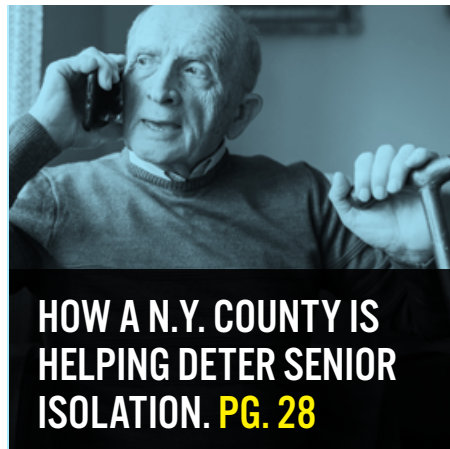




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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

VOL. 55, NO. 5

MARCH 13, 2023

## Peers recognize Rock County, Wis. opioid settlement plan

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

As counties debate how to allocate money from the National Opioids Settlement, a national leader among counties stresses listening to those who have experienced the brunt of substance use disorder.

Settlement plans developed by Rock County, Wis. and the state of Colorado were the inaugural honorees recognized by faculty at Johns Hopkins University and a coalition of national organizations steering The Principles for the Use of Funds From the Opioid Litigation.

“The most important thing is to really listen to the people that are most impacted, involve them in the process, because that’s how you’re going to make the change that’s going to matter,” said Shari Faber, a Rock County public health strategist who has participated on the county’s settlement task force.

“I think in some places it’s getting politicized, it’s turning into the thing that the politicians want, or the lobbyists that are lobbying the politicians want, and you really need to focus on those people that have experienced it who

have been impacted the most and make the changes that they’re identifying.”

The Rock County Public Health Department is in the process of winning approval from various county committees before taking the spending plan back to the Board of Supervisors.

The plan stresses increasing local treatments and services, providing assessments within the criminal justice system and focusing on youth prevention. The opioid settlement workgroup initially presented the plan to the Board in September 2022.

The plan was built from various public outreach and listening sessions to gauge community needs, along with an existing county substance use assessment and interviews with key informants.

The first of the roughly \$8 million expected from the various settlements is coming none too soon for Rock County, which saw its opioid-involved death and hospitalization rates peak in 2021, with numbers projected to have come down slightly in 2022. The county saw over 200 opioid-involved deaths across the last decade.

See **OPIOIDS** page 2



NACo President Denise Winfrey of Will County, Ill., welcomes county officials and others Feb. 11 to the first-time attendee orientation at the 2023 Legislative Conference at the Washington Hilton. See more coverage of the conference starting on Page 4. Photo by Denny Henry

## NACo announces National Commission on Mental Health and Wellbeing

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

As NACo kicked off its 2023 Legislative Conference Feb. 11, NACo Executive Director and CEO Matt Chase announced the rollout of a new National Commission on Mental Health and Wellbeing to widespread applause from a packed room

of county officials new to NACo. About 300 county officials and staff from across the country gathered for the first-time attendee orientation at the conference in Washington, D.C.

“Regardless of your political party, your county is really on the frontlines of this battle, unfortunately — through our

county jails, through homelessness, through other county services,” Chase said.

“And if we want to be a great nation, we should treat our most vulnerable fellow residents with a little bit more dignity,” he said. “We don’t think

See **NEWCOMERS** page 5

## Colorado county’s new camping ordinance opens doors for owners of private land

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

The blissful simplicity of a tent can become remarkably complex when county land use codes come into the picture.

When Denverites head out of town on weekends to explore the Rocky Mountains, they hit Chaffee County, Colo. with-

in a few hours. Beyond there, crowded campsites on federal and state land are pushing people farther off the beaten path and discouraging newcomers who aren’t reserving their sites the day applications open. But not all of these travelers are seasoned campers, and Chaffee County Commissioner Keith Baker saw the potential for mis-

hap, but also the opportunity to strengthen his rural community.

“Let’s be honest, there are some people who don’t belong in the backcountry yet,” he said. “They’re not ready for it, they may not even know if they’re capable of sleeping in a tent,

See **CAMPING** page 3



# Best feedback for opioid treatment comes from residents who used drugs

From OPIOIDS page 1

What hasn't helped, the working group learned, was the relative dearth of local options for treatment and recovery living, so when residents need help, they have to go elsewhere for it. The plan prioritizes increasing availability of both locally.

"We currently have a one day-treatment program, we have no residential or inpatient treatment, so we are having to send people to other lo-

cations for those higher levels of treatment," Faber said.

"We know the funds aren't going to cover everything and pay for everything that we proposed in the recommendation, but we're hopeful that we can expand capacity wherever possible to increase our ability to meet the current needs."

The county's working group includes representatives from the public health department, human services, county administration and sheriff's of-

fice. The spending plan would add a full-time staffer to oversee its execution.

Faber said the most valuable feedback came from the working group's listening session with residents who used drugs or had used drugs and their family and friends.

"We wanted to get some really honest feedback from those people and for instance, we didn't allow media in that session because we really wanted to create a space where the people felt comfortable sharing," she said.

"We gave them options to not put their real name on their 'Zoom person' if they wanted," she noted.

"I feel like we got some really good information, particularly from family members working really hard to try to get their loved ones treatment and a lot of the barriers that they ran into," she said.

"We got some really good information from that aspect, we did have some people who were [in] our drug court program and gave us some brief feedback about drug court and the services that they were provided through drug court," she said.

The consequences of substance use disorder have moved beyond to immediate human service and criminal justice needs to add demand for all sorts of government services, but Rock County recognizes that even \$8 mil-

lion provided by the settlement has limited spending power.

So it has to be spend strategically, and one of the best deals is trying to prevent the problem from growing.

Although the National Opioids Settlement focused on the promotion and distribution of legal painkillers, the pattern of substance abuse disorder has evolved to synthetic drugs like fentanyl, so Rock County, like many, has to hit a moving target.

Prevention programs to try to avoid new users, particularly children, are paramount and pragmatic.

"That supply side is always going to be there," Faber said. "It's really important to look at the bigger picture and look at the whole the demand supply issue and looking at the demand side — why are people wanting these drugs?"

"What can we do to slow down that demand side? Because that supply side is always going to be there and it's just going to keep changing," she said.

"As we tamp down one drug, another drug's going to pop up, so I like to try and think and figure out what can we do to reduce that demand for drugs locally." **CN**

SNAP/STATS

Women's History Month

WOMEN vs MEN	NUMBER
No. of women in United States: .....	168 million
No. of men in United States: .....	164 million
Women ages 85 and older:.....	3.8 million
Men ages 85 and older: .....	2.2 million
Women with bachelor's degrees:.....	36.1 percent
Men with bachelor's degrees: .....	33.9 percent
Women's percentage of median earnings compared to men:.....	81.5 percent

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

EXCELLENCE IN THE APPLICATION OF THE OPIOID LITIGATION PRINCIPLES

These awards are designated by a coalition led by faculty at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and will be given to states and counties that have demonstrated adherence to the principles to highlight their efforts and share practical examples with other jurisdictions.

The principles are:

1. Spend the money to save lives.

2. Use evidence to guide spending.

3. Invest in youth prevention.

4. Focus on racial equity.

5. Develop a fair and transparent process for deciding where to spend the funding.

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These awards will be given to states and counties on a quarterly basis throughout the year. The next deadline is March 31. If you know of a jurisdiction deserving of an award, please nominate them at <https://bit.ly/3L2jOfi>.

REQUEST YOUR FREE NACo STUDENT ART COMPETITION CALENDAR

Send an email with your name, title, county and address to: [cnews@naco.org](mailto:cnews@naco.org).



## Outdated county codes leave landowners between two bad options for camping



The Mountain Goat Lodge offers tipis, a full service bed and breakfast lodge and also has campers and a vintage trailer. Photo courtesy of the Mountain Goat Lodge

### From CAMPING page 1

they might find out one night is more than they can handle. It's better for them to find out when they're close to services and close to town than to be out somewhere on the Colorado Trail, seven miles from the nearest road or anything like that."

The alternative — camping on private land — involved a yearlong process with multiple meetings with the county planning commission and Board of Commissioners and could cost \$15,000 for a conditional use permit.

"This is a very broad problem that I see consistently across counties in the U.S.," said Mica Rosenoer, government relations manager for outdoor marketplace Hipcamp, which supplements public land access, integrates with Airbnb and works similarly. She is also a Chaffee County Housing Authority Board member.

"Most land use codes have very old commercial campground regulations meant for high density RV parks or they have very new short-term rental permit application processes, and those usually require a single family home on the proper-

ty.

Chaffee County passed a new ordinance tailored to low-impact camping on private property in October 2022, streamlining the process to an online form, a single meeting with a county staffer and a \$500-\$1,500 permit. Instead of requiring bathrooms and electric hookups onsite, the new ordinance allows for primitive camping. The ordinance took effect in February 2023.

Legislation passed last year in Maryland changed the definition of agritourism to include camping and incidental outdoor stays.

Baker led the effort to revise the county's land use code along with Hipcamp. Hipcamp users reserve campsites, with a portion of the booking fee going to the landowner offering including tents, RVs, vans, yurts, domes or travel trailers. Some landowners include equipment in the rental.

"We want to support landowners who are working ranchers or farmers or have a piece of property that is going relatively unused and developing a secondary use to some of their properties so they can build out sustainable revenue, be able to pay their property taxes and

support tourism in a more sustainable way in their community," Rosenoer said.

During a webinar held by the Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals, Baker said the ordinance was helping Chaffee County hew close to what so many local bumper stickers preached: Keeping the towns 'town' and keeping the country 'country.'

"I think that's the challenge that most carriers in the rural West have faced," he said.

Increasingly, landowners are also facing challenges of rising costs as they tend to their properties, and for many, allowing camping could fund that.

