

PRESIDENT BIDEN STRESSES PARTNERSHIP



President Joe Biden addresses county officials Feb. 15 at the 2022 NACo Legislative Conference at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C. Photo by Denny Henry

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

With the American Rescue Plan in one hand and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in the other, President Joe Biden came home to kindred spirits from the start of his political career, when he was a New Castle County, Del. Council member.

Biden addressed the NACo Legislative Conference General Session Feb. 15 with memories from those early days and a vision for the future of the inter-governmental system. He spoke by video in December 2020 to the NACo Board of Directors and attended the 2015 Legislative Conference as vice president.

“I promise I’ll always have you as a partner with us,” Biden said. “The partnership was critical,”

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ROBOTS TO THE RESCUE AT SHORT-STAFFED BUSINESSES

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

It might sound like something out of “The Jetsons,” the futuristic cartoon from the 1960s, but for counties where local businesses are short on staff during the pandemic, robots appear to be the answer, at

least for some restaurants and other businesses.

Walk into almost any eatery these days during the era of COVID-19 and you may be waiting awhile to get a table or flag down a waiter. Signs in the windows say “help needed,”

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Facing a second pandemic: A helping hand for counties from Mental Health First Aid

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

County leaders have told NACo they fear an upcoming “second pandemic” pertaining to COVID-19-related mental health issues that communities are not prepared to face. To help tackle the coming challenges, NACo has partnered with the National Council for Mental Wellbeing to promote the Mental Health First Aid program to help counties deal with mental health challenges in their communities.

Originally created in Australia in 2001 and adapted for use in the United States, the

Mental Health First Aid training program educates participants on how to recognize mental illness symptoms and signs of substance use, how to discuss these complicated issues in the workplace and how to fight back against the stigma around mental illness and seeking help.

The program is designed to empower county officials of all levels, including fire and emergency medical services personnel, law enforcement and school district employees. The council’s five-step program can help county employees address the difficulties of treating mental health, burn-

out and other symptoms. Through the program, participants will “learn risk factors and warning signs for mental health and addiction concerns, strategies for how to help someone in both crisis and non-crisis situations, and where to turn for help.”

With more than 15,000 trained instructors, the council has educated 2.5 million Americans and counting. Instructors focus on teaching the five steps of the program called “The Mental Health First Aid Action Plan.” The five steps are;

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Biden addresses Legislative Conference attendees



NACo President Larry Johnson, DeKalb County, Ga., welcomes President Joe Biden Feb. 15. Photo by Denny Henry

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he said, in crafting the American Rescue Plan's regulation delivering funding to every county in the country and in helping pass the bipartisan infrastructure law. Both, he said, will have lasting consequences for counties and the nation as a whole.

"We made sure that \$65.1 billion of that went straight to the counties," he said. "I know how much it matters, it really matters, giving you the ability, the flexibility, the control to meet both the short-term and long-term challenges you face."

Biden served as a New Castle

County Council member from 1971-1973 until he took office in the U.S. Senate.

He urged county leaders to use both pieces of legislation at the same time to achieve better outcomes.

"You don't have to wait until the project starts, you can use the resources from the American Rescue Plan now," he said, referring to extra spending flexibility awarded to counties by the legislation's Final Rule for implementation. "You're going to need welders, pipe fitters, advanced manufacturers ready to take on those [infrastructure] jobs and it takes training to do

those jobs well. Start by building pathways to better jobs. Like Maricopa County in Arizona, where they're using American Rescue Plan funds to help young workers develop in-demand technical skills. They know what the county is going to need."

He tracked the progress the United States has made in vaccinating the population against COVID-19 and stressed his belief that the challenges Americans have faced and solutions they forged will all lead to a step forward for the country.

"We're the only country in the world that whatever crisis we've

gone through, we've ended up on the other side better off than where we were before we had the crisis," he said.

"We are the United States of America," he said. "There's nothing, I mean this from the bottom of my heart, there's nothing beyond our capacity. There's nothing we cannot do if we do it together. It's always been who we are."

While he noted several indicators' reports that the economy was making a rapid comeback from the pandemic-influenced recession, Biden stressed the need to make sure all Americans have the chance to advance and thrive economically, which he said his proposed Build Back Better legislation — which stalled in the Senate in 2021 — would enable.

"Families are getting clobbered at the cost of everyday things," including childcare, automobiles, prescription drugs, gasoline and other consumer goods, he said. "I'm going to work like the devil to bring gas prices down. We're going to

keep working to strengthen the supply chain and bring the cost of every good down, particularly food and automobiles."

For many families, the precarious balance they once maintained was no longer viable with new situations for their family members.

"We have a so-called 'sandwich generation,' and if you are part of it," he said, "you're trying to take care of your children, while taking care of your aging mom or dad. We can help make it work."


Although he criticized the prices charged by pharmaceutical companies and suggested they could be successful with price controls, he told the audience he was a proud capitalist.

"I think you should be able to go out and make a million or a billion dollars given the capability. But just pay [taxes], a little bit."

The revenue from the various funding mechanisms in Build Back Better, he said, would go to programs that would ultimately make higher corporate tax rates moot.

"When middle-class folks do well, there's never been a time the wealthy don't do very, very well, he said.

But the most crucial link Biden made between county governments and the future of the republic came not from any funding proposals or federal programs. It was from his anecdotes about serving in local office, where he was a phone call or an encounter in a grocery store away from the public. That credibility, he said, will perpetuate people's faith in representative government.

"You're there, representing the frontlines of public service, that's not hyperbole," he said. "We need your voices of county officials, helping us folks understand what our communities need." 

SNAP/STATS BEST RURAL PLACES TO LIVE



Wallowa County, Ore.
Fergus County, Mont.
Edwards County, Ill.
Lincoln County, Wash.
Iron County, Wisc.

Source: 2021 U.S. News Healthiest Communities

Supreme Court considers local issues mid-term

by Lisa Soronen

The Supreme Court's docket is full for the 2021-22 term. The SLLC Supreme Court Preview for Local Governments summarizes a number of important cases for local governments.

The issue the Supreme Court will decide in *Shurtleff v. City of Boston** is whether flying a flag on a flagpole owned by a government entity is government speech. If it is, Boston may refuse to fly a Christian flag.

Boston owns and manages three flagpoles in an area in front of City Hall. Boston flies the U.S. and the POW/MIA flag on one flagpole, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts flag on another flagpole and its own flag on a third flagpole. Third parties may request to fly their flag instead of the city's flag in connection with an event taking place within the immediate area of the flagpoles.

Camp Constitution asked the city to fly its Christian flag while it held an event near the flag. The city refused its request to avoid government establishment of religion.

The First Circuit held that

flying a third-party flag on a city hall flag pole is government speech, meaning the city didn't have to fly the Christian flag.

In *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District**, the Court will decide whether the First Amendment protects a high school football coach who, joined by students, prayed after football games.

According to Joseph Kennedy, his religious beliefs required him to pray at the end of each game. Students eventually joined him as he kneeled and prayed for about 30 seconds at the 50-yard line.

When the school district found out, the superintendent directed Kennedy not to pray with students. After widely publicizing his plan, Kennedy announced he would pray after a particular game even if students joined him. He was ultimately put on administrative leave and didn't apply to coach the next fall.

The Ninth Circuit held that Kennedy had no First Amendment free speech right to pray because he was speaking as a "government employee" rather than as a "private citizen." And even if he was speaking



as a private citizen, the Ninth Circuit held the district could prevent him from praying because of Establishment Clause concerns.

The question in *Vega v. Tekoh** is whether a police officer can be sued for money damages for failing to provide a Miranda warning.

Terrance Tekoh was tried for a sexual assault. At trial he introduced evidence that his confession was coerced. A jury found him not guilty. Tekoh then sued the officer who

questioned him, Deputy Carlos Vega, under 42 U.S.C. Section 1983 claiming Vega violated his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination by not advising him of his Miranda rights.

The Ninth Circuit held Tekoh could bring a Section 1983 case. According to the Ninth Circuit, following Miranda there was much debate over whether Miranda warnings were "constitutionally required."

Interestingly, all three cas-

es present issues which could arise at any local government on any day.. The Court will issue opinions in all of these cases by the end of June 2022.

**Indicates a case where the SLLC has or likely will file an amicus brief.*

Lisa Soronen is executive director of the State and Local Legal Center (SLLC) files Supreme Court amicus curiae briefs on behalf of the Big Seven national organizations representing state and local governments.

Short-staffed businesses are turning to collaborative robots or 'cobots'

From ROBOTS page 1

some restaurants close early due to staffing shortages and some eateries promise signing bonuses for new employees. It's all part of the great staffing shortage due to the pandemic.

The numbers back it up: The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the restaurant industry lost 4.1 million people between July and November last year.

In Collier County, Fla., Brooks Burgers purchased a \$15,000 robot that works 15 hours a day and can handle three tables at a time, according to WINK-TV.

Denny's, a national restaurant chain, has robots working at some of its locations, clearing dirty dishes and delivering food to customers. Evan Smith, manager of a Denny's in Lackawanna County, Pa., told the *Standard-Speaker* that "some people think it's replacing serv-

ers, but it's more of a helper than a replacement."

At Eat District in Palm Beach County, Fla., where 4,000 jobs need to be filled in the leisure and hospitality sectors, a restaurant called Eat District

"hired" Bella, a robot that can greet customers, seat them and even sing "Happy Birthday," according to WPTV-TV.

In addition to serving food and clearing tables, restaurants are also using robots in the

kitchen and to clean restrooms.

Some call these kind of robots collaborative robots or "cobots," because they are working alongside humans.

In Maricopa County, the community college is helping

advance this type of robotics. "Robots have been around for years, but cobots in maybe the last five years or so have really started taking off," Ken Hackler, program director of Automated Industrial Technology at Mesa Community College, told Arizona Education News Service.

Robots have been used in a variety of ways across the country including:

- In Somerset County, Pa. to track pollution sources.
- In Brevard County, Fla. to build 3-D printed residential homes.
- In Pima County, Ariz., robots are being used in classrooms to boost STEM learning.
- In Delaware County, Pa., Robbie the robot helps workers dish out 130 meals each day at a senior living center.
- In Pennington County, S.D., the county's special response team uses a robot for high-risk situations. **CN**



HISTORY OF U.S. PRESIDENTIAL AND VICE PRESIDENTIAL PARTICIPATION AT NACo EVENTS



Gerald Ford meets with county officials.



Bill Clinton meets county officials.



Mary Ann Borgeson greets Donald Trump.

<p>1959 Vice President Richard Nixon attends first Urban County Congress Caucus in Washington D.C.</p> <p>1964 President Lyndon Johnson hosts NACo members on the White House South Lawn</p> <p>1969 President Richard Nixon addresses Annual Conference</p>	<p>1975 President Gerald Ford addresses NACo Legislative Conference</p> <p>1974-1977 (exact date unknown): President Gerald Ford hosts NACo members at the White House</p> <p>1979 President Jimmy Carter addresses Annual Conference</p>	<p>1980 Vice President Walter Mondale attends ground-breaking for new NACo HQ</p> <p>1981 President Ronald Reagan meets with NACo's Black Caucus at the White House</p> <p>1982 President Ronald Reagan addresses Annual Conference</p>	<p>1982 Vice President George H.W. Bush speaks at the Legislative Conference</p> <p>1982 Vice President George H.W. Bush cuts ribbon at the opening of NACo HQ</p> <p>1991 President George H.W. Bush signs proclamation establishing National County Government Week, with county officials in the Oval Office</p>	<p>1993 County leaders meet with President Bill Clinton at the White House</p> <p>1995 President Bill Clinton addresses Legislative Conference</p> <p>1996 President Bill Clinton addresses Legislative Conference</p> <p>1997 Vice President Al Gore addresses Legislative Conference</p>	<p>2001 Vice President Dick Cheney and Mrs. Lynne Cheney address Annual Conference</p> <p>2003 First Lady Laura Bush addresses Legislative Conference</p> <p>2011 President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden meet with county officials at White House</p>	<p>2015 Vice President Joe Biden addresses Legislative Conference</p> <p>2020 President Donald J. Trump addresses Legislative Conference</p> <p>2021 Vice President Kamala Harris address Annual Conference</p> <p>2022 President Joe Biden addresses Legislative Conference</p>
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Buttigieg: 'We need to be on time, on task and on budget' with infrastructure dollars

2022 NACo
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SPEAKERS



Transportation Sec. Pete Buttigieg talks with county officials Feb. 14 at the NACo Legislative Conference. Photo by Denny Henry

by Mary Ann Barton
editor

Transportation Sec. Pete Buttigieg told county officials Feb. 14 that everybody has a role to play when it comes to making use of the historic \$1.3 trillion infrastructure bill President Biden signed into law in November.

"The great risk with any deployment of taxpayer dollars is the risk of not seeing \$1.3 trillion of value delivered to the American people," he said in a conversation with NACo President Larry Johnson, a DeKalb County commissioner, at the General Session.

"So, what does it mean to actually make sure that happens?" Buttigieg asked. "Well, we've got to be on time, on task, on budget, with all of these programs."

It will be "critically important" for counties to speak up about their infrastructure priorities, he said.

"Please make sure, when you see anybody from the Department of Transportation, to get to know them, because they are the connective tissue that are going to help you interface with us as a department," he said.

