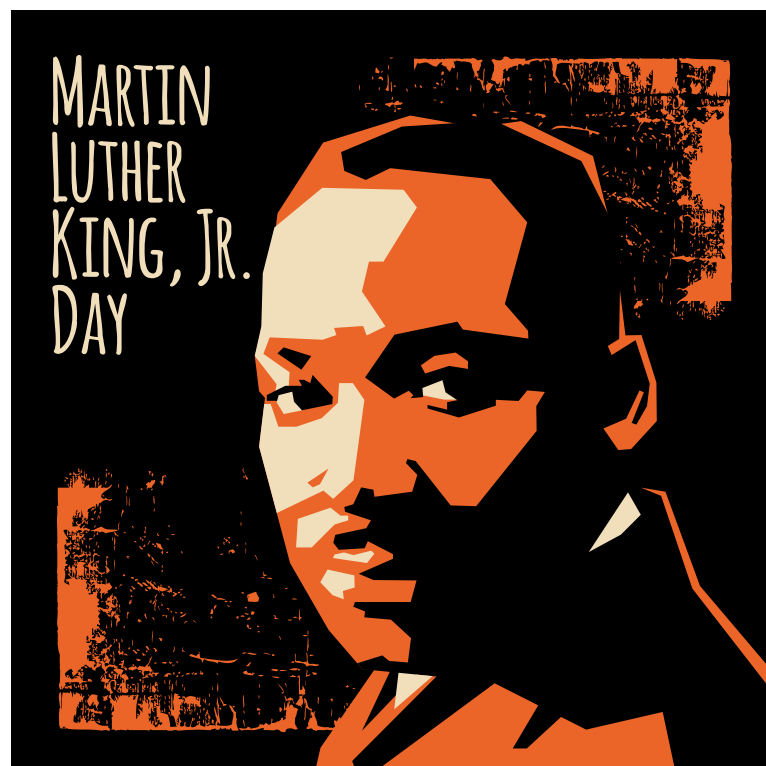
As many readers know, The HR Doctor has visited South Africa repeatedly as well as Northern Ireland for conference presentations and seminars. I witnessed firsthand how incredible it is to see persons split apart amidst religious or racial hatred bridge those artificial chasms and come together for greater achievements. If only that can happen soon in the historic crucible of conflict that is the Middle East.

It reminded me that in a world of caring and smart people, all things are possible. Read on and consider how you can make a difference in your own community and your own family.

God Save the 'King'

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would have been 87 years old this year. Were he still with us, he would have lived through decades of amazing technological changes and the continuing, yet very slow progress in America's search to close gaps and narrow inequalities between races, between genders, between persons of different sexual orientations, and between persons of different language and national origins. He would have seen tens of millions of immigrants continuing to come to America to realize their own versions of the American dream. It is hard to even imagine how much more progress would have been made in creating a great and equitable society if he had been able to continue as a passionate advocate.

Conventional wisdom recounts that his great contribution to the world was in the advancement of civil rights through nonviolence. The HR Doctor, however, will focus in this article on another lesson from Dr. King that all of us as managers and administrators, not to mention as parents, community members, and friends need to learn and practice every day. That is the importance of creating a vision and enlisting others to share in that vision



to help make it a reality.

The greatest weakness in public service, in this writer's opinion, is the narrowness of our vision. We spend too much time counting paper clips and not enough time looking at the long-range vision of what our city, county, country or world could be like. We focus on the memo of the day and not on the momentous changes, which could happen in our world if we only created the opening in thought and action to make these changes happen. Dr. King was able to speak with amazing eloquence about what he saw in his own mind when he went to a metaphorical mountaintop and looked at the "promised land."

That land could be a county or a country in which all people, especially children, had health care coverage and adequate, healthy food. It could be a place in which senior citizens are not prevented from enjoying their final years in dignity because of the cost of prescription drugs, or the lack of health insurance or the scourge of loneliness. It could be a society in which no one dropped out of school or in which the unemployment rate was statistically insignificant.

The only hope for visions like the ones above to become real is to create a view of the future that is so compelling and so articulately presented that persons throughout the society agree to put aside lesser divisions to focus on the higher loyalty, which can be developed toward the common outcome. We have done this historically in times of war, and we have done this historically in times of other national opportunities, such as the mass polio

vaccination program of the 1950s. We do it every day in a sense in commercial America when we create cultural icons or heroes or products, which sell in the millions. If only we could do this in a "micro" way in terms of the way we live and practice public administration day-to-day.

There is no end to the number of positive visions, which can turn into reality if we learn to move with commitment and optimism to make the changes happen.

Here are a few of the HR Doctor's favorites:

1. Make a commitment as a manager or executive in government to be a mentor to subordinates at work and children in the community. Be a Big Brother or Big Sister or a high school mentor. Be a teacher and a champion of the career development and success of others.

2. Find a teacher as well as be one. Commit to learn new skills. Learn to speak Spanish, Chinese or some other second language. Learn to take up hiking or photography, or one of the HR Doctor's favorites, music. Review the previous HR Doctor article to be reminded of the importance of this concept.

3. Commit to personal health improvement by getting a check-up and following through on actions to reduce health risks through regular exercise, weight loss, smoking cessation and other steps to help you live longer and live happier. Do these things and do them soon. While you're at it, take someone with you, such as a colleague at work or a member of the family. It is easier to

succeed in a plan if you have support from an understanding friend.

4. Make a major difference in the community. Be the catalyst to turn that vacant lot into a senior health center. Be a United Way or Rotary Club champion. Be a "go to" person for charities so that your own reputation is enhanced and your own leadership skills are developed.

What better way to improve these personal elements in your life than by also helping other people on the way. There are no shortages of charities in the neighborhood, in the county or in the world that need your help.

5. Spend time with people you care about, including private time with yourself away from the excessive intrusions of the modern world. The HR Dogs, Isibindi and Major, join me regularly, especially in the morning, for this purpose by taking walks together. It's harder and harder to find privacy, meditation — call it what you will — but the more our lives are intruded upon by smartphones, horns honking, telemarketers, loud neighbors, etc., the more we lose some part of the essence of our individuality.

6. Spend more time away from the television and away from the computer to pursue some personal passion.

7. Dream and plan ahead for what your own life may be like after retirement — no matter how young you are. Invest energy in not only saving for financial security but also by taking steps to increase your long-term "intellectual security" as well. Think about things like where and when you might retire, and what active steps, including other employment, you will take to keep alert, alive and contributing.

Do all these things and you will have a significant set of New Year's Resolutions. You will also be walking in the pathway of Dr. King. Each of us individually can make the choice of whether to live our lives surrounded by large piles of paper clips or surrounded by a legacy that will make our children look back at us and say that we stood for something wonderful.

The HR Doctor wishes Dr. King a very heavenly birthday and wishes you all an incredible 2016! I hope you will spend some time reliving the great "I Have a Dream" speech and remembering the power of those words.

Phil Rosenberg
The HR Doctor
www.hrdtr.net