"This is another [revenue] stream, not a hugely lucrative stream, but enough to make a significant difference in a lot of people's lives that helps augment their income so it helps us maintain the rural character of the rural part of the county and helps our producers maintain the rural character of the agricultural community," Baker said.

The Chaffee County Planning Department identified 250 farms and ranches that are eligible for this kind of use. Half of those landowners opening two campsites, Rosenoer said, could

yield nearly \$4 million for local businesses and \$100,000 in county tax revenue if the county adopted a transient occupancy tax.

For Baker, it's a way locals can help communicate their values to visitors and bridge a cultural gap to make sure rural Colorado is not just Denver's weekend playground.

"It seems that we're losing our connection with our agricultural heritage — the Jeffersonian concept of knowing where your food comes from, knowing how it's produced, knowing what people go through to produce it, all those values that used to be pretty commonplace," he said. "[Private property camping] gives families and others an opportunity to stay on a working ranch and for a kid to go out and see tadpoles in a creek, or a pond, or even an irrigation ditch, or to look at pond water under a microscope or to have some encounters with nature.

"I think there's still that connectivity, it's part of the overall Western heritage, the Western lifestyle of being outdoors... they still want to share it with people, they want to share that heritage and that point of view with people so they can try to

continue it and foster it onward."

The ordinance requires major site reviews if the property is located in an undisturbed high or highest quality habitat, is in an identified wildlife migration corridor or is visible from or located within 300 hundred yards of a scenic and historic byway. The ordinance limits landowners to 10 campsites, at a minimum size of 10 acres, and requires campsites to have a caretaker within 60 miles. Different minimum campsite sizes for tents or RVs or vans limit fire risk. Quiet hours run between 10 p.m. - 7 a.m. and camping is limited during wildlife habitat periods.

"We didn't have a lot of concern because of this being, by definition, rural in nature, from neighbors who thought they might be adversely impacted by people on adjacent properties," Baker said. "Part of it is because you know the numbers are going to be somewhat self-limiting, they're not going to be a huge campground, it's not going to be like a Burning Man or everything like that sort of music festival, it would be fairly small numbers of people just on an opportunistic basis that way." **CN**



# Buttigieg talks partnering with counties on infrastructure, safe streets, climate change



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Transportation Sec. Pete Buttigieg discusses transportation issues with NACo Immediate Past President Larry Johnson during his address Feb. 13 at the NACo Legislative Conference. Photo by Denny Henry

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Counties and the federal government must work together to get the most out of funding for the Safe Streets and Roads for All program and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Transportation Sec. Pete Buttigieg told a General Session audience Feb. 13 at the NACo Legislative Conference.

"When I was mayor, I believed that local government was the key for getting things done, and the reality is the answers, the projects, the delivery doesn't come from Washington, but more of the funding should, and that's exactly what we're doing with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law — we're seeking to work with our partners on the ground to help you meet the priorities that you've

known all along need to get done," Buttigieg said.

Buttigieg pointed to benefits the Rural Surface Transportation Grant program has brought counties, including the addition of a ferry boat to provide access across the Mississippi River in Plaquemines Parish, La. and a railroad project in Clay County, Minn.

"We have more funding than ever, and we know that it's not just having the funding out there, it's making it easier to work with," Buttigieg said. "Rural counties don't have legions of federal relations staff to pick through federal requirements to work with our agents, we get that, and so we are available on request -- we can often provide technical assistance to help work that process, not just securing a grant but getting those dollars out and we want to help

you deliver."

To combat rising numbers in pedestrian deaths and injuries related to transportation, Buttigieg said that counties need to focus on road design, reducing speed and reducing the number of "conflict points." The success of Vision Zero, a strategy to eliminate traffic deaths and severe injuries, shows that sometimes the best way to prove that something can be done is to implement it at the local level, Buttigieg said.

"Some people struggle with that, because it sounds so pie in the sky, but it's actually happened," he said. "It hasn't

happened nationwide, but it's happened in Jersey City, it's happened in Hoboken, in Evanston, Ill., so instead of saying, 'How do we get from 40,000 to zero overnight?' we say, 'How do we take the roster of the places that got there and make that roster longer each passing year? It just changes the conversation and I think sometimes expands our imagination about what's possible.'"

Over 7,000 miles of highway, 3,700 bridges and 8,000 buses, ferries and other transit are being created through funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Buttigieg said.

"We can't tell you what your community's priorities are, but we can partner with you on priorities that I think we all share — safety, job creation ... climate change," Buttigieg said. "This is not going to be easy — none of this is easy. You've got to deal with escalating costs and the inflationary environment that we have, you've got to deal with permitting, you've got to deal with local alignment, with raw materials, workforce constraints.

"But I would argue that these are the kinds of problems we went into public service to solve." **CN**

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**POLICY RESOLUTIONS COVERAGE  
STARTS ON PAGE 21.**



# Biden administration is 'engaged in largest anti-smuggling campaign in history,' official says

by Mary Ann Barton  
editor

The Biden administration is scaling up its anti-smuggling operations and expanding cooperation and support for counties and cities and non-profits on the border.

In fact, the Department of Homeland Security "is engaged in the largest anti-smuggling campaign in history," said Sean McGoffin, senior coordinating official for the Southwest Border Coordination Center, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

One of the problems the administration is combating? Misinformation doled out to people trying to enter the United States both legally and illegally, often by smugglers, said McGoffin, who spoke to members of NACo's Justice and Public Safety Committee Feb. 11 at the NACo Legislative Conference.

"When people are being smuggled — and there are smugglers on both sides of the border — they are treated like a commodity, not a human being," he noted. Misinformation provided by smugglers gives migrants false hope. "They were telling Venezuelans that buses will be available to take them to Canada."

"It's really about educating these individuals' [who want to come to the United States], he said. "They're being told fabrications."

The Biden administration is taking on smuggler misinformation, with the State Department expanding media outreach to be sure that accurate information is reaching migrants.

Trying to cross the border often ends with deadly results. Last year, at least 853 migrants died trying to cross from Mexico to the United States, according to a report by CBS News.

"On a regular basis, our job turns into rescues and that's what we do," McGoffin said. "Saving that human life is important. The people we en-

counter are deserving of that respect."

The United States has seen an uptick in border rescues. From 5,336 in 2020, to 12,857 in 2021 to 22,014 last year.

One tool in the Customer and Border Protection toolbox is CPBOne, a mobile app used to streamline lawful entry into the country, McGoffin said. The app guides users to services based on their needs, such as reporting their arrival, completing documents or making appointments for CBP services. The app is designed to streamline their travel by providing information before or upon their arrival or departure. It also increases transparency for CBP stakeholders through online access to service requests, live status updates and direct chat capabilities.

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection is guided in its mission by six pillars, McGoffin said. (Quotes explaining more about each pillar are from an executive summary issued by DHS Sec. Alejandro Mayorkas.)

**1. Surging resources:** "We are surging resources, including personnel, transportation, medical support and facilities to support border operations."

**2. Increasing efficiency to reduce strain on the border:** "We are increasing CPB processing efficiency and moving with deliberate speed to mitigate potential overcrowding at Border Patrol stations and to alleviate the burden on the surrounding border communities."

**3. Employing an aggressive consequence regime:** "We are administering consequences for unlawful entry, including removal, detention and prosecution."

**4. Bolstering the capacity of non-profits:** "We are bolstering the capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to receive noncitizens after they have been processed by CBP and are awaiting the results of their immigration removal proceedings. And, we are ensuring appropriate coordination with and support for state, local and



Department of Homeland Security's Sean McGoffin, discusses human smuggling. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

community leaders to help mitigate increased impacts to their communities."

**5. Go after cartels and smugglers:** "We are targeting and disrupting the transnational criminal organizations and

smugglers who take advantage of and profit from vulnerable migrants, and who seek to traffic drugs into our country."

**6. Work with regional partners.** "We are deterring irregular migration south of our

border, in partnership with the Department of State, other federal agencies, and nations throughout the Western Hemisphere, to ensure that we are sharing the responsibility throughout the region. **CN**

## Winfrey: 'Take advantage of all we have to offer'

From **NEWCOMERS** page 1

county governments can solve this problem alone — we need private insurance, we need hospitals, we need providers, we need federal, state and local partners, tribal partners, and we want to convene and we want to drive solutions."

"But it's not about more money, it's going to be about building better systems, getting the incentives aligned, so that we're focused on outcomes and not just passing people from system to system," he noted. "We want to make our residents better."

"So, I'm very proud of President Winfrey and the members who will serve on this commission to help set the country on the right path," Chase said.

Members also heard from Matt Prochaska, chair of NACo's membership committee; a representative from NACo partner, Nationwide and NACo

President Denise Winfrey. All urged the first-time attendees to take advantage of their time in Washington D.C. by making their county priorities known and discussing best practices with other officials.

"Please reach out to any member, learn what you can, take advantage of all we have to offer," said Winfrey, a member of the Will County, Ill. county board. "We're excited to have so many of you involved at NACo as first timers this year. What you may not know is that the way that NACo is able to advocate for counties across the country is through your participation, your support, your involvement. We need you to be able to do what we do for you."

"The Legislative Conference is your chance to be able to learn a lot about us, about government, about interaction between the federal government and counties," Winfrey said. "We know that as counties, we

have all the responsibility, and very often, so little of the say so and the money, so this is the chance for you to put your ideas forward, share with us what you need, so that we can advocate for you at the federal level."

NACo ambassadors, who are members well-versed in everything the organization can do for counties, were seated at each table and newcomers were encouraged to ask questions.

"It all starts and stops with engagement — being here is that first important step," Chase said. "Make sure you read our materials, give us your stories. So, what we're really focused on is storytelling — putting the county government role into context, that we're not taking our positions from a partisan lens, we're taking our positions based on the mandated roles and responsibilities that counties have." **CN**



# Economic opportunity awaits rural and urban farmers, says USDA Secretary Vilsack

by **Mary Ann Barton**  
editor

Agriculture is experiencing a transformative moment that could see new creative opportunities for rural and urban farmers alike, according to Agriculture Sec. Tom Vilsack, who addressed the NACo Board meeting Feb. 12 just hours before the Super Bowl.