Buttigieg noted his department's role: "It's going to be critically important for us to be user-friendly in helping you apply for those funds." Johnson asked about strategies DOT plans to use to be user-friendly with counties.

"First of all, we're just trying to make the process a little bit simpler," Buttigieg said, adding that with implementation of the new infrastructure law, DOT is creating about 40 new programs.

"And one of the things that we realize, of course, is that you don't have the staff to navigate 40 different application processes for 40 different programs."

Buttigieg said his depart-

ment is going to try to have a common Notice of Funding Opportunity. "Basically, the equivalent of, you know, the Common Application for college applications."

"The bottom line is, we need to have a better front door for local government trying to get

**"I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE
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ING TO BE ABLE TO
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TOGETHER."**

things," he said.

If a county is encountering a roadblock to accessing funding for infrastructure projects, "there are ways for local governments to come directly to the department, if there's something that you don't think is getting enough attention through the regular formula process," Buttigieg said.

Johnson also asked how the

Transportation Department can help rural counties, which oftentimes do not have the resources to access funding that's available to them.

"Yeah, so this is very important," Buttigieg said. "And we're doing it in two ways. Dedicated programming for rural communities. So, think of the Routes Program, for example, and definitely get to know that program, if you haven't already."

"We're going to go out of our way to make sure that there are adequate levels of support that can't just get gobbled up by the bigger pool," he said.

Buttigieg put in a plug for rural counties to take a look at electric vehicles and electric vehicle infrastructure.

"Even though there is this kind of traditional cultural attitude about EVs, that we're talking about luxury vehicles for zipping around cities, and they can be. But one of the biggest opportunities for EVs

is rural, for the simple reason that rural drivers have longer drives," he said.

"What a lot of people in rural America don't realize is you already have charging infrastructure; it's called the plug in your home. Right? If you have a single-family home, and you happen to have a garage, or a carport, you've got charging infrastructure right there at your house," he said.

"I think as the pickups come on the market, and people see that they have superior towing and torque, and you can power your shop tools, then people are going to get more excited about it. I think just the commercials on the Super Bowl did more for this than I ever could. But I'm mentioning this because I want to make sure it's understood how big of an opportunity it is."

"I can't wait to see what we're going to be able to deliver working together," he said. "So, thank you, in advance." **CN**

Cornyn reaches across the aisle to help counties



Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) speaks to county officials Feb. 14 at the 2022 NACo Legislative Conference. Photo by Denny Henry

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

Comparing the impact of the coronavirus pandemic to the “domestic version of World War II,” Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) told county officials Feb. 14 that it was one of the reasons why he co-sponsored legislation to give counties more flexibility when it came to spending Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act funding.

Cornyn made his remarks during the Feb. 14 General Session. He noted that legislation he crafted would help counties struggling to spend the \$5 trillion in COVID rescue funding authorized in March 2020.

Counties faced a Dec. 31, 2021 deadline to spend their share of CARES Act funding or must have had a contract in place by that date to spend it

by September 2022.

“If you had told me previously that I would have voted for \$5 trillion worth of funding for anything, I would’ve thought you had lost your mind,” he said.

“The COVID-19 pandemic stressed our communities,” he said, revealing greater challenges yet to overcome. “Americans knew what we had to do at all costs: Stop the spread of COVID. One of the ways Congress aimed to stop the spread is by releasing rescue funding.

“You’d have to go back 100 years to really have anything comparable from a public health standpoint,” he noted.

Cornyn saw the struggles counties endured trying to respond to the crisis. He proposed legislation to solve the problem, reaching across the aisle to work with Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Calif.). Together

they crafted the State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Fiscal Recovery, Infrastructure, and Disaster Relief Flexibility Act, one of the few bills to pass unanimously in the Senate in some time.

The bill gives counties much needed flexibility in how they respond with CARES and American Rescue Plan Act funding by extending the spending deadlines if unspent aid is used for eligible infrastructure projects.

“I reached out to my friend and colleague, Alex Padilla from California, to create a third option and that is to allow you to spend the money you have if you have access to funds that can’t be spent for already identified purposes, to spend it on necessary infrastructure projects,” Cornyn said. “We all know that infrastructure is something that is not just here today and gone

tomorrow. It’s a long-term investment in our economies, and our communities.”

The bill would allow counties nationwide to use a total of over \$27 billion for new transportation and infrastructure projects and over \$17 billion for government services.

The bill is awaiting a vote in the House, and NACo passed an interim resolution in support of its passage hours after Cornyn spoke.

Crafted in the original bill are “guardrails” to ensure communities spend COVID rescue funds responsibly. Cornyn and his colleagues, in addition to adding more ways to spend the funding, are still set on ensuring the funds are spent correctly. It was important to Cornyn, he said, that the new flexibility did not come with mandates on spending but was not too lax that communities could spend the

funding in less effective ways.

He encouraged communities to spend the funding for natural disaster relief and infrastructure investments in addition to the already allowed uses.

“You know the needs of your community best, and you should have the flexibility to spend this money where it will do the most good,” he said.

Cornyn has served at all levels of government, gaining firsthand experience in the challenges communities face. He noted that county leadership during the pandemic provided valuable insight into the needs of the community which helped Congress respond with haste. “Your work and advice and counsel is invaluable to us in Congress, because we know we can’t solve problems if we don’t have an accurate picture of what the need actually is,” he said. **CN**

Environment and economy go hand in hand, says EPA Administrator Michael Regan

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

To foster community growth, economic development and environmental restoration, the Environmental Protection Agency needs partners like county officials to help craft meaningful policy, said EPA Administrator Michael Regan, Feb. 15 in an address the General Session audience.

“Believe me when I say that I understand that EPA actions can either help or hurt local efforts,” he said, “and it’s critical that we have a shared working relationship. You know your communities better than the federal government ever could and that makes our partnership essential.”

“Environmental protection and economic development are not mutually exclusive; they actually go hand in hand,” he noted.

The EPA is ramping up brownfield restoration funding and projects with an emphasis on community partnerships, he said, emphasizing that partnerships with community leaders is vital to iden-

tifying the most critical infrastructure improvements and restoration opportunities.

“Thanks to the bipartisan infrastructure law, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to turn brownfield sites all across this nation into economic engines,” said Regan. “This is a game changer in terms of our ability to empower local communities, large and small, urban and rural, to address the long standing, environmental, economic and health challenges created by brownfields.”

The EPA is creating opportunities for counties to invest further in water infrastructure, he said.

Acknowledging the struggles of counties on the frontlines of fighting climate change impacts, lead pipes and crumbling infrastructure, Regan said the EPA will release \$7.4 billion in 2022 to state revolving funds and for the next five years to come to help fix water infrastructure.

Regan heralded Newark, N. J. for their work in partnership with Essex County to remove 100 percent of all known lead

pipes, a complicated and expensive undertaking completed in 36 months instead of the original eight-year plan. “We can replicate those efforts in communities all across the country by working together,” Regan said.

Regan and his efforts with the EPA focus heavily on the

importance of partnership with communities, educating county leadership on opportunities both currently available and upcoming through funding releases and competitive grants, as well as the importance of making long-lasting investments from American Rescue Plan and Infrastruc-

ture Investment and Jobs Act funding.

“The implementation of the infrastructure law calls for strong partnership,” he said, “and the EPA is not only ready, but we’re excited to work with our local partners to ensure that all communities see the full benefits of this investment.” **CN**



Michael Regan addresses county officials Feb. 15 at the NACo Legislative Conference. Photo by Denny Henry

USDA seeks to grow circular economy in rural areas

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Making a dent in rural poverty will mean making sure extraction industries make less of a dent in the land and new industries start building there.

When minerals and natural resources leave, they also take away some of an area’s prosperity, and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, in his second stint in the position, wants to see that change.

“At the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we’re looking for ways to develop what is called a ‘circular economy,’ in which wealth and new opportunities and jobs are created in rural communities and stay in those rural communities,” he told the General Session audience Feb. 14.



USDA Sec. Tom Vilsack speaks to county officials Feb. 14 at the NACo Legislative Conference. Photo by Denny Henry

“An extraction economy is one that essentially takes things from the land and off the land, but rather than converting them into valuable and rural communities, that value is transported elsewhere and so too are the opportunities and jobs.”

“We’re focused on incentiv-

izing and encouraging the circular economy to be the more prevalent economy rule areas across the United States.”

That strategy could involve expanding processing capacity or embracing climate-smart agricultural practices, both of which could grow the employ-

ment base in rural areas.

USDA will coordinate partnerships with between 25 to 30 communities in eight to 10 states, tribes and territories, pairing them with federal staff dedicated to helping communities find the best programs to support their rural growth efforts.

“We can create a stronger pipeline between communities in need in federal programs to assist them,” Vilsack said.

The department has already announced plans to commit \$1 billion of American Rescue Plan funding to expand independent meat processing capacity through loan guarantees. On top of that, a total of \$375 million in grants will provide gap financing to jumpstart independent processing projects.

“Both workers and producers

now will need to invest in workforce development components in order to build a pipeline of well-trained workers and support safe workplaces with fair wages,” Vilsack said. “All of that’s involved in our effort to enhance processing.”

Vilsack also touted plans to bolster carbon sequestration efforts on working agricultural land, which could be lucrative for farmers.

“As we embrace climate smart agricultural practices, we open up a whole new vista of opportunity for farmers to be paid for carbon sequestration for things that they’re already doing and we’ll do in the future,” he said. “In a number of ways, USDA is also targeting our existing programs to focus on voluntary incentive-based climate solutions.” **CN**

DOI deputy touts IJA benefits for public lands

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

In his second stint at the Interior Department, now-Deputy Sec. Tommy Beaudreau feels a tremendous responsibility to help counties face their current challenges.

He previously served as chief of staff to Sec. Sally Jewell during the Obama administration.

Those challenges include

results and we want to deliver for the people we serve.”

He described the programs financed by the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act, including \$28.1 billion to help states plug orphan oil and gas wells and recover abandoned mine lands, restore critical habitat, address drought through water delivery infrastructure, assist with wildfire management and help communities prepare for extreme

weather events. billion for water and drought resilience, water efficiency, recycling and rural water projects.

“These are the types of projects that are possible with this once-in-a-lifetime investment to help communities navigate the broad range of funding available to the president’s bipartisan infrastructure law, we need to work together on technical assistance and providing a guideline and handbooks for how to access these funds.”

He said the Interior Department will be in contact with state, county and local governments and other stakeholders regarding the practical considerations of accessing grant funding and provide project support.

“We want to work with you on how to provide technical assistance to access this funding,” Beaudreau said.

“This is a major conversation happening right now across the federal family, and with our state, local and tribal partners, we do not want any communities left behind.” **CN**

“Something we all have in common is that we care about results and we want to deliver for the people we serve.”

drought, wildfire, crumbling infrastructure and devastation from extreme storms.

“These are national-level challenges that defy political boundaries and yet, every county feels the stress and needs to have the resources to serve their constituents,” he said during the Feb. 14 General Session.

“Something we all have in common is that we care about

weather events.

“There’s no better feeling than to be able to give these communities a shot in the arm, and we’ll be doing it every year for 15 years thanks to the bill,” he said.

Addressing wildfire risk in the West will include \$1.5 billion for forest restoration, fuels management and post-wildfire restoration activities across the National Park Service and \$8.3



Deputy Interior Secretary Tommy Beaudreau describes the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act’s benefits for public lands counties during the Feb. 14 General Session. Photo by Denny Henry

ARP stewards: Tell the true story of county use, recovery

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The officials in charge of the American Rescue Plan’s implementation returned to NACo in the wake of the act’s final rule, which allows greater flexibility in the use of the \$65.1 billion that counties received.

they ignored the high demands that you are facing on the service side in light of COVID and previous disinvestment and, most of all, they’ve not seen the incredible things so many of you are doing.”

Sperling stressed the importance of communication between counties and the Biden



Gene Sperling speaks to the General Session audience Feb. 15. Photo by Denny Henry

Gene Sperling is overseeing the plan’s administration and Jacob Liebenluft is the chief recovery officer and counselor for Treasury Sec. Janet Yellen. The pair spoke successively to county officials at the Feb. 15 General Session during NACo’s Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. They both stressed a need for communication, with regard to both how the stimulus is working on the ground and the allowable ways the money can be spent.

“I think we all need to make sure that we are telling the story of what is actually happening on the ground,” Sperling said. “There is a shallowness in some of the elite media reporting of the state and local plan — they look at a few states that have surpluses that are giving tax cuts and they decide with no homework, with no investigation, that maybe all of this wasn’t needed. They ignore the dramatic revenue loss that you face, they ignore the degree that you face underinvestment and deep austerity after the Great Recession because the federal government did not give the adequate resources,

administration because there is no precedent for allocating stimulus money directly to every county, rather than using states as intermediaries.

“We had to listen and listen and listen,” he said. “I think you hopefully see and agree that we listened and adjusted, even in the final rule.

“If you asked us what was the one word we heard from everybody here, Democrat or Republican, was flexibility. Over and over again, each city and state concurred in its own unique way [that they] needed significant flexibility, and we listened.”

Liebenluft outlined some of the important flexibilities added in the final rule, which was released in early January:

- Replacing lost revenue, particularly allowing a flat standard allowance of \$10 million
- The flexibility to calculate revenue loss on either a calendar-year or fiscal-year basis
- Making services like affordable housing, childcare and others eligible to a broader use by a broader group of house-

See **RESCUE PLAN** page 27



Tracy Stone-Manning, director of the Bureau of Land Management, addresses NACo's Public Lands Steering Committee Feb. 12. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Bureau of Land Management chief outlines restoration, conservation, economic benefits

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

In her first in-person remarks since being confirmed director of the Bureau of Land Management, Tracy Stone-Manning laid out her priorities for the BLM Feb. 12 to NACo's Public Lands Steering Committee.

She led with the transformative effect she sees the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act having on public lands counties.

"It's a once-in-a-generation investment that will come to every corner of America, [touching restoration], commercial development and the climate crisis while creating good-paying jobs, advancing environmental justice and boosting local economies by delivering really long-awaited investments," she said.

Efforts to limit and mitigate the damages caused by "orphaned" oil and gas wells,

abandoned by defunct companies, will get help from \$1.1 billion on its way to states, with \$4 billion total allocated over 10 years.

"Millions of Americans across the country live within a mile of an orphaned oil or gas well," Stone-Manning said.

"They're polluting our backyards, recreation areas and public spaces across the country," she said.

"The historic investments to clean up these hazardous sites will create good-paying jobs, catalyze economic growth and revitalization and reduce dangerous methane emissions."

To address wildfire risk resulting from drought, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides \$4.5 billion over five years. In 2022, the Interior Department will invest \$407 million in wildfire management and \$900 million to restore wildlife and ecological habitat.

"Of course, there's a seat at

the table for county governments," Stone-Manning said. "We can put [Good Neighbor Authority] to use for our land and communities in this bill."

She pitched the America the Beautiful initiative to an audience that has voiced skepticism of the 10-year nationwide voluntary campaign aimed at conserving and restoring 30 percent of the country's land and water by 2030, with efforts from several federal agencies.

"We've all seen what this looks like — voluntary conservation programs on working

lands that not only increase ecological health, but at the same time raise the bottom line for the producer," she said.

"Forest restoration that fixes fish habitat but also delivers cold water downstream. Wetland restoration that brings marshes back to life, as well as their natural ability to filter clean water."

The Interior Department is working on the American Conservation and Stewardship Atlas to measure and create a baseline to build on conservation and restoration efforts.

The BLM will accept written feedback through March 7 and the first edition will be published at the end of 2022.

In other BLM-related news: Grazing costs will not increase in 2022.

The agency will pursue outcome-based grazing policies, which will welcome more collaboration from and offer more flexibility to livestock operators.

The agency will gather a record number of wild horses and burros from overpopulated herds and double fertility control treatments. **CN**

2022 NACo
**LEGISLATIVE
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**POLICY RESOLUTIONS
COVERAGE STARTS ON
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U.S. economy will rely more on immigrants

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Though immigration has become a flash point in American politics over the last decade, it will likely be what fuels the economy within 15 years.

That's Julia Gelatt's analysis, which she delivered to NACo's Immigration Reform Task Force Feb. 13 as part of a panel discussion on the immigrant workforce.

The last decade has seen the lowest population growth since the 1930s and drops in immigration played a big part in that. Though the U.S. birth rate has already been in decline, the immigrant population was only 500,000 per year in the 2010s, compared to twice that in the 1990s.

"Despite what we've heard about the border lately, the unauthorized immigrant population has been growing more slowly," said Gelatt, a senior policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute. "We've seen fewer unauthorized immigrants more recently, during the Trump administration. We saw declines in some types of immigration — there were fewer foreign students coming in, fewer refugees coming in, but again, you know people com-



Miriam Enriquez, deputy assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, updates NACo's Immigration Reform Task Force on the Biden administration's federal immigration policies Feb. 13. Photo by Denny Henry

ing as permanent immigrants — that number was fairly steady."

But relative to the U.S. birth rate, the migration will be more consequential.

"The Pew Research Center estimates that any future growth in our working age population will come from immigrants and their children, so immigration is going to be really key for sustaining or ideally growing our working age population," she said. "We need

more workers whose work and whose tax contributions will help support retirees."

Immigrants experienced higher unemployment than U.S.-born workers (16.4 percent to 14 percent) in April 2020 at peak unemployment, but in 2021 the United States was still seeing roughly 1.1 million fewer immigrants in the workforce compared to before the pandemic.

"This raises a lot of questions

about how many of the U.S.-born, and also foreign-born workers, will rejoin and help to fill the labor shortages that we're seeing in some parts of the country," she said, "and how much future immigration will also play a role in filling some of those gaps."

Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, policy counsel at the American Immigration Council, focused on three areas of the U.S. economy with the most job open-

ings where immigrants play an outsized role in the labor force.

- health care and social assistance positions, where one in six workers is an immigrant (in 2019), including 38 percent of home health aides, 28 percent of surgeons and physicians, 16 percent of registered nurses and 22 percent of nursing assistants
- professional and business services
- accommodations and food services

"As many of you know, especially in areas in within rural counties, in rural hospitals, immigrant workers are enormously important, especially those... coming in from countries like the Philippines," Reichlin-Melnick said. "We've seen how they're really important."

Processing backlogs, largely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, have caused huge shortages and in December, it was estimated that there are 10,000 nurses who are outside of the United States whose last step needed to come to the United States and start working is just a single visa interview at a consulate. The Biden administration has begun lifting some future requirements to speed along this process. **CN**

DOT intends to prove itself with infrastructure rollout

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The U.S. Department of Transportation knows it has an image to change as it implements the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, after already defying the odds to pass a bipartisan bill.

"We're the dog who caught the car," said Will Rasky, DOT special assistant for governmental affairs. "What's in front of us right now is the opportunity to deliver ... on time, on task and on budget. That has not been the calling card of U.S. infrastructure projects for a number of years, and we believe we can get back to that again."

Part of that will be ensuring the federal government can get



Will Rasky, special assistant, government affairs, Department of Transportation, speaks Feb. 12 to the NACo Transportation Steering Committee. His DOT colleague Emily Schweninger stands to his right and committee chair Liz Hausmann is seated between them. Photo by Hugh Clarke

funding down to the local level and forming an almost symbiotic relationship with states, he said Feb. 12 to members of NACo's Transportation Steering

Committee.

Rasky said part of DOT's communication with the National Governors' Association included beseeching them to

make sure local governments were part of their discussions to maximize the impact of their funding. That effort should benefit from 40 new discretionary grant programs with more precisely tailored funding.

Equity will play a major role in funding, Rasky noted, because for too long, many communities have felt overlooked by infrastructure investments.

"We have to make sure that we're using every level of power we have across the administration," he said.

But paramount in the Biden administration's transportation priorities is road safety. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg announced the National Roadway Safety Strategy in January, which provides practical steps to systemati-

cally reduce avoidable traffic deaths and injuries.

"It sounds maybe fantastical or over the top, but I think the point is to establish the understanding that we don't accept roadway fatalities as something that is acceptable," said Emily Schweninger, a DOT senior policy advisor.

"I feel like safety is this fundamental principle...it crosses a lot of different sectors; it also crosses a lot of divides and approaches."

That approach, she said, would be holistic and in cooperation with different levels of government, without being too prescriptive.

That said, she suggested there was a simple solution.

"There's so much that can be done by slowing down." **CN**

LUCC members talk drug epidemic, expanding electric vehicle infrastructure



Rahul Gupta, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, addresses LUCC members. Photo by Denny Henry

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

Discussion of the drug epidemic and electric vehicles took center stage Feb. 13 at NACo's Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) meeting.

On the drug front, more than 100,000 died from drug overdoses in 2021, the first time that has happened in a 12-month period in U.S. history, said Rahul Gupta, director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy.

Two-thirds of those deaths were related to fentanyl.

"When I was an ER physician, there were weeks and months when I couldn't go a single shift without reversing an overdose," said Gupta, a former county health commissioner for Kanawha County, W.Va.

The numbers of drug overdoses have only risen, he not-

ed, as those in need lack access to substance abuse resources.

"The truth is, that whether we're working at a local, state level, federal level, we all have to work together, we all have a role to play," he said.

Gupta said he and the Biden administration are tackling several priorities moving forward to reduce the number of overdose deaths.

The first is to expand the availability of naloxone to treat drug overdoses.

As it stands now, in most cases when someone overdoses on drugs, "your ZIP code defines whether you get to live or you get to die," he said.

The next focus is expanding treatment capacity by battling stigma as it is one of the sharpest deterrents for seeking aid.

"Every single life is valuable and is worth saving," he said.

LUCC members also heard a panel discussion on the lat-

est about electric vehicles and what counties will need to do to help expand the use of electric vehicles.

As more funding heads to states and counties for EV infrastructure to meet the national push for half of all vehicles sold in the country to be EVs by 2030, counties will have

the opportunity to rapidly expand their EV infrastructure.

The funding opportunities present "an important legislative victory that will bring massive new resources into our energy and transportation systems to modernize them in service of efficiency, convenience, reducing carbon

emissions and many other important changes," said Sasha Mackler, executive director of the Energy Project at the Bipartisan Policy Center.

States can designate areas as "alternative fuel corridors," where EV infrastructure will be prioritized.

The goal is to have a high-speed charging station every 50 miles along the alternative fuel corridors, which are eligible for the first round of \$25 million of federal funding.

"Electrification by itself will not produce the target reductions that we need in order to achieve our greenhouse gas reduction goals," said Stephanie Pollack, deputy administrator of the Federal Highway Administration.

She emphasized the need for additional infrastructure and cultural changes to build more bicycle and walking paths. **CN**



Stephanie Pollack, acting administrator at the Federal Highway Administration, speaks to LUCC members Feb. 13.

Photo by Denny Henry

New drug czar previews Biden administration plan

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Lost amid the undulating COVID-19 infection and death charts was a grim milestone in the United States' battle against the opioid epidemic.

In the 12 months ending April 2021, the country saw 100,000 overdose deaths.

"That means that an American is perishing from an overdose every five minutes, around the clock," Rahul Gupta told the Rural Action Caucus Feb. 13. "We're talking about the tip of the iceberg."

Gupta, who was confirmed in November as director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, reflected on the grim odds, but pivoted toward a chance for optimism. The ONDCP coordinates a budget of \$40 billion across 18 different federal agencies.

"As we're facing this serious challenge, we also have a unique opportunity to address this problem head-on, to create a treatment infrastructure like never before," he said. "But we have to work together on the local, state and federal

levels. We can't get this done otherwise."

The Biden administration is preparing to release its inaugural drug control policy, and Gupta gave a few hints as to what it would include:

- Increased availability of Naloxone, which can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, noting that two-thirds of overdose deaths happened in situations where Naloxone would have helped.
- Standardized data-keeping to measure the problem and progress, because overdose data isn't captured the same

way in all situations. "We have to start holding ourselves accountable. We've done it with strokes and heart disease. Data will help us figure out where to concentrate efforts."

- Cracking down on illicit finances of organized crime involved in drug trafficking. "We have to go after those who finance drugs. We need new authorities to go after transnational organizations."
- Meeting people where they are, including offering harm-reduction services and removing barriers for treatment

- Fighting stigma. "Not getting help when you need help," is a surefire way to grease the rails for continued opioid abuse and dependency. This includes making treatment easier to find.

"Every life is valuable and worth saving," Gupta said. "You can see on [a map that illustrates overdose rates] that there are a lot of communities that are suffering through overdoses and overdose deaths. We have to create a treatment infrastructure because believe me, it isn't there today." **CN**

Counties reflect on election law changes

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Though talk of changes to election laws resounded throughout 2021, actual legislation kept pace with earlier years, without a spike in lawmaking that would have matched the buzz.

"After all of that attention there really were the same number of bills enacted on elections materials as in previous years, so it did not turn out to be a blockbuster year in terms of election legislation," said Wendy Underhill, director of elections and redistricting at the National Conference of State Legislatures. "Most of the laws were kind of in line with what we've seen over 20 years."

The end result was three more states with all-mail voting plans, increased digitization of registration, stiffer voter ID laws and new early voting schedules.

"What was new and different was that there was a lot of attention on the details relating to absentee voting," Underhill said. "Details became important in a way they haven't been before."

- The attention included:
- Drop boxes: Where can they be located?
 - Collection laws: Who can pick up ballots?
 - Deadlines: Your ballot must be received by Election

Day or it can be received afterward, if it's been postmarked by Election Day.

"Last year, there was philanthropic money that flowed to local election officials," she said. "This year, there were laws saying that will not be permitted in the future."

Under the static trend on the national level for election legislation, the Arizona Legislature saw a lot of action. More than 150 bills were proposed, with 33 passing, 23 that were bipartisan.

"I count that as a huge win," said Aaron Flannery, Maricopa

County, Ariz.'s recorder. "But I can't celebrate just yet because 2022 is here and right now the Senate government is meeting and I'm nervous."

Lisa Schaefer, executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, gave voice to a universal frustration that while the state Legislature passed expanded no-excuse absentee voting in 2019, there was no provision allowing counties to process and verify ballots ahead of Election Day.

"We caught it probably in January 2020 and spent the

next 10-11 months trying to get the legislature to give us more time to do that," Schaefer said. "They allowed us to start at 7 a.m. on Election Day, but you're talking literally tens and hundreds of thousands of ballots."