"You know, it doesn't surprise me that NACo would meet on Super Bowl Sunday, it just shows how truly dedicated you are to the cause," he said.

Speaking to a packed conference room at the Legislative Conference, Vilsack told county officials that agriculture is experiencing both a "transformative and challenging" time.

Over the last few years, farmers have seen their highest income ever.

"But as Paul Harvey said, 'Here's the rest of the story,'" he said. "Nearly 50 percent of America's farmers lost money. Another 40 percent did make a little money, but the majority of their money came from 'off farming.'"

Off farming is any activity undertaken by the farmer or farm household as an additional source of income.

Over the past 60 years, dating back to former USDA Sec. Earl Butz, farming has "been about production," Vilsack said. "Farms have gotten bigger and bigger," he said, "and we have fewer and fewer farmers. That just doesn't impact agriculture, it impacts small businesses in small towns because there are fewer customers."

"It impacts the public-school systems, because there are fewer students and it impacts the healthcare system because there aren't sufficient numbers of people to support a full-scale hospital."

So, the challenge, he said, is to "make sure we figure out ways to transform the model we've been operating under the last 60 years."

To do that, it requires looking at new and creative ways

for farmers to make a living, he noted. Today, farming choices are mainly growing crops and livestock.

But due to recent legislative achievements, Vilsack noted, farmers can diversify.

"Economic opportunity awaits both rural and urban farmers."

USDA is committed to supporting a diverse range of farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners through a program called Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, he said.

The effort will expand markets for America's climate-smart commodities, leverage greenhouse gas benefits of climate-smart commodity production and provide direct, meaningful benefits to production agriculture, including for small and underserved producers.

This effort will expand

## 2023 NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

markets for America's climate-smart commodities, leverage the greenhouse gas benefits of climate-smart commodity production and provide direct, meaningful benefits to production agriculture, including for small and underserved producers.

USDA is investing more than \$3.1 billion for 141 projects through this effort and all of the projects that will be funded require meaningful involvement of small and underserved producers.

Last fall, Vilsack announced USDA would invest up to \$2.8 billion in 70 selected projects under the first pool of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities funding opportunity.

In December, he announced \$325 million will be invested in an additional 71 projects under the second funding pool.

Another opportunity Vilsack discussed is the Farm to School program.

"For example, we recently invested \$10 million in a series of grants that actually went to 5,000 schools across the United States to help them purchase, and to know how to purchase, locally produced foods. So that's 5,000 new opportunities that didn't exist."

"So it's an exciting new world," Vilsack said, "which is why I asked for the opportunity to speak briefly to you today. To encourage you to whet your appetite to learn more about this."

"All of this information is on our website, at USDA.gov. And we encourage you to do this and all of it requires an understanding of two things. And I'll

finish with this — it's important for us to continue to have the resources that are currently available to us in the infrastructure law, in the American Rescue Plan, in the Inflation Reduction Act."

"Now there may be an effort on the part of some folks to basically take back some of those resources," Vilsack warned.

"If they take it from us at USDA, they are limiting our capacity to transform agriculture. Secondly, as we put the farm bill together, it's going to be important for these programs that are now being launched, and this administration to be supported and integrated into that farm bill, so that they become part of the fabric of what USDA does on a regular basis."

"If we do this, here's what happens," he said. "Farming improves, not for a few. But for many." **CN**



**Agriculture Sec. Tom Vilsack speaks to NACo Board members Feb. 12 at the NACo Legislative Conference.**

Photo by Denny Henry



# White House advisors chart economic path forward in General Session

2023 NACo  
**LEGISLATIVE  
CONFERENCE**

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

The Biden administration's chief economic emissaries outlined changes in store for the American economy and how counties fit into the picture, while speaking Feb. 13 to a General Session audience.

Mitch Landrieu, who is managing implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), has seen a lot he likes in his portfolio, along with the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

"This is the most comprehensive, well-thought-out approach to fixing what has been wrong with America in my lifetime," he said. "You will not see — whether by design, or good fortune or luck — another overarching theme that fits together really nicely, beginning with the bill that Gene's [Sperling] overseeing for the rescue plan, to the work that I'm doing in the infrastructure law, to the work that John's (Podesta) doing with the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS Act.

"It's all part of the same arc, of how you rebuild America from the bottom up and the middle out."

Sperling, who has overseen ARPA implementation, said the plan's attention to flexibility should make it a model for the federal government going forward. The plan awarded \$65.1 billion directly to counties to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including replacing lost revenue. That gave counties the leeway to stabilize their pieces of the country, expand their services to meet increased needs, retain their workforces and fortify their local economic bases in the form of assistance to businesses and nonprofits.

"This model is the best model for a recovery plan ever," Sperling said. "It was...designed to ensure that we have insurance against the bumps in the road that can happen and all of you had the capacity not just to get back but to, as the president says, build back better."

The flexibility that allows re-



**NACo President Denise Winfrey asks a question of Mitch Landrieu the Feb. 13 General Session. John Podesta and Gene Sperling look on. The trio of White House advisors described how the legislation they are implementing would change the American economy.** Photo by Denny Henry

cipients to spend on anything besides lobbying has been crucial to ARPA's success, and Sperling tells anyone who asks to look to counties as the test case.

He refuted criticism that ARPA was responsible for inflation, pointing out the favorable inflation rate in the United States, relative to comparable nations.

"I think all of you know, the U.S. is not only having inflation coming down, we're in the middle of the pack," he said, noting that the 38 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries averaged 10.3 percent inflation as of November 2022, compared to the 7.1 percent U.S. inflation rate at the same point.

"If we do not let people know how well this model has worked, then shame on us, because the next time they'll say that was that was a mistake. If not, the next time this happens they're going to go back to the old model" of sending money through state governments,

Sperling noted.

The Inflation Reduction Act will incentivize private sector investments to advance transitions to renewable energy adoption in pursuit of climate change goals.

"It's a big bill, but it's a bit different than the other legislation we've been talking about," said Podesta, senior advisor to the president for clean energy innovation and implementation. "Two-thirds of the support for investment is running through the tax code, so it is intended to spur private sector investment in all these clean technologies to create a cycle of innovation to root that investment in the needs of the country."

Those needs have been collecting in underserved areas for decades, and Podesta said the Inflation Reduction Act is oriented toward making investments that are too good to pass up.

"By enhancing these tax credits, it gives the private sector an incentive to pay prevailing wages, to use certified ap-

prentices, to go to places that are often overlooked, left behind and invest there," he said.

Long-term horizons for incentives will make planning more reliable and Podesta said it was oriented toward local community development strategies.

"Now we've got 10 years of certainty and countless households as a result will be able to install rooftop solar, purchase energy efficient appliances like heat pumps, make cost-saving efficiency upgrades, insulation windows and doors," he said. "We went through a period of time where there was tax credit support for clean power, but it sunsetted every year. It's very hard to plan big projects."

Big projects are relative, though, and Landrieu said what may seem like small bridge replacements funded by the BIL could mean the world to a community that is cut off or severely inconvenienced in both commerce and public safety if an off-Interstate-system bridge is out of commis-

sion.

"There is a benefit in this bill that says that if you actually invest the money in an off-system bridge, we'll pay 100 percent of it instead of the 80 percent of it," Landrieu said. "That's where the incentive comes in from our side, everybody, rural areas understands that."

Getting some projects done through the BIL, including repairing, replacing, fortifying, upgrading and rethinking myriad infrastructure components — some of which have been neglected for decades due to insufficient resources — takes a modicum of cooperation with states, and for some projects, like the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, counties have to be active in making their needs known.

"The governors and the state legislators have to come up with a state plan, and you need to be engaged with them to make sure that your county doesn't get left behind," he said of revolving door loans for water resources. **CN**



## 2023 NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

# Foundation for America's Public Lands promises hope for BLM funding needs

Bureau of Land Management Director Tracy Stone-Manning answers a question about Greater Sage Grouse habitat protection. Photo by Leon Lawrence III



by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

At the dinner table with its federal public lands' siblings, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is eating last, but it's getting hungrier.

Even as outdoor recreation grows on territory managed by the federal government's largest landowner, its budget remains paltry and BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning said that will

start to show wear before too long if trends continue. In fiscal year 2021, visits to U.S. public lands increased by more than 10 percent to 80.5 million people.

"This rapid rise is putting significant strain on our facilities, roads and infrastructure while also of course having an impact on the lands themselves," she told the Public Lands Steering Committee Saturday.

"These increases are distrib-

uted unequally, with popular sites being inundated, while lesser-known places remain relatively stable and yet other places are as yet undiscovered.

"BLM has not been seen or treated as a recreation agency, despite the public discovering us."

On top of that, her department — the BLM — receives just 79 cents per visitor, compared to \$5.20 to the National Park Service and \$1.70 for the

Forest Service. The latter have long had congressionally chartered private partners and now, so too will the BLM: The Foundation for America's Public Lands.

"We can direct these efforts to areas with the infrastructure to handle increased visitation, while benefiting gateway communities and creating job opportunities working with the foundation," Manning said.

BLM and the foundation will

hold a series of listening sessions this year to inform the partnership's strategy.

"You know the communities you represent, and the recreational opportunities encompassed by your counties," she said. "We need that kind of expertise as we work to improve the visitor experience. As you can hear, we take seriously our role in managing the nation's public lands for current and future generations."

Manning was optimistic about the Biden administration's goal to permit projects totaling 25 gigawatts of renewable energy on public lands by 2025, and for the job growth that push will entail.

"It's an aggressive goal that we're going to meet," she said. "The power and potential of the clean energy future is not something on the distant horizon, it's an undeniable and critical part of the day-to-day work we do now."

The BLM is updating its environmental impact statement for solar energy in Western states, last done in 2012.