Given the demand for absentee ballots because of the COVID-19 pandemic, that left counties sprinting to do that work on Tuesday morning and warning that results would change dramatically Tuesday night when they scanned the results of the ballots.

"God bless all of the election

directors in Pennsylvania, because they went through an awful lot in 2020," she said. "We are really fortunate in our association that when we talk about election policy, we very much focus on the administration of the election. There are a lot of things that our members don't agree on," so the focus remains on the logistics of how counties will execute the election laws and if they have the resources that they need to be able to make the law happen.

Ricky Hatch, auditor and clerk in Weber County, Utah, saw pressure come down on a widely beloved universal mail voting system.

"Many, many legislators approached us and they said, 'Look, I totally trust how your county does things, but so many people are coming to me and they're so insistent that I have to do something.' And that's what we're hearing across the country, 'We've got to do something.'"

Utah's county clerks met with legislative leadership to create their own bill that enhances election integrity and preempts all of the other bills.

That bill established a voter registration database audit, which would verify that that system has not been altered from the approved system that the Elections Assistance Commission tested and certified. **CN**



Lisa Schaefer, executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, describes the challenges placed on county election workers by the state Legislature, which didn't allow counties to verify absentee ballots until Election Day 2020. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Local capacity-building tops rural development agenda



Xochitl Torres Small, undersecretary for rural development at the USDA, makes a point during remarks to NACo's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee Feb. 12. Photo by Denny Henry

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The Biden administration will focus its rural development agenda on capacity-building, moving away from one-off projects to a more intentional approach.

Xochitl Torres Small, undersecretary for rural development, told NACo's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee Feb. 12 at the 2022 Legislative Conference that rather than giving rural counties the money to buy what they need, like fire engines, Agriculture Sec. Tom Vilsack would rather help grow a county's tax base so it can make its own purchases.

"Without that local capacity, all rural development has is money in a room – it's your vision, and more importantly your work, that turned that into good, reliable internet, safe roads and good drainage, health care clinics and more," Torres Small said.

The goal is to first understand the visions that communities have, and then work with partners on the ground to find the right ways to support that vision, she noted.

"We're an agency with terrific potential and resources, but the trick is to make those resources flexible, so it's less like having to walk into a bank and put together your portfolio and pick the exact right thing to apply for, but more like be-

ing in your backyard, working on a project and your neighbor knocking on your door and saying 'Hey, I see you're working on this, do you want to borrow any of my tools?'"

Torres Small said the wishes and plans forged by communities should guide development efforts

"They say that in rural development, you can build a town from the ground up, but it's the people who do that," she said. "Rural development works not to build towns out of thin air, but to be there to support people who want to turn their vision, for their own home, into a reality."

Foundational support will be crucial in making that happen, and identifying and filling in gaps that prevent a community from reaching its full capacity, whether that is programmatic support, funding, traditional infrastructure, broadband connectivity or more.

She touted the Re-Connect program, which combines grants and loans to fund broadband expansion.

"If you're rural, you haven't just heard of a kid who's sat outside a Taco Bell to turn in their homework, you know that kid. Maybe that kid is your kid," she said. "You haven't just heard about an elderly person who is trying to get to their health care appointment but can't drive anymore. You know that person who'd really benefit from tele-health." **CN**

Voting officials warn of looming paper shortage

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

Supply-chain issues could impact the paper — the ballots, envelopes and inserts — that county election officials will need for the November 2022 elections, a panel of election officials warned Saturday, Feb. 12.

In addition to supply-chain issues, the paper industry has reported they are also contending with tightening capacity and a labor shortage.

"There's not only the paper shortage, but the cost of the paper," said Aaron Flannery of the Maricopa County Recorder's Office, who took part in the panel discussion about elections at a meeting of NACo's Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs Steering Committee.

Tammy Patrick, senior advisor of elections for the Democracy Fund, warned that any elections office ordering paper in late summer for the November election "may not get it."

Ben Hovland, commissioner, U.S. Election Assistance Commission, who moderated the discussion, asked panelists about other trends they are seeing on the elections landscape.

"We have seen a weaponization of elections," said Patrick.

In Lycoming County, Pa., where Forrest Lehman has directed elections and registration for the past seven years, he said he continues to see a segment of the population obsessed with the 2020 presidential election. He has seen a shift, he said, in how the public engages with his office.

"When they call our office, they're already deeply suspicious about whatever it is they want to know...there's no benefit of the doubt anymore," he noted. "There's 'something going on,' and they want to get to the bottom of it."

"And we have to talk from that place," he said.

"With respect to public outreach, we're still playing catch-up. We're taking increasingly arcane and bizarre questions about election processes, driven by cable news and by social media.

"We're trying to correct the record one voter at a time."

In Maricopa County, Flannery noted they are also combating misinformation and have launched a website dubbed "Just the Facts," to do just that.

Other challenges for election officials include security issues, unfunded mandates from states and federal lawmakers and a shortage of poll workers.

Patrick offered a checklist of

ways counties can prepare for the 2022 election:

- Don't assume things are running smoothly with your election office. Check in with your election officials — "they're in dire need of help."
- Make sure people who will be mailing in their vote have options to get their vote in. "We know one in three Americans will get their ballot in the mail. We want to make sure those voters have return options."
- "There's going to be such a challenge around new laws, litigation and redistricting."
- Make sure you are "cutting through the din" with facts and information.
- Look for large facilities that can serve as a voting place. "Everything old is new again — we are in dire need, when I talk to election officials, of facilities that can accommodate the distancing that is still required. We don't know what November is going to bring."
- Election offices are also in need of poll workers. "Think about whether you have any sort of civic duty leave for employees to take; it's a great resource."
- Patrick also noted that the Department of Justice offers grants for security issues and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency offers free risk assessments. **CN**



(Far right) Forrest Lehman, director of elections and registration for Lycoming County, Pa., makes a point Feb. 12 as (l-r) moderator Ben Hovland, commissioner, U.S. Election Assistance Commission, Aaron Flannery, government affairs, Maricopa County Recorder Office and Tammy Patrick, senior advisor of elections for the Democracy Fund look on. Photo by Denny Henry

County officials hear about next-gen 911 centers, role of ‘hero behind the headset’

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

“When 911 fails, people die,” said Maryland State Sen. Cheryl Kagan. “It’s literally life or death.”

Kagan (D), who spoke Feb. 12 to members of the Telecommunications and Technology Steering Committee, is passionate about the issue of 911 and safety. When 911 systems are overloaded, not functioning properly or are struggling due to staffing issues, residents pay the price.

Kagan has been part of the efforts to renovate 911 systems in Maryland, providing much-needed assistance to dispatchers, giving residents the ability to text if they are unable to call 911 as well as bolstering and reshaping funding capabilities for NG911 programs.

“In August of 2020, all 24 counties in Maryland all went live with text to 911,” she said.

Kagan spoke of the critical



Maryland state Sen. Cheryl Kagan talks about changes made to the 911 system in her state with members of NACo’s Telecommunications and Technology Steering Committee. Photo by Denny Henry

importance of supporting the “courageous women and men under the headset” who are constantly dealing with potentially horrifying situations that they must calmly navigate with little

recognition or appreciation. The men and women who work such difficult tasks are only acknowledged when they make a mistake, Kagan noted. Stress caused by the position often prompts

them to leave, she said.

In Maryland, dispatchers are called “911 specialists” and they are provided with mental or behavioral health support which helps support the employees

and their mission.

Another component to protecting the integrity of the 911 system is strong laws with adequate repercussions. Swatting, TDOS and DDOS attacks are all techniques that either waste emergency service resources or prevent systems from functioning properly.

Kagan said Telephone Denial of Service and Digital Denial of Service are attacks designed to swamp services with overwhelming numbers of calls or connections, slowing down vital services. Swatting is the process of making a serious false claim with the police for a home to be invaded by a SWAT team. Some have died due to this increasingly common occurrence.

Kagan encouraged county officials at the meeting to visit their county dispatch center to familiarize themselves with the technology and get to know the “heroes behind the headsets.” **CN**

Collaboration with providers key to healthcare challenges

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

During one of the first sessions of the 2022 Legislative Conference, NACo members discussed ways to create lasting partnerships to overcome healthcare challenges linked to incarceration, equity and financial difficulty.

“The Medicaid program is the central tool of counties in our role as administrators and operators of local health systems and safety systems,” Nick Macchione, San Diego County’s director of health and human services, told a NACo Health Policy Steering Committee meeting Feb. 12.

Counties are gatekeepers of the nation’s healthcare system as fiscal partners, owners and administrators of 843 hospitals, 758 long-term care facilities, 750 behavioral healthcare care authorities and nearly 2,000 local public health departments, he noted. Counties are “essential primary implementers and innovators of healthcare programs and services.”

The NACo Medicaid and Indigent Subcommittee, of which Macchione is a member, has identified several ways to better support county residents:

improving equitable access to services expanding the availability of services and improving Medicaid flexibility by partnering with various state and federal agencies to create programs tailored to local needs.

By investing in partnerships with providers, bringing them up to the standards of Medi-Cal (Medicare) and working to identify individuals entering the justice system who should not be there, counties can reduce their operating costs and better serve the community, he noted.

Macchione discussed the situation in San Diego County, how the county managed to network with Medi-Cal (California Medicaid) and the state to provide higher quality service and reduce operating costs of existing county programs by breaking the cycle of continually treating at-risk residents.

“One out of 13 San Diegans has a substance abuse prob-



Nick Macchione, San Diego County’s director of health and human services, discusses how counties can make improvements to healthcare Saturday, Feb. 12 at the NACo Legislative Conference. Photo by Hugh Clarke

lem,” said Macchione. The county had to invest money into the agencies and providers to bring them into Medicaid compliance and build a network of support. While expensive and time consuming, in the long run the program saved taxpayer dollars and provided a better service to the community.

Chatham County, Ga. Commissioner Helen Rose said their journey to create behavioral crisis centers began four years ago with a petition for state-level

support. Of their \$280 million budget, over half goes to sheriffs, jails and courts. Frequent offenders often are at or below the poverty line with zero access to healthcare. Without support, these individuals will fall back into the system, continually using expensive resources not suited to their needs.

To modernize their system, Chatham County uses a behavioral crisis center or diversion center to put those who would otherwise enter the justice sys-

tem into a facility that better suits their situation as well as provide better resources to the ones that need it most. Rose mentioned the importance of the NACo Stepping Up Initiative, which launched in May of 2015 aiming to help counties reduce the number of mentally ill residents incarcerated in county jails. Without the proper institutions in place, law enforcement and criminal justice systems are swamped with problems they are not designed to handle. **CN**

One answer to pandemic's mental health toll: The arts



Panelist Gen. Nolen Bivens, president and CEO for Americans for the Arts, takes part in a panel discussion Feb. 13 about how the arts can promote healing for county residents experiencing behavioral health challenges. Other panelists are Dr. Gayle Jordan-Randolf, medical director at Aetna (left) and Dr. Jill Sonke, director of national research and impact at One Nation/One Project Initiative. Photos by Denny Henry

by Mary Ann Barton
editor

Gene Downing delivered a powerful original poem Feb. 13 at NACo's Legislative Conference. He calls it, "A Time to Heal."

The poet ambassador for D.C.'s Free Minds Book Club is a former prisoner who served 27 years for his crimes.

He wrote his poem specifically for the group of county officials from the Healthy Counties Advisory Board and the Arts and Culture Commission, who gathered to hear about how the arts can help heal those who have suffered trauma in their lives.

Downing said that his art form – writing – helped him heal from his experience.

Loudoun County Supervisor Phyllis Randall, who introduced Downing and a panel of experts, noted that "as a therapist in the prison system, I know what many will do with a second chance."

County officials across the country are seeing how the

pandemic has affected constituents experiencing higher levels of anxiety.

According to the Pew Research Center, one-third of adults report at least occasional sleeplessness and anxiety during the week a survey was conducted last year.

During Sunday's discussion, moderator Dr. Gayle Jordan-Randolph, medical director of AETNA, asked panelists: "What does art mean to you and how does it impact your life?"

Dr. Jill Sonke, director of national research and impact at One Nation/Project Initiative, kicked off the discussion, offering the audience a personal story.

At age 55, after the pandemic began, she said she picked up a guitar and began singing every day, making it part of her routine.

"I started playing every day after Zoom calls. It became a deep necessity during the pandemic. It's a new stage in life. I feel like I had understated joy and play and expression. I'm



Gene Downing delivers a poem Feb. 13 to members of the Healthy Counties Advisory Board and the Arts and Culture Commission.

astounded at this stage in my life to have a relationship with an art form that's nothing less than transformative."

Panelist Gen. Nolen Bivens, president and CEO for Americans for the Arts, said he is not particularly artistic, but has three children whose work all involves the arts.

He wanted to clear something up that audience members might be wondering: "What is a general doing in the arts?"

"I was looking for an answer

to a problem," he explained. He told the audience how a conversation during a hearing checkup at Fort

Hood in Texas changed his life. The technologist told him how veterans would often weep and cry during their exams.

"She got my attention at that point."

"People who look healthy but have wounds inside ... they have too much pride, that's the culture of the military," he said.

"I ended up on the doorstep

of the arts. That's where I saw there was an opportunity for young men and women to take up the arts and heal."

"The arts are truly an asset to our nation – the security of the nation is at risk."