"We have got to get it right," she said. "We must work with the renewable energy industry to site, design and operate these projects in ways that minimize impacts to our public lands and allow outdoor recreation and other uses to continue. We can only do that well with smart planning to that end." **CN**

## 2023 NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

County officials operate in a political world. Their county staff do not.

That distinction is one of the most important for an elected official of any tenure to make, Clackamas County, Ore. Commissioner Martha Schrader told the Community, Economic and Workforce Development Steering Committee Feb. 11.

"It's your job to take the slings and arrows and occasionally the tomatoes," she said to an audience of mainly elected officials. "Your job is to set the tone and what you want to do [policy-wise], but make sure that once you're down that road, you

are the one that's on the spot to do the external communication to the public."

That said, Mary Keating added, staff are there to support the visions elected officials have for their counties. She's the director of community services in DuPage County, Ill.

"The most important step in that is developing what is a clear vision of what it is that you are hoping to accomplish," she said. "Once you're able to articulate that and staff can help you craft that vision, we'll figure out how it's possible to get there and what things are within our control."

Shawn Milne, who has lived in both worlds as a former Toole County, Utah commissioner

# Professional development, work-life balance helps county employees be more productive



DuPage County, Ill.'s Mary Keating warns against department heads who try to be information gatekeepers while addressing the Community, Economic and Workforce Development Steering Committee. She is flanked by Cache County, Utah's Shawn Milne and Clackamas County, Ore.'s Martha Schrader. Photo by Charlie Ban

and now economic development director for Cache County, Utah and he said county staff helped him adjust to the public sector.

"I came into office feeling pretty darn sure that city council experience and successfully running a business, that I knew more than I did, and I thought that there was a lot that was transferable between the private sector in the public sector," he said. "Boy, was I wrong."

Keating said that leaving budget flexibility for staff professional development was critical to both retention and skills enhancement.

"I absolutely encourage all

See **STAFF** page 25



# Infrastructure law boosts public land wildfire arsenal

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

The U.S. Forest Service is changing its approach to combating wildfires, choosing a method commensurate with the growing size of the threat. At the same time, the investments made by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is having a substantial impact on the Forest Service's and Department of Interior's approaches before, during and after wildland fires.

During a summit on public lands management and wildfires during NACo's Legislative Conference, Forest Service Chief Randy Moore said the agency is adjusting to the growing scope of wildfires.

"Our process has been to do what we call 'random acts of restoration,'" he said.

"We have taken the money that we get and we try and treat a lot of different areas, but what we're seeing is that the level and the scale of treatment that we're providing on the land-

scape does not match the levels and scale the fires and the disease and insects that are taking place on the landscape."

The Forest Service has added 11 additional landscapes to the 10 designated high-risk fireheds that were identified in 2022, on which hazardous fuel removal is prioritized.

"Our scientists are telling us that if we're able to treat anywhere between 20-40 percent of a fireshed, then we would have a positive outcome on how fire behaves when it moves across that landscapes," Moore said.

Jeff Rupert, director of the Department of Interior's Office of Wildland Fire, reported that the department reduced hazardous fuels on 2 million acres of its land, with another 800,000 acres planned in 2023.

"It really is about bringing a priority focus on where you're treating acres, how you're partnering to treat acres at that broader scale, that landscape scale, that watershed scale and developing shared strategies to

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reduce that risk working at the county level working with local communities working with other federal partners, tribes so that it's not just about 'OK, what is our plan on a particular interior administered piece of land?' but really what is that shared strategy to reduce risk at a scale that makes a difference?" Rupert said.

In addition, the Interior Department completed more than 360,000 acres of post fire emergency stabilization and burned area rehabilitation in 2022.

### Staffing concerns

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law directed the Interior Department to increase federal land firefighter pay, and Rupert said the department was eyeing a long-term strategy to make those raises permanent. The employee classifi-

cation for wildland firefighters will likely change, too.

"That's really important because that's a fundamental part of how we think about addressing the challenge... around recruiting and retaining wildland firefighters," he said.

"Firefighters want to be recognized as professional wildland firefighters," and changes with the Office of Personnel Management can give them that recognition.

"We're addressing you know sort of all of the qualifications and establishing clear lines of career development so that when someone enters the workforce as an entry level firefighter, they have a clear path to becoming a senior manager and see a full career in front of them."

For an agency that deals mostly in what is essentially fuel for wildfires, any position contributes in some way to forest health or operation.

The Forest Service has seen a reduction of roughly 8,000 non-fire employees over the

last 20 years, Moore said, and although he doesn't think it will be possible to get back to that employment level, he did see a path to hiring 4,000 and leveraging the other half through partnerships, including working with counties. But staffing is a dynamic challenge.

"We hired 3,300 new employees last year and that was really good it was getting that increasing the capacity, but then we lost 2,500 through attrition and so what we really only gained was about 800 new people to add to the capacity," he said.

"When you look at the entry-level type-positions, then there's an amount of time where you need to be training people as well, and so the other thing that we've noticed is that a lot of the people we've hired in the last three years a high percentage of them have left the agency," he noted.

"We are experiencing a 45 percent reduction of the new people that we brought on that have left." **CN**



U.S. Forest Service Chief Randy Moore emphasizes how recent legislation fortifies firefighting capacity on public lands. Photo by Charlie Ban



# Key staff stress broadband, bipartisanship in new farm bill

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Professional staff from House and Senate committees that will be crucial to the crafting of this year's farm bill told NACo members that broadband funding and deployment will loom large over

the negotiations, along with an emphasis on making federal programs more accessible.

They discussed prospects for the legislation during NACo's rural stakeholders meeting at NACo's Washington, D.C. office Feb. 14 during the Legislative Conference.

"It seems like every rural development hearing we have turns into a broadband hearing, so I think we're going to be particularly focused on that," said Paul Balzano, a House Agriculture Committee staffer.

Fellow House Agriculture Committee staffer Emily German said legislators wanted the farm bill to be comprehensive.

"We're looking at what the path forward is to make sure that we have one program that works really well rather than two [where] our efforts are split," she said.

Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) is stressing bipartisanship for the Senate's legislation.

"Last time in the Senate, the farm bill passed with a record-breaking [86-11] bipartisan vote in passage and our only directive from the chairwoman so far is to beat that number," said Mikayla Bodey, senior professional staff member for the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Forestry and Nutrition.

"So we are aiming for 87 votes in the Senate, and obviously that's going to take a lot of bipartisanship on a number of different issues throughout the committee's jurisdiction and throughout the farm bill titles, but we think that a really great place to start is with rural



**Mikayla Bodey, senior professional staff member for the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry emphasizes the 87-vote goal for the farm bill in the Senate.** Photo by Charlie Ban

development and energy."

The variety of federal programs are all well and good, but Bodey said one of the main problems was that they aren't often accessible to the rural communities who need them most, particularly if they don't have staff capacity.

A working group is identifying statutory barriers to rural development programs, though she also suggested

rural development agencies could better organize information into toolkits for users.

"We oftentimes hear from rural communities who are trying to access rural development programs that the applications are too onerous, it takes too much time and frankly we don't see it as being fair that a rural community has to hire a \$10,000, \$20,000, \$30,000 consultant to secure one rural

development grant," she said. "We need folks from partner organizations who are doing that kind of technical assistance and meaningful work and frankly making a more accessible front door of the federal government."

DeShawn Blanding, another House Agriculture Committee staffer, seconded that when addressing how to strengthen technical assistance offerings, emphasized the opportunity posed by local service providers who have been working on communities for years.

"Paperwork can be onerous, so how do we begin to address some of those [concerns] and mitigate some of those processes that allow easier access to programs?" he said.

"I think part of that is going back to the technical assistance piece and providing resources to community based-organizations, to other organizations that are out there in the community that are trusted. I think 'trusted' has to be a key part of that, as well." **CN**

## 2023 NACo ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

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# The arts have the power to transform counties

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Art can be more than “just art.” It can help counties handle recovery in a variety of ways, according to Larry Nelson, Waukesha County, Wis. supervisor and chair of NACo’s Arts and Culture Commission.

“It’s what we call ‘arts and’ — so ‘arts and the environment, arts and economic development, arts and community cohesion,” Nelson said Feb. 12 when the group’s members heard from three different counties about their experiences with the arts.

Three examples of counties utilizing the arts to solve local challenges are Hawaii County, Hawaii in its pursuit of “regenerative tourism,” Potter County, Pa. attempting to attract young people to the rural area and Greenbrier County, W.Va. in its efforts to tackle the opioid crisis.

All participated in NACo’s Creative Counties Placemaking Challenge in partnership with Americans for the Arts, which tasked counties with populations of less than 150,000 to use the arts to solve a problem.

## Hawaii County

Hawaii County, Hawaii is launching “Revitalize Pohoiki,” aligning art with the Hawaii Island Destination Management Action Plan to educate tourists about the importance of maintaining Hawaii’s environment. They plan to do so through cultural workshops, signs and art including a rock sculpture, in the Puna district’s natural area.

“We are designing a creative and educational experience that ... balances residential access and visitor curiosity,” said Hawaii County Councilmember Ashley Kierkiewicz. “The signs we’re designing and producing are a celebration of Pohoiki — its stories, its people, its culture, its assets ... We want folks to know it’s not just about Pohoiki, but about taking care to ensure long-term sustainability, celebrating what feeds us, while educating about the need for managing our precious resources.”

## Potter County

In another example of how the arts can bring about change

in a community, county officials heard from Potter County, Pa. Commissioner Paul Heimel.

At increasing rates, he explained, young people are moving away from Potter County. The 2020 census found that the county’s median age was about a decade older than the national average, which proved to not only be an issue in attracting tourists, but also resulted in a lack of people needed for critical services, like volunteers for the fire and ambulance service.

Research conducted by the county discovered that at close to the top of the list for what young people were looking for in a rural area was a “vibrant community,” something that the arts could help solve.