In the audience was Butte County, Calif. Supervisor Debra Lucero, who sees that the arts can also help in counties suffering traumatic events such as hurricanes or wildfires.

Her constituents suffered through the Camp Fire, which burned down 14,000 homes and 5,000 businesses.

"We are now suffering the trauma of mental health, with 7,000 people on a waiting list for services, some of those mental health services," she said.

She proposed to the room that counties create memorandums of understanding with arts agencies and mental health agencies to deploy mental health professionals and artists to "give us hope and inspiration" and serve as "second responders" after traumatic events. **CN**

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Virtual Hill Briefings

Members of Congress take county advocacy online

Congresswoman Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.), chats Feb. 15 with Sublette County, Wyo. Commissioner Joel Bousman. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

by **Charlie Ban**
and **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writers

With COVID mitigation strategies precluding annual Capitol Hill rallies, NACo members went online Feb. 15, touching on the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program (PILT), the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy (MIEP) and efforts to combat intergenerational poverty.

Public lands

Things looked good, from Rep. Liz Cheney's (R-Wyo.) perspective, that the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program would be fully funded in the coming omnibus appropriations bill.

"Every indication that we've seen is that there is bipartisan support to continue the funding," she said. "We've got to make sure that [counties have] a way to pay for some of the most important fundamental services."

She criticized federal forestry policies that hamstring local timber receipts and lead to more fuel for wildfires.

"One of the challenges that we're facing in terms of fires across the country, I think there

is disagreement about what's causing them and disagreement about what we need to do to fix it," she said. "I believe that it goes back to healthy forest management. It gets back to not being in a situation [we're in] because of government regulation."

Her Unshackle Act, with a companion bill introduced by Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), bundles five bills that take aim at the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which among other things, would prevent "venue shopping" in NEPA litigation.

Cheney said H.R. 6435 was promising for public lands counties because it would make technical corrections to the Secure Rural Schools reauthorization, including ensuring counties could allocate funding to law enforcement patrol, search and rescue operations on federal lands, community wildfire programs and broadband access in schools.

Medicaid

Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) spoke about his bipartisan efforts to continue Medicaid coverage through adjudication, pointing to his insight as a hepatologist showing him just how much

shouldering the burden of hepatitis care could cost county [or parish] jails.

"An American should not be denied a right just because they have been put into a jail," Cassidy said. "End of story, you are innocent until proven guilty."

To tackle the apparent violation of constitutional rights, Cassidy and Rep. David Trone (D-Md.) proposed the Due Process Continuity of Care Act, which would remove the exclusion policy, provide grant funding for states to restructure their systems and offer grant funding to increasing the level of care available in the jail system.

The current policy, Cassidy said, forces costs and coverage of inmate medication and treatment onto the community, losing Medicaid discounts and the federal cost share and forcing inmates to deviate from what had been successful regimens on their medication, which exacerbates behavioral and mental health issues in jail.

Any increase in the cost of Medicaid coverage, he argued, would be offset by cost to individual justice systems. Cassidy said 40 percent of inmates have a chronic illness, 44 percent have a

mental health disorder and most are not addressed while being detained. The bill has NACo's support, along with the Major County Sheriffs of America and the National Sheriffs' Association.

"If you've got somebody on a stable medical regimen, you can continue that," he said. "They are more likely to do better. They're more likely to be well and therefore less likely to cost additional dollars in the long term."

In a recorded message, Trone described the difficulties that come with holding so many people before trial without proper medical coverage. More than two thirds of all inmates in local jails are pretrial inmates with higher rates of mental health conditions and substance use disorders, he noted.

"The sudden absence of stabilizing treatment exacerbates the pretrial detainee's health problems and also leads to rearrests and increased recidivism," he said.

Trone hopes the Addiction and Mental Health Taskforce's 140 members will successfully promote policy to help combat addiction and mental health issues. The taskforce has submit-

ted 70 bipartisan bills, so far.

Intergenerational poverty

Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) sees the COVID-19 pandemic as an inflection point and a chance to reform a broken approach to addressing poverty.

Calling the existing approach an "uncoordinated and seemingly sometimes uncaring bureaucracy," he said, "we have an opportunity to invest strategically in reshaping the way that our states and local communities and local service providers help families overcome intergenerational poverty."

Heinrich has introduced several bills since 2015 tackling the issue and will co-sponsor the Two-Generation Economic Empowerment Act with Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), which would better coordinate existing support systems and funding streams to create a more cohesive structure. It would also allow state, tribal and local governments to test out innovative ways of using federal antipoverty resources.

Taking a cue from an earlier

See **ADVOCACY** page 27



NACo members stand as a color guard procession makes its way to the stage at the Opening General Session March 2 at the NACo 2020 Legislative Conference.

2022 NACo
**LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE**
— IN PHOTOS

ALL PHOTOS
BY DENNY HENRY
UNLESS NOTED



Eagle County, Colo. Commissioner Kathy Chandler-Henry and Weld County, Colo. Commissioner Steve Moreno talk Feb. 15 at the General Session.



Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif), addresses NACo members.



Tazewell County, Ill. Board Chairman David Zimmerman attends the First-Time Attendee Orientation Feb. 12.

L-r: NACo First VP Denise Winfrey, President Larry Johnson, Second VP Mary Jo McGuire and Immediate Past President Gary Moore pause for a photo.
Photo by Lana Farfán



Dauphin County, Pa. Commissioner George Hartwick catches up with Ramsey County, Minn. Commissioner Toni Carter Feb. 14.



NACo President Larry Johnson (left) greets Chatham County, Ga. Commissioner Bobby Lockett Feb. 14 at the NACo Board meeting.



(L-r) Fremont County, Colo. Commissioner Dwayne McFall, Fremont County, Co. Commissioner Debbie Bell and Archuleta County, Colo. Commissioner Warren Brown greet fellow NACo members at the General Session Feb. 15 of the 2022 NACo Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C.



Tarrant County, Texas Judge Glen Whitley and Palm Beach County, Fla. Commissioner Melissa McKinlay pause for a photo. Photo by Lana Farfán



Clayton County, Ga. Commissioner Felicia Franklin and Johnson County, Iowa Supervisor Royceann Porter greet each other Feb. 15 before the start of the General Session.



Arapahoe County, Colo. Commissioner Carrie Warren-Gully (left) speaks with Larimer County, Colo. Commissioner Jody Shadduck-McNally (center) Feb. 15 during the General Session.

Kaua'i County, Hawaii Councilmember Bill DeCosta makes a point during a meeting at the Legislative Conference.





Public Lands Policy Steering Committee participants Cindy Riegel and Varlin Higbee vote in favor of a proposal.
Photo by Leon Lawrence III



Greenbrier County, W.Va. Commissioner Tammy Tincher speaks Feb. 12 during the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Policy Steering Committee.



Chatham County, Ga. Chairman Chester Ellis ask a question during the Accessing Federal Wildfire Resources session. Photo by Leon Lawrence III



Commissioner Kevin Paap of Blue Earth County, Minn. in conversation at the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Policy Steering Committee meeting.
Photo by Leon Lawrence III



NACo members pause for a photo Feb. 14 with the U.S. Capitol in the background, after the NACo Board of Directors reception. Photo by Lana Farfán



Members of Women of NACo pause Feb. 15 for a photo after their meeting. Photo by Hugh Clark

L-r: Marathon County, Wis. Board Chair Kurt Gibbs, Porter County, Ind. Auditor Vicki Urbanik and Ottawa County, Okla. Commissioner Russell Earls chat Feb. 12 at the First-Time Attendee Orientation.



Blue Earth County, Minn. Commissioner Vance Stuehrenberg and McPherson County, Ky. Commissioner Keith Becker share a laugh before the General Session gets underway Feb. 15.



Gwinnett County, Ga. Commissioner Marlene Fosque speaks with Florence Coram of DeKalb County, Ga. Feb. 13 during the Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) meeting.



Veterans Affairs Deputy Sec. Donald Remy (left) and NACo President Larry Johnson (right) congratulate Supervisor Thomas Snider, chair, Veterans and Military Services Committee, for his leadership and service.

Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Fifth-grader from Montgomery County, N.C., a winner of NACo student art competition

The fifth-grade winner of NACo's Student Art Competition, Madilynn Bowles of Brittain Academy in Montgomery County, N.C., crafted a painting that depicts her county, her state flag and the pride of her community: The 4-H club.

In hues of pink, light blue and orange, Madilynn drew the county shape in the early morning light of the sun, rising over top of the North Carolina flag of red, white and blue. Beneath the sun, a small 4-H logo is depicted. She notes that the 4-H organization is what makes her so proud to be a part of Montgomery County.

"I love my county because my county's slogan is 'a golden opportunity,' she said in her entry. "[The] 4-H [organization] in my

county gives me these opportunities. I am very proud to be a Montgomery County 4-Her."

The NACo Student Art competition is sponsored by Americans for the Arts, the nation's leading non-profit arts organization, which serves, advances and leads a network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain, and support the arts in America. They have partnered with NACo for almost 25 years to educate and inform county elected leaders about the importance and value of the arts to their communities.

If you would like to give students in your county the chance to enter the 2022 competition, get all the details here: naco.org/art. Winning artwork will be featured in a 2023 calendar.



dar. Winning artwork from the 2021 competition is featured in a 2022 NACo calendar and in *County News*. **CN**



SEND US YOUR MASTERPIECE.

2022 "I Love My County Because..." Art Competition now accepting entries.

Our annual NACo Student Art Competition in conjunction with National County Government Month (April) is now open. Students in grades 1-12 are encouraged to enter the competition with the theme "I Love My County Because..."

For more information, visit: naco.org/art

Sponsored by:





2022 NACo

**LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE**

BOARD ADOPTS NEW POLICIES RANGING FROM CHILDCARE AND DISASTER MITIGATION TO BROADBAND AND HOME OWNERSHIP.

Orange County, N.C. Commissioner Renee Price takes the microphone Feb. 14 at the NACo Board meeting.

Photo by Denny Henry

NACo'S POLICY STEERING COMMITTEES AND THEIR SUBCOMMITTEES MET DURING THE CONFERENCE TO CONSIDER NEW LEGISLATIVE POLICIES. THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS APPROVED 26 INTERIM POLICY RESOLUTIONS FEB. 14. THESE INTERIM POLICY RESOLUTIONS WILL SUPPLEMENT EXISTING NACo POLICY UNTIL NACo'S 2022 ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN ADAMS COUNTY, COLO. THE APPROVED INTERIM RESOLUTIONS ARE:

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Define WOTUS Regulations with Agricultural Considerations

ISSUE: Redefining the "Waters of the United States" (WOTUS) is the Biden Administration's goal of outlining the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' authority in regulating water. The proposed definition aims to put back into place the pre-2015 definition of WOTUS.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties

(NACo) urges the administration and the U.S. Congress to fully adopt the initial intent of the Clean Water Act recognizing state and local authority working together with federal regulatory agencies to protect rural, disadvantaged frontier communities, from regulations gravely affecting the nation's agricultural supply chain.

Define Conservation under the America the Beautiful Initiative

ISSUE: The "America the Beautiful" initiative is the Biden Administration's goal of conserving 30 percent of our nation's lands and waters by 2030, also known as 30x30. The

initiative lacks a clear definition of conservation and setting a land use policy is uniquely a county authority. Agricultural lands in production should not be at risk of having restrictive land use designations placed on them to achieve a 30% conservation goal.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the administration and the U.S. Congress to fully adopt the principles of conservation under the U.S. Senate and Congressional Western Caucuses' Western Conservation Principles issued in September 2021 when considering the definition of conservation under the "America the Beautiful" Initiative.

H-2A Administrative Rules Reform

ISSUE: The U.S. Department of Labor should consider reforms to existing H-2A administrative rules by addressing the following items: 1) Streamlining housing, transportation, and worker certification approvals; 2) Re-evaluating housing program components to include a discussion of vouchers, wage offsets, and a pre-employment housing needs survey; 3) Clarifying the term seasonality and providing flexibility for farm worker movement to respond to production needs; 4) Creating a simplified application processing system with a central portal housed

under the U.S. Department of Agriculture; and 5) Modernizing farm worker recruitment methods to ensure timely certification and arrival of farm workers.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to reform existing H-2A administrative rules to modernize and simplify the H-2A application and certification processes and expand farm worker flexibility to ensure that a reliable and capable workforce is available for the nation's farmers and ranchers.

See **POLICY** page 24

2022 NACo

**LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE***From POLICY page 23***Financially Support
the Agriculture
Industry**

ISSUE: A lack of legislative and financial support can have detrimental effects on the agriculture industry in the United States.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the U.S. Congress to pass legislation in support of the livestock, ranching, and other farming industries commensurate with an acknowledgement that agriculture is one of the bedrocks of the United States economy.

**COMMUNITY,
ECONOMIC AND
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT****Increasing
African American
Homeownership**

ISSUE: Federal support to increase African American Homeownership rates in the United States.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports increased federal support to address the decreasing rates of African American Homeownership. To increase the rates of African American Homeownership requires intentional actions by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to increase access to resources that support and facilitate the home-buying process for African Americans.

**Encouraging the U.S.
Congress to Enact
the Creative Economy
Revitalization Act**

ISSUE: Creative workers have been some of the most severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the height of the pandemic, two-thirds of all creative workers (2.7 million people) were completely unemployed, and even now the unemployment rate of the sector remains 3-4 times the national rate. Since the start of the pandemic, the U.S. has lost an estimated \$15.2 billion

Congress must prioritize creative workforce programs

in the arts and culture sector alone. Just as important as these livelihoods is the culture and well-being of communities they contribute to. The creative economy is essential to the U.S. economy. Our country exports art, music, and film to the entire globe. In addition to being an economic driver of 4.3 percent of the country's GDP, arts and culture have a significant economic, social, and individual impact. The presence of arts and culture drives additional spending on local businesses, restaurants, and hotels, increases property values and improves education outcomes for students, boosts community pride and social cohesion, and inspires political and social activation.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the U.S. Congress to enact the Creative Economy Revitalization Act (CERA) to require the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), in consultation with the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA), to award competitive grants to government and nonprofit agencies, which will assist eligible enti-

ties to carry out arts and creative workforce programs that result in publicly accessible art and arts programming and employ individuals.

**Proposed Interim
Resolution in Support
of Demonstration
State Status**

ISSUE: Maintaining Wagner-Peyser Demonstration State Status

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to retain the current regulations within the Wagner-Peyser program status as a Demonstration State and allow local workforce areas to continue setting the standard for innovation and excellence in workforce delivery. NACo urges the U.S. Congress to support maintaining this status through standalone legislation or within any Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reauthorization legislation.

**FY 2023
Appropriations for the
U.S. Department of****Housing and Urban
Development**

ISSUE: Support Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the U.S. Congress to support the following levels of funding for core U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill: no less than \$4.2 billion in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) formula funding; no less than \$1.9 billion in formula funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME); \$3.5 billion for Homeless Housing Assistance grants, including at least 20% of funds directed to ESG as allowed by statute, plus an amount to fully fund expiring supportive housing and Shelter Plus Care rent subsidy contracts; expansion of the Section 8 voucher program in addition to full funding for ex-

isting Section 8 project-based and tenant-based contracts; \$40 million for HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) and \$500 million in Section 108 Loan Guarantee authority.

**FINANCE, PEN-
SIONS AND INTER-
GOVERNMENTAL
AFFAIRS****Support of the
Passage of H.R. 5735**

ISSUE: The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) has been very helpful to counties in allowing us to continue our response, resiliency, and recovery efforts from the COVID-19 pandemic. House Resolution 5735, which has been introduced, and its companion bill, S.3011, which passed out of the U.S. Senate, provides an additional opportunity to further augment recovery efforts, but has not yet been taken up for a vote in the U.S. House of Representatives.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties

See POLICY page 25

Kings County, Calif. Supervisor Craig Pedersen takes to the microphone. Photo by Denny Henry

2022 NACo

**LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE****Federal support needed for crisis support systems***From POLICY page 24*

(NACo) urges the U.S. House of Representatives to immediately pass H.R. 5735 - State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Fiscal Recovery, Infrastructure, and Disaster Relief Flexibility Act.

HEALTH**Supporting the Role of Direct Support Professionals**

Issue: Direct support professionals (DSPs) play a critical role in the care provided to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. There is an inaccurate representation of the number and turnover rates of DSPs due to miscategorization in the Standard Occupational Classification System.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports federal efforts to develop a discrete occupational category for direct support professionals (DSPs) to help states and the federal government better interpret the shortage of these professionals in the labor market and collect data on the high turnover rate of DSPs.

Improving Maternal Health Outcomes

ISSUE: Lack of health care access for postpartum women and children, and workforce shortages including lack of diversity are key contributors to poor maternal health outcomes. Policy changes are needed to improve maternal health outcomes through improved access to postpartum healthcare coverage under Medicaid and growing and diversifying the perinatal workforce.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the federal government to enact policies that will assist counties in improving maternal health outcomes by (1) making investments in the perinatal workforce and (2) removing the 5-year sunset on the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 provision that would give states the option to extend Medicaid postpartum coverage from 60 days to 12 months.

Supporting 988 Implementation and Comprehensive Behavioral Health Crisis Care

ISSUE: Federal support is needed for implementing nationwide local crisis support systems for people experiencing a behavioral health crisis and calling the new 988 call centers.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports federal legislation to ensure that all people have access to comprehensive crisis care services to stabilize patients in crisis and direct them to the most appropriate treatment options. Such legislation should direct the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to ensure a standard set of behavioral health crisis services are universally available, including: 24/7 crisis hotlines and call center; mobile crisis services; behavioral health urgent care facilities; 23-hour crisis stabilization and observation beds; and short-term crisis residential options. Legislation should also provide coverage of behavioral health crisis services for all patients no matter the source of their health insurance. The U.S. Congress should authorize and appropriate adequate funding for the development of these services in counties, including technical assistance from HHS and a platform for communities to share successful ideas and services. The legislation should establish a panel of experts to improve coordination among 911 dispatchers and 988 crisis hotline call centers, so that those in need are quickly connected to the appropriate service.

Supporting Legislation and Administrative Waivers to Lift the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Prior to Reentry

ISSUE: Support for federal legislation and Medicaid Section 1115 waivers to lift the statutory Medicaid inmate exclusion for services provided to persons in custody for a certain

period prior to their reentry into their communities.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports legislation which would allow Medicaid payment for medical services furnished to an incarcerated or detained individual in local or state custody during a specified period preceding the individual's release. NACo also supports advancing such provisions via the earliest available legislative vehicle.

Advancing the Implementation of National Standards and Accreditation Requirements for Coroners/Medical Examiners Workers

ISSUE: For countless decades, Coroner and Medical Examiner Offices have struggled with common challenges; funding, staffing, training opportunities, and lack of resources. Currently, medicolegal death investigations are highly varied and inconsistent. This mixed system hinders public safety with a lack of qualifications and any professional development requirements. The poor understanding of disease and underlying mechanisms of death ultimately results in inaccurate conclusions and skewed death statistics. These miscalculations affect the development and implementation of needed policies and practices, thereby directly affecting members of the community. Also, of great concern, is that without best practice guidelines, both criminal and civil litigation may suffer egregiously negative consequences.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports federal legislative and regulatory changes that do the following: 1) Advances research and provides technical assistance for data collection and analysis that chart a pathway for enhancing statewide training and standards for coroners and medical examiners; 2) Requires coroner and medical examiner accreditation(s) through the International Association of Coroners and Medical Ex-

aminers (IACME) and/or the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME); and/or 3) Requires certification of non-forensic pathologists, coroners, and medicolegal death investigators through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) to enhance the proficiency of medicolegal death investigations.

HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION**Support Increased Federal Funding for Social and Emotional Learning**

ISSUE: Decades of research have demonstrated the effectiveness of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) for supporting students' academics, behaviors, mental health, and long-term success. COVID relief legislation has offered temporary federal resources for school districts to invest in SEL in order to help students recover from the impacts of the pandemic on their social and emotional wellbeing. However, because of limited resources, few school districts are able to budget dedicated funds towards long-term SEL interventions.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the U.S. Congress and the administration to provide funding, guidance and technical assistance to school districts and early childhood educators, in collaboration with other community partners, to implement comprehensive SEL programming for infants, toddlers, children and youth.

Support Continued Administrative Flexibilities for Federal Human Services Programs

ISSUE: Administrative flexibilities for federal health, human services and nutrition benefit programs during the COVID-19 pandemic have streamlined and eased paperwork burdens for both families and county eligibility workers without jeopardizing program integrity.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports legislative and/or federal administrative actions to continue federal flexibilities in administering federal health human services and nutrition benefit programs after the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency ends.

Support County Health and Human Services Agencies to Prepare for and Respond to Disasters

ISSUE: Given the populations they serve, federal, state and local coordination and support of county health and human services (HHS) agencies is integral to disaster/emergency planning, preparation, response, and recovery.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports dedicated continued close coordination with emergency management agencies (EMA), increased federal funding, and more flexible eligibility for to county health and human services costs incurred during emergencies under Public Assistance and other programs, so that EMAs may ensure that county health and human services agencies are supported financially and integrally involved in for emergency response planning, training for staff and volunteers, supporting disaster response, mass care and shelter services, continuing the provision of human service benefits, and supporting recovery efforts. Such funding would improve disaster response for older individuals and persons with disabilities, persons living in poverty, as well as those experiencing pre- and/or post-disaster homelessness.

Incentivizing Careers in County Government by Enhancing the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program

ISSUE: Student loan debt is hindering the ability of millions of Americans to achieve financial security, with student loan debt now growing at

See POLICY page 26

2022 NACo

**LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE****Congress must
stabilize child-
care industry***From POLICY page 25*

a faster rate than the nation's GDP. The Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program is a potential remedy to this problem by providing student debt relief for public sector employees, including those in county government. However, current structural flaws prevent the PSLF from working as fully intended.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the federal government to enhance the PSLF program in order to help attract college graduates to government service and to more effectively reduce the burden associated with student loan debt. Due to its 10-year required commitment, many college graduates might not view the program as a true incentive to begin their careers in government. NACo supports legislation to retain aspects of PSLF, including full debt forgiveness after 10 years, while phasing in more significant relief over a shorter time frame to better incentivize college graduates to choose public service careers.

**Improved
Intergovernmental
Coordination to
Connect Transitioning
Service Members with
CVSOs**

ISSUE: Lack of information-sharing between intergovernmental partners inhibits outreach by County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) to new veterans, exacerbating risk of suicide and other challenges associated with the transition to civilian life.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports action by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to increase coordination and information at the federal level and with their state and local



Sublette County, Wyo. Commissioner Joel Bousman grins while voting during the NACo Board meeting Feb. 14. Photo by Denny Henry

partners. DOD and VA should work collaboratively to identify and connect transitioning service members with the State Departments of Veterans Affairs (SDVAs) and CVSOs prior to their departure from active duty.

**Stabilizing the Child
Care Industry**

ISSUE: The COVID-19 pandemic has sent the child care industry, which was already strained, into crisis. Lack of child care is damaging to the workforce as it prevents parents from going to work and prevents our children from vital development opportunities.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the federal government to pass robust legislation to stabilize the child care industry and workforce. In this turbulent time, there must be a historic investment in child care capacity, assistance with workforce recruitment and adequate resources for providers to sustainably serve low-income families. NACo urges the U.S. Congress to pursue a comprehensive strategy to support and sustain an increased living wage for child care workers while also ensuring all families have access to affordable, high-quality early care and education for children under age five. Federal investments in

expanded access to preschool should emphasize a mixed-delivery system and incentivize and support the provision of high-quality care and education for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

**PUBLIC LANDS
Supporting Long-Term
Federal Funding for
Shared Stewardship
to Collaboratively
Manage Unwanted
Wildfire**

ISSUE: For decades across the United States, the practice of wildfire suppression has led to an excess of large unwanted wildfires. These large fires have deleterious effects on the entire ecosystem by jeopardizing communities, watersheds, and sensitive habitats.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports long-term federal funding of Shared Stewardship agreements and work because of the imminent need to address the issue of unwanted fires threatening critical watersheds and vulnerable communities.

**Supporting the
Reconciliation in
Place Names Act and
Secretarial Orders
3404 and 3405**

ISSUE: On federal public lands, there are geographic

features and/or units of land named with derogatory terms that include racial and sexual slurs and stereotypes targeting Native Americans, African Americans, and others. The extent of inappropriate or offensive place names in the United States requires a systematic, public process in which offensive and inappropriate place names are reviewed and revised.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports the Reconciliation in Place Names Act, which would streamline the U.S. Board of Geographic Names (USBGN) process of flagging, reviewing, and revising offensive names. NACo also supports Secretarial Orders 3404 and 3405, issued by U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Haaland in November 2021.

**Supporting Wildfire
Mitigation Efforts
on U.S. Forest
Service Land Under
the Infrastructure
Investment and Jobs
Act**

ISSUE: On January 18, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and U.S. Forest Service Chief announced a new strategy, Confronting the Wildfire Crisis, to treat an additional 20 million acres of national forest lands

and 30 million state, private, tribal, and other forest lands over the next ten years as part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The IIJA provides nearly \$3 billion to reduce hazardous fuels and restore America's forests and grasslands, along with investments in fire-adapted communities and post fire reforestation. These funds are critical for wildfire mitigation efforts and need to be made available to impacted communities as soon as possible.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to partner with counties to implement the Confronting the Wildfire Crisis ten-year strategy by ensuring funding is available for forest health projects most impacting community health and safety. Due to the high risk that exists for communities located in the wildland-urban interface (WUI), NACo asks that at least 10% of the funds allocated in the IIJA be used in direct coordination with counties that border or have USFS land in their jurisdiction.

**TELECOMMU-
NICATIONS AND
TECHNOLOGY**

See POLICY page 27



Manny Ruiz, Santa Cruz County, Ariz. speaks up. Photo by Denny Henry

From **POLICY** page 26

High-Speed Internet Parity

ISSUE: Technologies that are capable of delivering high speed internet are excluded from various Federal grant opportunities.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the adaption of grant language that allows for the utilization of any and all technologies that meet then-current guidelines for high-speed internet speeds. NACo further urges the U.S. Congress to authorize grant funding based on high-speed internet access and reliability rather than utilizing a restrictive one-technology-fits-all approach for providing that service. The general term “High Speed Internet” should replace the technology-specific “Broadband” in legislation promoting ubiquitous internet access.