“There was a time in my life when I seriously questioned whether it made any sense for tax dollars to be used to support the arts, I’ll admit,” said Heimel. “But my eyes have been opened — I’ve learned there’s a tremendous evidence-based case to be made to invest in the arts.”

Heimel said he’s working to create an arts and culture center in a 750-acre state park located in the county that’s currently not in use, as it was previously a ski area but doesn’t have enough snow anymore to function due to climate change.

## Greenbrier County

Through its Opioid Recovery Project, Greenbrier County, W.Va. is connecting women receiving treatment for substance use disorder with the arts. The project is a partnership with Seed Sower, an organization in the county that provides supervised housing and recovery support.

“We know that in addressing mental health, addressing substance use disorder, art is a wonderful way to be able to help with focus, with touch and just an overall better lifestyle,” said Greenbrier County Commissioner Tammy Tincher. “... Our goal is to bring an opportunity to those in a way that more than likely would not be given to them and hope that it will push forward their recovery and create a better community, a better county and hopefully have a small impact on the opioid epidemic.” **CN**

**Potter County, Pa. Commissioner Paul Heimel, at the podium, tells Arts and Culture Commission members Feb. 11 how the arts are helping revive his county and make it more appealing to young people. Others on the panel (l-r) are: Greenbrier County, W.Va. Commissioner Tammy Tincher; Hawaii County, Hawaii Councilmember Ashley Kierkiewicz and Jay Dick, senior director of State and Local Government Affairs at Americans for the Arts.** Photo by Denny Henry



# EPA’s Frazer: Final WOTUS rule ‘stops uncertainty’

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Brian Frazer excused county officials from feeling frustrated after trying to comply with the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) over the last few years, but said relief is on the way.

“The definition of ‘Waters’ has changed from administration to administration, and from court decision to court decision,” he told county officials Feb. 11. “This has resulted in confusion, inconsistency and uncertainty for states as well as applicants.”

Frazer, the acting director of the EPA’s Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds, told NACo’s Public Lands Steering Committee that he saw a return to the predictable interpretation of the Clean Water Act that

lasted for decades, once the final rule takes effect March 20. The rule takes into account pre-2015 definitions, subsequent changes and U.S. Supreme Court decisions and establishes limits to draw the boundary of waters subject to federal protection.

“This rule forces effective and efficient implementation by clearly defining waters that warrant consideration of water impacts when development is being considered,” Frazer said.

He said the EPA received roughly 32,000 pre-proposal recommendations and more than 114,000 comments during the public comment period for the final rule, which was announced Dec. 30, 2022. The final rule, Frazer stressed, would emphasize durability, clarity and implementation.

“We worked to build a defi-

nition that can be counted on when the people are making decisions about operations, which projects we go forward with and when,” he said.

“This rule is grounded in EPA and Army’s longstanding authority provided by Congress to the Clean Water Act and refined by court opinions and consideration of the best available science over 45 years of real world practical experience garnered by EPA and Army in implementing the Clean Water Act,” he said.

“Today’s rule will protect more waters than the 2020 Navigable Waters Protection Rule, because it restores categorical protections to interstate waters while allowing for science-informed assessments, whether streams, wetlands, lakes and ponds significantly affect the integrity of downstream waters.” **CN**



**Brian Frazer, acting director of the EPA’s Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds, lists the scope of feedback the agency received on the Waters of the United States’ final rule.** Photo by Leon Lawrence III

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# Record numbers don't tell the whole story for U.S. agriculture



**Xochitl Torres-Small recalls county officials' warm welcome soon after she took office in 2021 as undersecretary for Rural Development.** Photo by Charlie Ban

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Numbers can be deceiving, and Xochitl Torres-Small told the Rural Action Caucus Feb. 12 that despite record-setting net agricultural revenue, the outcomes for many farmers have been less rosy.

That inequity is driving the U.S. Department of Agriculture's agenda during development of the next farm bill. Torres-Small serves as undersecretary for Rural Development.

"Congress writes the farm bill, but if they're doing it right, they're listening to people like you," she said.

"They know that it's people all across the country that experience the farm bill and how it impacts those places and those people who work so hard every single day to supply the rest of our country with the things that we sometimes take for granted."

She cited figures that half of U.S. farmers were not able to break even in 2022 and 80 percent of farmers had to supplement their income with non-farm work.

"So clearly while the system of conventional ag works for some, works for a few and feeds a lot of people. It doesn't necessarily work for the many,"

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she said.

"It's presented a choice for a lot of farmers, whether they have to have this feeling that they have to either go big or get out."

Value-added products may be the key to both setting farmers apart from each other and

"...it's people all across the country that experience the farm bill..."

- Torres-Small

reinforcing the economic viability of their counties.

Torres Small recounted a conversation with an Iowa dairy farmer who was concerned her family farm wouldn't survive.

"What she said to me is 'It doesn't matter how hard we work — you know dairy is a 365 days-a-year, 24 hours a day business,'" she said.

"The cows are always needing to be milked — and it doesn't matter how many innovations we make, how hard we work — we're stuck with the

same price that everyone gets," Torres Small said.

The opportunity comes in turning that milk into cheese or ice cream, allowing for more diversification.

"That's what I think we can do more of across the country if we are supporting farmers' visions about how to add value to their product, but then also recognizing — and you know this better than anyone — that when it comes to rural, it's about the entire community... and you see the impact of how the work that you do on the ground impacts the entire community."

Torres Small remarked that Rural Development being embedded throughout the country helped keep the United States functioning despite restrictions during the pandemic.

"In the midst of COVID, USDA was relied on to get out crucial aid because sometimes, when aid comes just through the states, it doesn't reach everywhere, so being able to invest in people who live in the communities they serve makes a huge difference for rural Americans," she said. "USDA and rural development are pretty unique in that we have people living in the communities they serve, and that gives us a different perspective." **CN**

# Rural counties should try for more help fighting substance use disorder

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

For smaller counties that may not have the staff or resources to compile exhaustive applications for funding to help with substance use disorders, telling a good story may be enough.

For that matter, sometimes grants are the wrong tool. But however counties go about it, they shouldn't let 'perfect' become the enemy of good while taking their shots for resources that will help their residents.

"On the grant writing side, I think that people think they need to have more than they need to have," Michelle Kunkel told the Rural Action Caucus Feb. 12. "It could be as simple as doing a snapshot survey in your jail, or your probation agency, or at your treatment facility to get a little bit of demographics and get a little bit of information," said Kunkel, executive director for the Rural Justice Collaborative. "Sometimes that's the only story you need to tell."

"Describe your community, describe the distance to services, tell me about what you have, what you've done well and what you are struggling with in the best way you possibly can."

Michelle White, senior policy advisor at the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, said the abatement funds that are available as a result of various opioid settlements are prompting coun-

ties to plan where that money should take their communities.

"This money is really forcing people to sit down and be planful, and to think deep into the future about what their needs are and how to address them and how to align with funds," she said.

Some of the most important work, White said, is for county officials to understand the human toll of substance use disorder.

"If you have not taken the time to talk to folks with lived experience... I would really challenge you to talk with those families, those people in the communities, the people who are trying to help the people in the communities, to really understand what their needs are," she said. "...Families who have lost someone, people who are in recovery or trying very hard to get there, and also people who have lived experience in the criminal justice system."

With all of that money, both from abatement funds and grants, White said counties should know what they're getting into, in terms of reporting requirements, and involvement from funders.

"Find somebody who is really good at herding cats — really, good at it — and really good at following instructions, because grant writing is really all about reading the thing and responding to it and knowing who to

See **RURAL** page 25



**The Rural Justice Collaborative's Tara Kunkel, speaking to members of the Rural Action Caucus, recommends that counties pool their opioid settlement funds regionally for greater impact. Michelle White of the Bureau of Justice Assistance is to her right.**

Photo by Charlie Ban



# Counties weigh strategies for allocating opioid settlements



**Lauren Carr, executive director of Graves County, Ky's drug abuse prevention agency, discusses substance abuse prevention.** Photo by Leon Lawrence III

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

With national opioid settlements beginning to roll in, county officials are tasked with determining how best to spend the funds.

Lauren Carr, executive director of the Graves County, Ky. Agency for Substance Abuse Prevention, advocated for needle exchange programs, community distribution of the opioid overdose treatment Naloxone, quick response teams in the event of overdoses and investing in peer support.

"Individuals in active addiction are going to use, regardless of if they have a clean syringe or not — I've never met somebody to walk in my doors and say, 'You know what? I've never shot up, I think I want to shoot up today,' but what I have seen is individuals use the same syringe for two weeks and have abscesses or potentially get a staph infection from using unsterile equipment," Carr told county officials at NACo's Legislative Conference Feb. 11.

"So, not only are we meeting individuals where they are, but we're providing them those key services and education, not only to keep themselves healthy, but keep them alive as

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well ... dead people don't recover, so we have to keep people alive, however that is."

Nick Szubiak, integrated health consultant and principal for NSI Strategies, said that a misconception he often hears is that harm reduction takes the place of programming that supports abstinence from drug use, when instead it's a helpful alternative for people whom the "abstinence only" mindset doesn't help.

"I love abstinence only programs, they're fantastic and they help many people, but they don't help everyone, so we need those programs and all this other stuff that we're talking about," Szubiak said. "We're not getting rid of anything with harm reduction, it's about adding in these other doorways and pathways that folks may not have access to."

Gregory Branch, director and health officer for Baltimore County Department of Health and Human Services, said it's essential to destigmatize substance use disorder and to begin examining it through a public health lens instead

of a critical one by investing funding in mental health, expanding access to methadone — which is used to treat opioid use — and creating treatment programs in all communities.

"What happens is that everyone always says we need to help communities, that's really important, but if I try and open a program, you're not going to let me because it's 'Not in my backyard,'" Branch said.