TRANSPORTATION

Urging the U.S. Department of Transportation to Robustly Engage Counties in Implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

ISSUE: Counties play an extremely significant role in the national transportation and infrastructure network, owning more roads and bridges than any other level of government and directly supporting public transit and airports that keep Americans connected throughout the country and across the globe. To ensure successful implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA/P.L. 117-58), county officials must be meaningfully engaged as intergovernmental

partners throughout the implementation process.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to coordinate, consult and provide support to counties as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is implemented and new resources are deployed.

Urging the U.S. Congress to Fully Enact FY 2022 Appropriations

ISSUE: Counties are directly impacted by the recently enacted bipartisan infrastructure law, the

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA/P.L. 117-58). Most vital for counties are the law’s competitive resources, which have been significantly increased through new and existing grant programs; however, without the enactment of a full-year FY 2022 appropriations bill, federal agencies are unable to stand up many of the roughly 40 new programs created by the law that rely on federal appropriations. Additionally, without appropriations legislation to establish obligation limits for federal-aid highway funding, state and local governments will be unable to access the 20 percent increase in this funding that is provided by the IIJA in FY 2022.

ADOPTED POLICY: The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the U.S. Congress to enact a FY 2022 appropriations bill upon expiration of the current Continuing Resolution on March 11, 2022.

To read more about these interim policy resolutions, visit: <https://www.naco.org/advocacy/american-county-platform>.

Counties can respond fast with flexible funding

From **RESCUE PLAN** page 8

holds, clarifying more eligible uses of funds in disproportionately impacted communities

- Expanding populations presumed eligible for services, without any additional analysis needed from the partner recipients

- Allowing the use of funds for capital projects that respond to the pandemic, including testing labs, primary care clinics, child care facilities, hospitals and schools

- Expanding eligible broadband, sewer and water infrastructure, including, Liebenluft noted, culverts.

“I don’t think Treasury had worked much around culverts before, but this is an example of where feedback from counties really did make a difference,” he said.

It all adds up to counties having more of a chance to ensure a more even economic recovery and handle ongoing threats from COVID-19 variants.

“In this recovery — compared to the past — counties, as well as states and cities, have been in a much better fiscal position to respond to immediate and long-term needs,” Lieben-

luft said. “And that’s especially in contrast to the widespread budget cuts and austerity we saw following the Great Recession. That means that not only have counties been able to avoid further devastating cuts, but they’ve been able to flexibly respond to new variants of the coronavirus while making long term and critical investments.”

Sperling was quick to point out that there were some strings attached.

“With great flexibility comes great responsibility,” he said. “I think right now, people are looking and they understand that everybody has their own unique challenges. But we also have to ensure that we are all pulling together on what is not unique. One is more national challenges that we are facing due to the pandemic and one of them is certainly the workforce.”

Liebenluft highlighted several county uses for funding, including:

- Gallatin County, Mont.’s expanded training for construction, trades, manufacturing and healthcare industries while providing evening childcare for students with children

- Nassau County, N.Y.’s apprenticeship program focused on the building trades for people economically impacted by the pandemic

- Kitsap County, Wash. and Pima County, Ariz.’s subsidized childcare.

- Harford County, Md.’s premium pay for bus drivers and public school food service workers

- Josephine County, Ore.’s permanent affordable housing for people who are unsheltered or leaving transitional housing programs, and

- Buncombe County, N.C.’s support for affordable housing.

Sperling touted success across the board, avoiding the tidal wave of foreclosures and evictions that was predicted when the moratoria ended, but he stressed that providing training and childcare were crucial to allow people to do the work they are best suited to do, offering the best outcome for local economies.

“This is a chance to use American Rescue funds to make sure that you can have the well-paid, the highly respected childcare workers that will be needed and need to be ready,” he said. **CN**

Congressional allies tackle key county issues

From **ADVOCACY** page 17

er version of the bill, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is establishing the Council on Economic Mobility, which would serve as a federal clearinghouse for two-generation and economic mobility policies.

“I say this as someone who used to work in local government and as someone who now represents an incredibly diverse state — this increased flexibility is essential for making these two-generation programs successful,” Heinrich said.

“Even in a single state like New Mexico, successful implementation of two-generation strategies looks a lot different in a rural chapter of the Navajo Nation than it does in an urban neighborhood in Albuquerque,” he said. “What works well in Rhode Island will not be what works

best in Montana.”

He added that many of the resources that could help families had already been allocated but could be more accessible.

“Local leaders like all of you are fully versed in the specific context and needs of your communities,” he said. “You are going to be the ones whose innovative

ideas can dramatically improve service delivery for children and families together. If we can make the most of the generational investments from the American Rescue Plan, our communities and our nation can emerge from this moment in a stronger, competitive position than we have ever been in.” **CN**



Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) speaks as Montgomery County, Md. Councilmember Craig Rice looks on. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

CN SPOTLIGHT

It wouldn't be a
NACo Board meeting
without a limerick

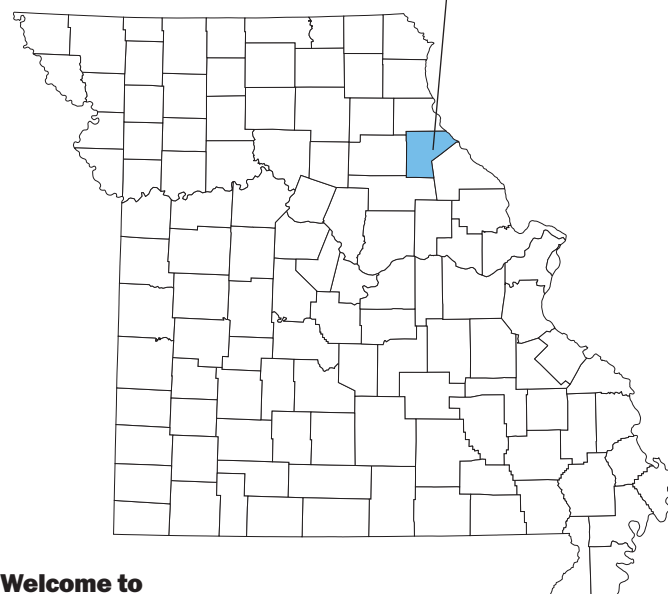
Of all of the places to be
It's good to be back in DC
The people, the places,
The half-covered faces
Make Washington special to me

Grant Veeder, a NACo Board member who serves as auditor of Black Hawk County, Iowa, delivered his limerick at the end of the NACo Board meeting Feb. 14 at the 2022 Legislative Conference.



GET TO KNOW...

Ralls County, Mo.



Welcome to Ralls County, Mo.

Bordering the mighty Mississippi River, Ralls County, Mo. is nestled in the north-eastern portion of Missouri.

Named after Daniel Ralls, a Missouri state legislator, the county has existed since November 1820. As of 2020, the county has a population of just over 10,000. The county seat of New London was named after the British city of London. Built in 1858, the county courthouse is one of the oldest in the state.

Ralls County's largest industries are manufacturing, health care and retail trade; its largest crop is soybeans.

Professional baseball player and baseball manager Edward Mayo "Catfish" Smith was born in New London. As a manager, he famously led the Detroit Tigers to victory in the 1968 World Series.

"Get to Know" features new NACo member counties.



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services

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**EDWARD
MAYO
"CATFISH"
SMITH**

BRIGHT IDEAS | MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, Fla.

Libraries Help Young People in Need of Volunteer Hours

PROBLEM: Once-bountiful opportunities for teen volunteer hours evaporated due to COVID restrictions.

SOLUTION: Create programs for youths to volunteer safely during the pandemic.

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

In Miami-Dade County and much of Florida, students must complete volunteer hours to graduate. When the pandemic hit and everything ground to a halt, many requirements were waived but not volunteer hours. Parents and students desperate for volunteer opportunities found a powerful supporter in the community: The public library. In Miami-Dade County, two librarians came to the rescue: Ellen Book, branch manager of the Pinecrest Branch Library and Athanasia Fitos, branch manager of the Kendale Lakes Branch Library. Each created their own unique volunteer opportunities.

Book had a consistent and dedicated group of creative older residents coming to the library to weave mats out of plastic yarn or “plarn” for the homeless. The group, known as Helping Hands, won a NACo Achievement Award in the past for their work with the homeless. Plastic yarn turns about 75 plastic bags into a ball of yarn useful for weaving.

But both the volunteers and materials dried up when the pandemic forced some businesses to close. Parents and children kept reaching out to the library for opportunities, information and support. Eventually, Book had the idea of teaching youths via Zoom how to weave plastic yarn, which could then be distributed to the weavers after some time had passed for COVID safety. Over the yearlong program, 5,475



Braddock Senior High School teacher Davie Towbin sits among “plarn” balls students created.

bags were turned into about 73 balls of plastic yarn and students earned 394 volunteer hours. Despite the struggles of the pandemic, the library was a beacon of creativity and a vital community hub.

The library has had further contact from groups including Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts looking to participate, a hairdresser accompanying those distributing the mats to give free haircuts to those in need, people and organizations looking to donate bags and more.

The program is especially beneficial to graduating students who are required to complete volunteer hours to graduate and be eligible for certain grant programs for those entering college. “We were basically trying to leverage and accommodate as much as possible so that students wouldn’t miss out on those qualifications in order to go forward with their education,” Book said.

Through the libraries’ work with Helping Hands, they have impacted “hundreds and hundreds” of lives. The library has received interest from all manner of people looking to learn how to make plastic yarn and weave mats from as far away as

Peru, the Congo and Haiti.

Book even heard from a group that found the process of making mats using plastic yarn too slow, so they developed their own loom to speed up the process. Mats are six feet tall and three feet wide, at minimum, to accommodate the average male.

In Miami-Dade County’s Kendale Lakes branch, Fitos knew if the pandemic continued at length, her newly restarted young adult library advisory board would collapse, so she took action. Starting with six young adults volunteering on the board, Fitos and her youth services specialist paired with another librarian to keep the program alive by migrating it online.

Inspired by branch Zoom meetings, the youths involved pivoted from shelving and program prep to working on readers’ and program advisory work along with a gaming program.

“About six weeks into the pandemic was when we realized that the kids essentially lost everything,” Fitos said. “They lost their social lives, they lost their school life and a couple of them lost their graduation. So, we recognized that there was

also a social and an emotional toll happening.”

The team fought to keep connections alive through Zoom and WhatsApp, eventually involving 26 youths and much of the library staff. “They were communicating their small victories and it became a very positive support group,” she said. The programming continues now that the pandemic has lessened and there is more knowledge on how COVID spreads and what precautions are necessary. The library has adapted to incorporate hybrid options for their programming moving forward, increasing participation and availability.

Despite the struggles imposed and the rapid need to shift gears to accommodate online functionality, the libraries of Miami-Dade County kept pace with the needs of their community. “If you can remember from ‘Harry Potter,’ we kind of serve as the Room of Requirement for a lot of our community,” said Fitos. **CN**

The Miami-Dade Virtual Library program is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the Volunteering category.



LANCASTER
COUNTY, Neb.

The origin of the seal is shrouded in mystery. The county was formed in 1859 and somewhere between then and 1861, the seal was adopted. Today, the oldest known use of the seal is on a document from Nov. 13, 1861, with a simple, regal design of an elk facing forward.

In March of 2010, the county approved reworking the image to craft a high-quality, digitally friendly seal. The new seal depicts a similar elk facing to the right with the county name emblazoned on the outer edge surrounded by rope.



The Lancaster County Seal depicts the striking image of an elk, majestic creatures once common in the wetlands of the county.

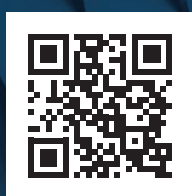
If you would like your county’s seal featured in “Behind the Seal,” contact Dakota Hendricks at dhendricks@naco.org.

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data and drives
breakthroughs.



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SPONSORED CONTENT

Analytics Automation Accelerates the Delivery of Unemployment Benefits During COVID

What happens when a large transactional system that is scoped to manage around 2,000 applications a month suddenly faces an unprecedented influx of 2,000,000 applications? You quickly discover that your legacy system needs help.

Recently, I had an opportunity to sit down and talk with Dr. Matthew McCarville, former Chief Data Officer for the state of Florida, about how Florida responded when faced with an unprecedented influx of requests for unemployment assistance at the height of the Covid pandemic.

In the face of the pandemic, Florida's unemployment agency found themselves facing an overwhelming challenge – the inability to scale with the sheer volume of new applicants. In a matter of days, a task force of state technology and data leaders worked to supplement their existing system with critical automation to handle the extreme influx of applications. Using a combination of Google Forms for data intake, analytics automation through Alteryx, and RPA

through UiPath, the agency was able to restore access to a critical array of services for those seeking unemployment relief.

Two million applications and counting

The pandemic caused a sharp influx of unemployment applications in Florida (from 2,000 a month to 2,000,000), and their unemployment system was unable to scale in response to the requests for support. That led to a system that was inaccessible to those desperately seeking assistance, and the information that was collected could not be analyzed for eligibility, adjudication decisions could not be processed in a timely

manner, and manual processes could not ensure adequate protection from instances of fraud. This led to delays in the distribution of unemployment relief, creating additional economic pressure on individuals and families, as well as pressure on state leaders to swiftly correct these concerns.