"It's always, 'It's a shame people are out there like that, it doesn't make any sense, they need to get care.' OK, well put [treatment] in your neighborhood and it's 'no'— yet that person is still in your neighborhood, taking drugs in your neighborhood. Yet, when I want to bring in services right where they are, it's 'not here.'"

Branch said that, while counties across the country are at varying levels of progress when it comes to the opioid epidemic — with some pushing for safe injection sites while others don't have access to needle exchange programs — it's important to move forward, however that looks for each county.

"Everybody's at a different place, and all we can actually do is, when your jurisdiction is ready to do it, go ahead and do it," Branch said. **CN**

**GET TO KNOW...**

**Mason County, Texas**

**Welcome to Mason County, Texas**

Founded in 1858, Mason County, Texas is nicknamed the "Gem of the Hill Country." It was created out of a portion of Gillespie County, which features the one-room Junction School that former President Lyndon B. Johnson attended as a child and is where he returned in 1965 to sign the Elementary and Secondary Education Act beside his first teacher, Katie Deadrich.

lation of roughly 4,344 and is about 932 square miles, according to the 2020 census. Its county seat is the city of Mason, which is known as "The Tennis Capital of Texas," for its 96 state University Interscholastic League championship wins.

**The Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve located in the county is home to 4-6 million Mexican free-tailed bats, making it one of the largest concentrations of warm-blooded animals in the world.**

Opening in 1928, Mason County's Odeon Theater is the oldest continually operating theater in west Texas and in 1957, it held a special premiere of the movie "Old Yeller," which was adapted from Mason local Fred Gipson's book of the same name.

*"Get to Know" features new NACo member counties.*





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# NOT KNOWING THESE SEVEN THINGS COULD BE COSTLY TO WOMEN

There are many misconceptions and gaps of knowledge about Social Security that can prove costly. This list will help clarify those misconceptions and fill in those gaps.

- **Your benefits are based on your highest 35 years of income.**

Because so many women take on caregiving responsibilities, there are often gaps in their wage history. In fact, women average 10 years out of the workforce, and nearly two-thirds of part-time workers are women.<sup>1</sup> Both of these conditions can negatively affect their Social Security benefit.

Working a few extra years before retiring (or even in retirement) may help offset years they were out of the workforce.

- **If you file early, you lock in reduced benefits for life.**

A quarter of women file as soon as possible and roughly half file before full retirement age. Yet by waiting one more

year, women could boost their benefit by an average of 8.6 percent.<sup>2</sup>

- **A spouse can claim their own benefit while waiting on the spousal benefit.**

If your spouse's wage history is significantly higher than your own, you'll want to consider claiming spousal benefits, where you receive up to 50 percent of your spouse's primary insurance amount after they begin claiming their own benefits. However, if your spouse plans to wait until age 70 to claim their benefit, your ability to claim spousal benefits must also wait.

In the interim, you can claim your own benefits as early as your age 62 and begin receiving income. Then, when your spouse claims their benefit, you will be eligible for a spousal adjustment. Be aware, however, that if you claim your own benefit or your spousal benefit prior to full retirement age, you won't receive the full 50 per-



cent of your spouse's benefit. Your spousal benefit will generally range from 35 percent to 50 percent of your spouse's primary insurance amount, depending on when you file.

- **Women tend to live longer than men.**

One out of four 65-year-old men of average health will live to age 93, and one out of four 65-year-old women will live to age 96.<sup>3</sup> Thus, women have a greater chance of outliving other sources of retirement income. Your potential to live a long life makes decisions about when to claim your benefit important.

- **Your spouse's or former spouse's filing decision may impact both of you.**

Because Social Security offers spousal, survivor and divorce benefits, and one spouse tends to have a higher benefit, the claiming decision for both spouses should be up to the one expected to live the longest.

- **You may be able to claim benefits on a former spouse's record.**

If you are divorced, you may qualify for benefits based on your ex-spouse's record if:

- Your marriage lasted 10 years or longer
- You have not remarried
- You are at least age 62
- Your benefit is less than the benefit you would receive based on their work
- Your ex-spouse is entitled to Social Security retirement or disability benefits

- **If your spouse passes away, your Social Security income could drop by as much as 50 percent.**

However, if both of you were receiving benefits, you can continue receiving the greater benefit of the two.

**Consider this:  
You should start preparing a Social Security strategy by age 55.**

Your situation is unique. Factors that may impact your decision include, but are not limited to, whether you are married, divorced or widowed; your current health; your family history of longevity; and other sources of retirement income.

<sup>1</sup> "Social Security Is Important to Women," Social Security Administration Fact Sheet (January 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin, 2021, Table 6.A4.

<sup>3</sup> "The Retirement Income Reference Book — Fourth Edition," LIMRA Secure Retirement Institute (October 2018).







President Biden speaks to attendees Feb. 14 at the 2023 NACo Legislative Conference at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C.

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IN PHOTOS

All photos  
by Denny Henry  
unless noted

Owen County, Ind. Council Member Anton Neff brought his daughter Sadie to the conference, where she got to hear President Biden speak during the Feb. 14 Special General Session.



New Castle County, Del. Executive Matt Meyer waves back after President Biden calls him out during his speech to the Special General Session Feb. 14. Biden served as a New Castle County Councilmember early in his career.



Susan Rodriguez-McDowell, county commissioner from Mecklenburg County, N.C.enjoys a response during the Human Services and Education Policy Steering Committee Meeting with Mark Jerrell, a Mecklenburg County commissioner.

Photo by Leon Lawrence III



Commissioner Barbara Rush and Commissioner Ann Howard, both of Travis County Texas, smile for the camera Feb. 14 during the Special General Session.





A color guard procession opens the General Session at the 2023 NACo Annual Conference at the Washington Hilton ballroom.



Nick Macchione of San Diego County, Calif. and John Gioia of Contra Costa County, Calif. chat Feb. 14 during a break in the Special General Session.



Commissioner Mandy Meisner of Anoka County, Minn., Commissioner Todd Patzer of Lac Qui Parle County, Minn., Commissioner Jeff Reinert of Anoka County, Minn. and Commissioner Vance Struehrenberg of Blue Earth County, Minn. revel during the Feb. 14 Special General Session.

(L-r) Commissioner Kimblin NeSmith of Gadsden County, Fla., Judge Joe Dabulskis of Sherman County, Ore. and Commissioner Margaret Magruder of Columbia County, Ore. chat Feb. 14 at the Special General Session.







Black Hawk County, Iowa Auditor Grant Veeder gets a kick out of the NACo Board meeting.



Representatives from more than 70 federal agencies met one-on-one with county officials at the Federal Agency Expo & Lunch Feb. 13.



An audience member asks a question of Transportation Sec. Pete Buttigieg during the Feb. 13 General Session.



Members of NACo's Arts and Culture Commission end their meeting with an engaging performance by poet Charity Blackwell.



NACo President Denise Winfrey chats with members of Women of NACo (WON). The mission of WON is to help women in seeking leadership positions.



Summit County, Colo. Commissioner Elisabeth Lawrence admires the 2023 "I Love My County Because" calendar.



A conference participant shows their NACo pride.





Judge Andy Brown and Commissioner Ann Howard talk up their hometown, Travis County, Texas, site of the Annual Conference.



NACo members are “Ready to Rumble” during the LUCC/RAC reception at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. Photo by Lana Farfán



Commissioner Alana Sanders of Newton County, Ga. and Nddidi Mojay with the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Intergovernmental Affairs pause for a photo Feb. 14 during the General Session.



USDA Sec. Tom Vilsack chats with NACo officers (l-r) Denise Winfrey, Mary Jo McGuire, Larry Johnson, James Gore and Kathryn Barger Feb. 12.



Actors take part in a performance Feb. 12 at the Resilient Counties and Arts Luncheon at the conference.





NACo members, including First Vice President Mary Jo McGuire (in red), take a moment for a photo during the all-conference celebration Feb. 12. Photo by Lana Farfán



Party treats for the football-themed all-conference celebration.  
Photo by Lana Farfán



Oregonians McKenzie Farrell, with the Association of Oregon Counties, Tillamook County Commissioner Erin Skaar and Deschutes County Commissioner Phil Chang chat after checking in to the conference Feb. 11.



Washington County, Minn.'s Karla Bigham and Olmsted County, Minn.'s Laurel Podulke-Smith display their team allegiances during the celebration.  
Photo by Lana Farfán

Former NACo President Larry Johnson greets Commissioner Chris Lukasevich of Carbon County, Pa. during the Feb. 14 General Session.

Photo by Leon Lawrence III







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## 2023 NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

### NACo BOARD PASSES 29 INTERIM POLICY RESOLUTIONS

BOARD ADOPTS NEW POLICIES  
RANGING FROM FOOD WASTE  
MANAGEMENT AND DISASTER  
MITIGATION TO FENTANYL CRISIS  
AND TELECOMMUNICATION  
PRICING.

Commissioner Tarryl Clark of Stearns County, Minn. makes a point Feb. 12 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 29 interim policy resolutions Feb. 12. These interim policy resolutions will supplement existing NACo policy until NACo's 2023 Annual Conference in Travis County, Texas. The approved interim resolutions are:

#### COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

##### FY 2024 Appropriations for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

**ISSUE:** Support Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges 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) 2024 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 \$2.1 billion in formula funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships Pro-

gram (HOME); \$3.5 billion for Homeless Housing Assistance grants, including at least 20 percent 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 Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Program in addition to full funding for existing project-based and tenant-based contracts; \$50 million for HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) and \$500 million in Section 108 Loan Guarantee authority.

#### ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY, AND LAND USE

##### Federally Fund Food Waste Management

**ISSUE:** Counties need additional federal funding to reduce the amount of food waste in landfills. Food waste is a growing management challenge in the United States, with an estimated 63 million tons of food

waste generated annually. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that more food waste reaches landfills and combustion facilities than any other single material in our everyday trash. Diverting food waste materials from landfills to waste management options such as composting, anaerobic digestion and other organic waste processes will reduce landfill footprint growth, improve air quality and promote new and innovative products for enhancing a circular economy model for food.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the federal government to provide financial and technical assistance to county governments to achieve measurable food waste reduction.