Agility and stability through analytics automation

By implementing a Google Forms-based process, the team was able to fix the problem associated with the input of application information. Once the data was collected, the Alteryx Analytic Process Automation (APA) Platform was utilized to process and analyze this data and create an

integrated dataset with other sources to automate the process of identification (fuzzy matching), the determination of eligibility, and the management of funding distribution. Additional workflows were automated, including the use of Alteryx to feed RPA processes (UiPath), to handle the adjudication of claims.

The core system was still limited to 150,000 concurrent sessions, meaning that on average, 400,000 users needed to have their input (data collection) handled through Google-based processes. Through an integrated process that included both APA and RPA, analytics automation was applied through 72 decision tree algorithms to handle backdated claims and provide unemployment relief automatically and retroactively to the date of

filing instead of when the application was eventually processed.

Building for the future

With a combination of technologies and the application of analytics automation through Alteryx, Florida's unemployment agency was able to recover from the increase in applications, restore a critical element of the state's social safety net, and ensure that people received the unemployment support they were entitled to faster and more efficiently. Additionally, the state is better equipped to handle future challenges and is benefiting from a higher level of automation that is making operations more responsive and efficient.





2022 NACo

ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

CELEBRATING **52** YEARS OF INNOVATION**EARLY BIRD****SUBMISSION DEADLINE:**

March 4, 2022 at
11:59 p.m. EST

SUBMISSIONS DEADLINE:

March 31, 2022 at
11:59 p.m. EDT

**NOTIFICATIONS OF
ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:**

Week of April 25, 2022

HOW TO **APPLY**

Does your county have an innovative program that improves county government and enhances services for county residents? Apply for the 2022 Achievement Awards! There are 18 categories ranging from information technology, health, criminal justice, human services and many more.

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QUESTIONS?

Contact awards@naco.org

PROFILES IN SERVICE

JULIE RING

NACo Board Member
Executive Director
Association of Minnesota
Counties

Number of years active in
NACo: 15

Years in public service: 28
years - two years in a regional
economic development district
in South Dakota, 10 years in
state government in Minnesota
and 12 years (so far!) at our
association.

Occupation: Association
executive director

You'd be surprised to learn
that: I spent my childhood in
Oklahoma, Nebraska, and South
Dakota.

The most adventurous thing
I've ever done is: Backpack
through Europe for two months
in the era before cell phones and
the internet.

My favorite way to relax is:
With a stack of books, near a
body of water.

Every morning I read: Twitter
and several news aggregators,
including our state capitol news,
Minnesota headlines and nation-
al headlines.



Ring

My favorite meal is: Nachos
or sushi, but definitely not the
two together!

My pet peeve is: People
who can tell you every reason
something won't work but can't
imagine options that might work.

My motto is: Optimism is a
force multiplier (thanks, General
Colin Powell!).


The last book I read was:
The Power of a Positive Team,
by Jon Gordon and *The Lincoln
Highway*, by Amor Towles.

My favorite movie is:
"Best in Show"

My favorite U.S. president
is: George Washington

My county is a NACo mem-
ber because: My state is a
100 percent membership state
because our counties see the
value in NACo's advocacy, re-
search, programs and services!

Three people (living or dead)
I'd invite to dinner:
Susan B. Anthony,
Anthony Bourdain
and Lin-Manuel Miranda



Steve Jurvetson/Flickr

WORD SEARCH

ALBANY COUNTY, N.Y.
Created by: Dakota Hendricks

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

ALBANY: The county seat and capital of New York.

DUKE: The county is named after the Duke of York and Albany, a titled bestowed by the British Crown.

FOUNDED: The county was founded in 1683.

HUDSON: One of two rivers bordering the county.

KNICKERBOCKER: The original name of the Times Union Center, the largest performing arts venue in the area.

MOHAWK: One of two rivers bordering the county.

PINE: The Albany Pine Bush Preserve is a popular area for hiking and exploring.

PLANETARIUM: The county has a planetarium exploring the stars as part of the Albany Heritage Area Visitors Center.

SHAPE: The county was officially bordered in 1772 with the creation of neighboring Tryon and Charlotte counties.

SLATER: The USS Slater is a World War II-era ship and now a floating museum docked on the Hudson River.

STATE: Albany County has the largest state museum in the country.

TECH: Albany County is part of the so called "Tech Valley" region focused on high-end, cutting-edge technology.

THOMPSON: Thompson's Lake State Park is a popular state park in the county.





TULIP: Albany hosts the Tulip Festival each year, a celebration of the county flower.

WASHINGTON: Washington Park is a popular location in the county seat that plays host to many festivals.

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NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



CALIFORNIA

• **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** is assessing homes that will participate in a \$24 million state-funded **rural fire protection** pilot program that will help residents prepare their homes against a potential blaze. KPBS-TV reports the program helps retrofit older homes at an average cost of about \$40,000 by “tightening them up” against potential embers and easy entry points. The county focused on implementing the project first in the rural areas of Dulzura, Potrero and Campo.



• **MONTEREY COUNTY** is tackling **vehicle part thefts** by adding identification information to catalytic converters, which are expensive parts targeted by thieves because they contain rare metals like platinum. The identification numbers will allow police departments to immediately tell which parts are stolen. KS-BW-TV reports that the first ID session has already been fully reserved, with others taking place at a later date.

FLORIDA

• **LEE COUNTY** has launched a new **interactive web tool** detailing project information about the upcoming Sanibel Islands Project which includes adding parking and restroom facilities, controlling erosion, planting native landscaping and more. According to Gulf-

shore Business, the app will allow residents to find information about the project, a proposed timeline and even maps of the area.

• **MANATEE COUNTY** will renovate an old county jail to provide **housing for homeless veterans**, setting aside \$15 million of American Rescue Plan funding for the job. “We are in a good position to do some great things and continue to embrace those who serve our country and step out on the front line for us in their time of need,” Commissioner Reggie Bellamy said, according to WF-LA-TV.

• **WALTON COUNTY** has contracted with a tourism marketing company to build a strategic **tourism plan**. Zeitgeist Consulting will begin by reviewing the Walton County Tourism Development Council budget, which raises several million dollars a year from vacation home rental fees, according to the *Northwest Florida Daily News*. They will also begin reviewing how the area fared after the significant challenges posed by the pandemic.

GEORGIA

With a goal toward rehabilitating young men, **CHATHAM COUNTY** has created the “Show Us Your Guns” **diversion program**. The county District Attorney’s office re-

cently launched the program for young men ages 16-25 who, after an encounter by police, are found to be in possession of firearms, WTGS-TV reported. Participants will be diverted to programs on housing, resources and development. The DA’s office believes the program will “bring guns off of the street and curb the number of young people who become incarcerated.”

IOWA

JOHNSON COUNTY law enforcement recently held a “Behind the Badge” **outreach program** aimed at educating residents about the police force. Held in conjunction with several local nonprofits, The Gazette reports the shortened version of their Citizens Police Academy program will run for four weeks with three-hour sessions, highlighting specialists on the K9 team, bomb squad and more.

MARYLAND

• **FREDERICK COUNTY** has launched a new program to accelerate the **permitting process for local businesses**. The county launched the EPIC program (which stands for expedited permit and inspection certificate), which allows businesses to request expedited permitting if they are renovating a building smaller than 5,000 square feet *The Frederick News-Post* reported. The program also requires no changes to the outside of the building and no changes to the use of the property.

NEW YORK

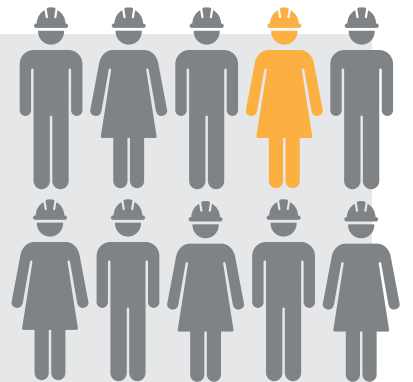
• Partnering with Mohawk Valley Community College, **ONEIDA COUNTY**’s new **employment program** will work to build the job skills of



NEW YORK

• A new **MONROE COUNTY** **apprentice training program** aims to address a need in the local building and trade workforce. The program will require construction contractors doing work in the county to have access to a New York State Certified Apprenticeship Training Program and ensure that a minimum of 10 percent of its workers be apprentices for each trade on a project. At least 30 percent of apprentices must be made up of minority and/or disadvantaged populations. Four capital constructions projects scheduled for bid this year are selected to participate in the new apprenticeship pilot program.

“The apprenticeship program is just one way we’re going to have a more equitable and prosperous rebound from the economic hardships created by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said County Executive Adam Bello. “This program will build up our local workforce to fill the building and trades jobs needed now, while giving workers life skills they can use to advance their own careers in construction.”



MARYLAND

• **HOWARD COUNTY** recently announced it is expanding a **food scrap program** that allows residents to divert food scraps from the landfill to a compost. According to the county, the program expansion brings the total number of homes served to over 34,000 or about 53 percent of the county population. “Last year, 900 tons of food scraps were diverted from the landfill through our program and turned into nutrient-rich compost,” said County Executive Calvin Ball. “Howard County is leading the way in Maryland to create a clean and sustainable environment.”





TEXAS

The prospect of 30 to 50 **feral hogs** anywhere is enough to get **CALDWELL** and **HAYS counties** up in arms. The two counties received a total of \$27,500 in grants from Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service - Wildlife Services, and now the Central Texas Feral Hog Task Force will pay a bounty of \$5 per hog.

"Feral hogs continue to pose significant problems for both agriculture producers and residential property owners in Hays County," said Hays County Commissioner Mark Jones.

In 2020, the Feral Hog Task Force was able to help remove nearly 2,900 swine from Hays, Caldwell, and Guadalupe counties through bounty programs, trapping kits for landowners, aerial gunning operations and educational programming, KSAT-TV reported.

WISCONSIN

The **DANE COUNTY** Highway and Transportation Department is collaborating with the Urban League of Greater Madison and the Latino Academy for Workforce Development, and its starting to show some results.

So far, roughly 80 people have graduated from a program the helps people earn a **commercial driver's license** at a lower cost than commercial driving courses.

"It's a win-win. We get workers, [and] they get the skills that they need in order to be able to obtain a CDL," Dane County Executive Joe Parisi said.

WYOMING

Residents of one of the country's most expensive real estate markets will

get some help after **TETON COUNTY** commissioners and Jackson town councilors voted to continue the Jackson/Teton County Housing Department's **housing preservation program**. The program offers people down payment assistance in exchange for recording an appreciation-capped "workforce" deed restriction on property they're buying or already own.

The move places the program in the housing department's rules and regulations permanently after a successful yearlong pilot.

The News and Guide reported that of the 19 families

pre-approved thus far for the 20 percent (or up to \$200,000) down payment assistance, four have found homes, with one closing soon. The program offers the same amount of cash to people who already own homes.

News From Across the Nation is assembled by Charlie Ban and Dakota Hendricks. Does your county have news we should see? Contact us at cban@naco.org and dhendricks@naco.org.

its young adults. The Oneida County Career Corps will give students ages 18-24 hands-on work experience at local employers, provide individualized supportive services, foster social entrepreneurship skills and assist young adults with fi-

nancial literacy skills.

OHIO

The **SUMMIT COUNTY** Land Bank will help a local nonprofit put families on the **road to homeownership**. The land bank will help Family

Promise of Summit County purchase foreclosed properties for around \$10,000. The organization will then collaborate with Truly Reaching You to assess and perform renovations needed to ensure each home meets building code requirements. Truly Reaching You is a relationship-based reentry ministry serving men who have "done their time" and are ready to return to family and community. The program — Survive to Thrive, Destination Homeownership — will also work with businesses in the Minority Capital Access Program to complete renovations, *The Plain Dealer* reported.

OKLAHOMA

Over 18 years, **TULSA COUNTY's Recycled Medication Program** has filled 266,961 prescriptions, worth more than \$27.5 million. The program partners with local medical providers to transport unused medications to Tulsa County Social Services, where they are repurposed to help lower-income residents of Tulsa County at little or no cost.



Millard Blackwell Creef, seen in the back row, second from right in this 1942 photo, was the first Dare County, N.C. resident killed in service overseas.

NORTH CAROLINA

The **DARE COUNTY** Library will **highlight local history** in a quarterly series of programs with the Outer Banks History Center on Roanoke Island. The one-hour programs, available to library card holders, will touch on "Carolista Baum and the Fight to Save Jockey's Ridge," valiant efforts of a local environmentalist to save an Outer Banks natural wonder and "Millard Blackwell Creef: A Dare County War Hero," about the first Dare County boy to be killed in service overseas, and more.

Mental health a top priority for counties

From **HEALTH** page 1

- Assess for risk of suicide or harm
- Listen nonjudgmentally
- Give reassurance and information
- Encourage appropriate professional help
- Encourage self-help and other support strategies.

Participants learn by treating symptoms through practice exercises surrounding suicidal thoughts, self-injury, panic attacks, trauma and more. Graduates of the program include police officers, elected leaders, veterans and school employees.

Mental health treatment infrastructure in the United States is mostly lacking. One in five adults face some form of mental illness, while one in 25 face a serious mental illness, according to the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors.

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing-NACo Partnership will provide critical education to participating counties through trained instructors with the goal of making mental health education training "as common as CPR." **CN**

To find out more about available courses, becoming an instructor or other ways to participate in the program, visit <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>.

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NACo



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