Urges the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to further define the goals of the North American Initiative on Food Waste Reduction and Recov-

ery for reducing the disposal of food waste in landfills by exploring opportunities to achieve food waste reduction and recovery within relevant North American industry, commercial, institutional, and governmental sectors.

Supports federal funding for the development of renewable based materials that promote safe and efficient handling and eliminate unwanted contaminants in the final dispositioned materials.

##### Pass the Historic Preservation Enhancement Act, a Bill to Amend Title 54, United States Code, to Increase Amounts Deposited in the Historic Preservation Fund

**ISSUE:** The \$150 million annual authorization of deposits to the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) has not changed since 1980. Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) were

created by amendment in 1990 and have grown to 208, with 5 to 10 added each year. 12 THPOs were established and funded in 1996. By 2017, 176 THPOs were established and funded. Inflation has reduced the buying power of the same dollar amounts for the state, tribal and local partners over time. An increase in deposits and appropriations could restore the impact and reach of the HPF without further appropriation or fiscal year limitation.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to pass the Historic Preservation Enhancement Act (HPEA) to continue supporting 59 State Historic Preservation Offices, 208 THPOs, and over 2,080 Certified Local Governments.

##### Support the Federal Government's Justice40 Initiative and Encouragement of Federal, State and

See RESOLUTIONS page 22



## 2023 NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

From RESOLUTIONS page 21

### Local Government Coordination on its Implementation

**ISSUE:** The climate resilience challenge is most severe in disadvantaged communities, which are hurt “worst and first” by flooding, extreme heat, extreme cold, and other results of climate change. To build an equitable climate-resilient future, reparative climate resilient infrastructure investments are necessary to close the infrastructure gap that has resulted from past policies, and to enable communities that have been subject to disinvestment, underinvestment, and marginalization to fully participate in and benefit from such development. The Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) created funding sources to advance environmental justice, and spur economic opportunity by investing in reparative climate resilient infrastructure for the purpose of advancing the principles of the Justice40 Initiative at the local level.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the federal government to work with county governments to implement the federal Justice40 Initiative by providing technical assistance where needed and coordination to access and maximize funding to implement Justice40 projects.

### Increase Safety in the Management of Coal Combustion Residuals

**ISSUE:** Millions of tons of coal ash waste generated by coal burning electric power plants have been placed in unlined diked impoundments at now retired coal burning power plants across the country. These coal combustion residuals (“CCR”) contain contaminants which present significant health risks, including mercury, cadmium, lead, arsenic, boron and sulfate. The disposal of massive amounts of CCR in these ill-maintained impoundments can result in failed containment and the uncontrolled

release of coal ash slurry placing downstream counties and their local community environments at risk of disastrous inundation by CCR.

Over the past 10 years, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has engaged in a set of rulemakings in an attempt to address the immediate and ongoing risk of groundwater and surface water contamination resulting from the migration of these toxic CCR constituents. However, this program has proven wholly insufficient to mitigate the risk posed by the CCR waste stored in these unlined impoundments. EPA’s failure to establish a CCR management program sufficient to protect human health and the environment requires state and local governments to incur substantial costs to monitor the management of CCR waste and to remediate groundwater contamination caused by CCR waste.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges EPA to make changes to existing regulations to directly mandate that all CCR waste, regardless of when it was generated or disposed of, is managed in

a manner which will prevent the migration of CCR contaminants to groundwater and minimize the risk of catastrophic release of CCR waste to the environment. Further, NACo urges the federal government to provide technical and financial assistance to local governments to protect groundwater and waterways from CCR contamination.

### FINANCE, PENSIONS AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

#### Prevent Recoupment of American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

**ISSUE:** Implement a statute of limitations for the remediation and recoupment of funds directly allocated to Counties under the American Rescue Act.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo supports legislation to prohibit the U.S. Department of Treasury from recouping previously awarded funds for projects and services that have been certi-

fied as complete, for at least three years, which will be 2029.

### Reform the Windfall Elimination Provision

**Issue:** The existing windfall elimination provision (WEP) in Social Security, that deducts Social Security benefits for workers who also have pensions from earnings not covered by Social Security, could dissuade individuals from switching to careers in public service/county government.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the U.S. Congress to enact legislation reforming the windfall elimination provision (WEP) in Social Security to make the reduction in benefits more fair for individuals who split their careers in the public and private sectors.

### Grant Counties Authority to Empower States and Counties to Enforce the Collection of State and Local Taxes on Short and Long Term Rentals Occupancy Taxes on Short and Long-term Rentals

**ISSUE:** Discrepancies in the ability of counties to enforce the collection of occupancy tax collection on short-term and long-term rental properties have resulted in the loss of potential tax revenue used for county services and development projects.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo supports federal efforts that support the authority for all counties to enforce laws that provide for the collection of taxes on short and long-term rentals.

### Raise the Debt Limit

**ISSUE:** On January 19, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen announced that the debt limit had been reached, and the U.S. Department of the Treasury would be taking “extraordinary measures” to continue paying government obligations.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to raise the debt ceiling to avoid a default on federal debts. The US Government always pays its debts.

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Board members vote Feb. 12 during the NACo Board of Directors meeting. Photo by Denny Henry



## 2023 NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

From RESOLUTIONS page 22

### HEALTH

#### Protect Kids from Fentanyl

**ISSUE:** Counties in every state are experiencing a fentanyl crisis that is taking the lives of too many of our young residents. Stress and other factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic have further exacerbated this issue and resulted in monthly drug overdose deaths nearly tripling among adolescents from 2019 through the end of 2021 (per the Centers for Disease Control).

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to prioritize the passage of legislation that provides schools with the flexibility needed to utilize COVID relief dollars, allocated through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, to accomplish prevention goals such as (1) purchasing life-saving opioid antagonists, such as naloxone, and (2) to providing related training and education to students and teachers, and (3) supporting other behavioral health initiatives in schools, including existing drug councils.

#### Obtain Better Research on Kratom and to Promote Publication of Best Health Practices Related to Kratom

**ISSUE:** Counties and other levels of local government need better data and research related to the use of kratom that will aide in the development of public health practices that mitigate safety hazards associated with the use of kratom throughout the United States.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo encourages Congress to pass legislation and / or federal agency directives to fund and support efforts to research the health impacts related to the use of kratom. Federal action steps should include agency and staff resources to complete both: (1) a review of existing research on kratom in order to provide counties, parishes,

and other local government jurisdictions with immediate guidance on the most appropriate public health practices related to kratom; including harm reduction and mitigation efforts; and (2) to pursue more comprehensive research on kratom that can inform long term public health approaches related to the use of kratom.

#### Advance CPR and AED Training and Implementation

**ISSUE:** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the estimated annual incidence of heart attack in the United States is 805,000 attacks, 605,000 are new attacks and 200,000 are recurrent attacks with Americans suffering a heart attack approximately every 36 seconds. Counties need better resources to coordinate robust awareness of and training in life saving CPR/AED programs.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the Federal Government to work with local, community and government agencies to (1) increase awareness and the need for cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillator (AED) training in their local communities (2) increase funding to organizations that conduct CPR/AED training programs both "hands only" and CPR certification training (i.e. American Heart Association, Red Cross, Fire Departments, Hospital Systems, Counties & County organizations, Departments of Public Health, etc.) (3) work to improve defibrillator access in vulnerable populations, and work with marginalized populations to provide education and training to improve survivability from a heart attack and improve health outcomes (4) support local, state, and federal programs that advance heart health awareness, to include federal incentives to providers for the provision of blood pressure checks to increase screening for and early diagnosis of heart disease.

#### Support County Behavioral Health Priorities

**ISSUE:** Counties nationwide face a behavioral health crisis, including growing numbers of residents requiring treatment for substance use disorder (SUD) and serious mental illness/severe emotional disturbance (SMI/SED). Counties need the federal government to continue to reform the behavioral health care system at the federal level to support state and local efforts and continue to make significant investments to implement the work at all levels.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to continue to address the Nation's behavioral health crisis in a bicameral, bipartisan fashion, and to support Counties' work serving residents in need of care. Congress should enact legislation to:

Further amend the Medicaid inmate payment exclusion; reform the Medicaid institutions for mental diseases (IMD) payment exclusion; authorize and fund direct and flexible grant programs to counties to support the recruitment, training, and retention of a sufficient behavioral health workforce, and increase funding for existing behavioral health workforce programs; continue to sustain federal funding to support local behavioral health crisis response infrastructure through Medicaid (to include, but not limited to, mobile crisis units); and enforce parity laws and policies in order to ensure equal coverage for behavioral health treatment and medical care, including moving towards parity for reimbursement rates.

#### Tricare Reimbursement Adequacy

**ISSUE:** For counties with a strong military presence and a high number of retired military, most dependent on Tricare for their health insurance. Tricare reimbursement levels and supplemental funding opportunities directly impact community access to care and significantly impact local

health capacity and resiliency.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo supports federal legislation and health financing reform to provide adequate funding to support access, continuity of care and direct provision of health care services for military members, retirees and their families; as well as needed support to critical access hospitals who serve this population.

#### Repeal or Delay Pending Statutory Cuts to Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital Payments

**ISSUE:** Current federal law requires \$32 billion in reductions over four years to Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) allotments, beginning in FY 2024. These cuts would be devastating to county public health care and hospital systems, and other hospitals that serve large numbers of Medicaid beneficiaries and uninsured or underinsured patients.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to repeal or delay the harmful statutory reductions to Medicaid DSH allotments before they go into effect, as scheduled, in FY 2024, beginning October 1, 2023.

### HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION

#### Decrease the Error Rate of the E-Verify System

**ISSUE:** The error rate in the E-Verify System keeps authorized workers from employment which impacts government and local employers' ability to attract and hire a diverse workforce.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to require SSA and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to reduce the error rate for the E-Verify system to less than 0.1 percent. Counties specifically call on the SSA and USCIS to create systems that will reduce errors that disproportionately impact our Latinx, LGBTQ+ and women residents. NACo further supports working with the E-Veri-

fy Platform to improve human made errors by making sure the requested information regarding naming conventions within government data bases, the I-9 Form and the E-Verify application process consistent.

#### Extend Eligibility for Foster Care Support to Age 21

**ISSUE:** Federal law provides foster care payments to eligible youth up to age 18 and allows states to opt into federal support for them until age 21. By requiring all states to extend eligibility to age 21, child welfare agencies would have more time to pursue permanent efforts to prevent having a young person leaving the system alone and unsupported, which often leads to long-lasting poor outcomes for the youth.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo supports legislation to extend federal eligibility in all states to age 21 for foster youth to receive necessary support as they transition to adulthood. NACo supports the targeted de-linking of the antiquated 1996 Aid to Families with Dependent Children income standards for foster youth ages 18 to 21 so that more of them are eligible for support.

#### Address Food Insecurity in Military Families

**ISSUE:** Food insecurity amongst military families creates a domino effect that leads to a reduction in the readiness of the military force and ultimately a weakening of our national security.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the U.S. Congress to continue its effort to reduce the incidence of food insecurity within our military families by ensuring adequate base pay and basic allowance for subsistence for servicemembers and enacting legislation that reduces obstacles that preclude equitable access to benefits for military families and ensures all service members and their dependents always have access

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## 2023 NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

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to enough food for an active, healthy life. Specifically, the federal government should exclude the Military Basic allowance for Housing (BAH) from income when determining eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

### JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

#### Add More Tools to Address the Migrant Crisis

**Issue:** In March of 2020, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) invoked Title 42 in response to the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This order, which is part of the Public Health Service Act, directs certain migrants to be returned to their country of origin under Title 42, instead of Title 8. Biden Administration officials and a bipartisan group of United States Senators and Governors have expressed concerns over plans to discontinue the CDC's use of Title 42. In November of last year, a US District Court judge ruled against the use of Title 42 and in late December, the US Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., denied a request from states that had asked for a delay in letting the rule expire. Most recently the US Supreme Court ruled to temporarily keep the policy in place, leaving its long-term fate uncertain.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges that before the end of Title 42 as a result of the termination of the Public Health Emergency, Congress should pass legislation or the Administration should create a plan, funded by Congress, that ensures counties have the resources necessary to address the ongoing border surge.

### PUBLIC LANDS

#### Expedite Salvage of Burned Timber on Federal Lands

**ISSUE:** Expediting the salvage of burned timber from our nation's public lands can

# Get burned timber off federal lands faster, protect nearby land



Clackamas County, Ore. Commissioner Martha Schrader presents the Community, Economic and Workforce Development Steering Committee's interim resolutions during the Feb. 12 Board of Directors meeting. Photo by Denny Henry

benefit local economies, serve as a method of fuel load management, ease the growing threat of wildland fire, reduce life-threatening hazards to wildland firefighters and the general public, provide fiber to American consumers, and be a source of funding for the U.S. Treasury.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo calls on the federal government to establish a program to expedite the salvage of burned timber resulting from prescribed and wildland fires.

**Background:** Each year prescribed and wildland fires burn and kill valuable trees. Because burned trees lose value quickly, they often become un-merchantable and part of fuel loading for the next fire. These burned trees can be harvested by local contractors and milled in rural and industrial area mills. However, current policies are an impediment to salvage efforts being done in a timely manner.

#### Post-Wildfire Impacts and Community Support

**ISSUE:** Implementing major changes to policies and practices that guide how the Federal Government responds to,

and supports, local jurisdictions facing post-wildfire impacts and recovery, will tackle the major gaps and issues that leave families and communities struggling through disaster recovery years after the initial disaster.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress and the Administration to make major changes in policies and practices regarding how it responds to and supports local jurisdictions and communities with addressing post-fire impacts and recovery. NACo calls 'on Congress to address the major gaps and issues with policies and practices that leave families and communities struggling through recovery for years by expeditiously moving the Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission's recommendations forward through the passage of legislation to swiftly implement the recommendations.

#### Assist Federal Agencies and Local Communities with the Impacts of the Drought Within the Colorado River Watershed and All Other Impacted Rivers and Watersheds

**ISSUE:** Drought in the Colorado River Watershed and all other impacted rivers and watersheds is threatening communities, economies, and livelihoods across the United States. Without bold action, further unmitigated drought impacts, imperil the food and water security for millions of Americans.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to provide funding and develop programming to assist federal agencies and local communities in mitigating the impacts of the drought within the Colorado River watershed and all other impacted rivers and watersheds. NACo urges Congress to develop programs to reduce demand for water by helping communities implement conservation measures while protecting agriculture and food supplies. NACo further urges federal agencies to quickly implement funding to help mitigate the impacts of the drought.

#### Fund Forest Restoration and Improve the County/Federal Partnership on Wildfire Risk Reduction Strategies and Projects

**ISSUE:** Continued funding for forest restoration across the western United States and improving the County/Federal partnership on wildfire risk reduction strategies and projects will positively impact the risk of catastrophic wildfire in counties throughout the west.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to continue funding within the 2023 Farm Bill for wildfire risk reduction projects on federal, state, and private lands above and beyond the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act program authorization and funding that is set to expire in FY 2026. NACo urges Congress to develop a Farm Bill that elevates county involvement in implementation and prioritization. Specifically, NACo urges the administration to incorporate county coordination in the prioritization process of wildfire risk reduction on Federal Lands within county boundaries.

### TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

#### Increase Technology and

See *RESOLUTIONS* page 25



## 2023 NACo LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

# Improve cellular coverage in rural areas

From RESOLUTIONS page 24

## Telecommunications Pricing Transparency

**ISSUE:** Telecommunication services are marketed in a manner that obfuscates total cost.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress and the relevant federal agencies to require telecommunication services to be marketed in a manner that displays total cost of service through the implementation of The President's Initiative on Junk Fees and Related Pricing Practices for companies dealing specifically in technology and telecommunications. Further, NACo urges the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to adopt the standards used in its broadband consumer label report and order across the entire spectrum of technology and telecommunication products and services.

## Research and Develop New Guidelines Around Technology and Telecommunications Digital Records Expungement Protocols

**ISSUE:** Records expungement orders and regulations are impossible to implement in a digital world and can have negative consequences for county residents who have gained the right for full expungement.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to direct the National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST) to investigate the negative impacts associated with current digital record expungement protocols, and to develop a series of guidelines associated with digital records expungement practices at the local level with consultation and input provided by a variety of stakeholders including county governments. Such guidelines can be in alignment to and make direct mention of the National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST) best practices and standards.

## FCC: Address the Lack of Cellular

## Phone Coverage for Unserved and Underserved Areas of the United States

**ISSUE:** Many areas of the United States, particularly in rural areas, are either underserved or not served at all by cellular phone carriers preventing residents and visitors from accessing emergency services through E-911.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to:

Direct additional funding for the build-out and rapid deployment of additional cellular communications capabilities in the unserved and underserved areas of the United States through the Federal Communications Commission's High Cost Program and 5G Fund for Rural America; and Ensure that telecom industry leaders are required to build cellular communications in the hardest to serve regions of the United States through enforceable deployment commitments for providers who receive federal funding for build-out.

## Ensure Accuracy and Accountability in the Broadband Data Collection Process

**ISSUE:** Local governments would benefit from additional time and resources to respond to the many provisions of the

Broadband Data Collection process that is working to accurately map broadband availability across the country.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the Federal Communications Commission to support a robust Broadband Data Collection process that ensures internet service provider accountability on the accurate reporting of fixed and mobile broadband availability, as well as offer technical resourcing and financial support to counties who are interested in verifying availability and location data within their jurisdictions.

## Provide Universal Open Access Broadband Networks in Projects Funded by the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program

**ISSUE:** The implementation of the Broadband Data Collection process has skewed broadband availability nationwide in a manner that hinders or prevents open-access networks from being promoted through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the National Telecommunications and Information Admin-

istration (NTIA) to reiterate support for open access broadband networks by allowing for areas designated as served to receive Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) funding if a deployment project will provide open-access broadband services to any residential, commercial, or other premises type in the designated area where open-access broadband infrastructure is not currently located.

## TRANSPORTATION

### Invest in Inland Waterway Infrastructure

**ISSUE:** Funding for America's Inland Waterway Navigation Infrastructure is a critical investment in the long-term strength and economic security of the United States; and there is increasing urgency required for immediate action to repair and replace failing infrastructure.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo recognizes that moving goods on our Nation's Inland Waterway systems is one of the least expensive, safest and lowest carbon footprints of all transportation modes and urges Congress to immediately initiate a program dedicated to funding Inland Waterway Navigation Infrastructure.

# Give flexibility to county staff

From STAFF page 8

of you, at whatever level makes sense, for your staff to get engaged with peer organizations, with professional organizations," Keating said. "Please give them the opportunity to do that. I think they will be more satisfied in their careers and they really will strengthen your county."

Schrader emphasized seeing staff members as human beings with life outside of work and treating them accordingly.

"You have to be flexible so they can be flexible and you have to be compassionate," she said. "You have to know that self-care is going to be part of this as well as continuing education."

"My staff, if they have children or...they have to leave a little early and I'll say to them 'You go do, I'm going to do just fine,' if staffers aren't available for certain events and appearances."

Keating said the institutional knowledge that professional staff carry can save elected officials time and frustration, particularly when they are adjusting to elected life and, like Milne, have plans about how they'll make changes.

"I'm not trying to be an obstructionist, but I am trying to be someone who points out 'We tried that before,' 'Here's where we stumbled before,' 'Here's where we were successful.'"

She pivoted toward optimism. "Maybe we could do it a little bit differently this time." **CN**

## Rural Substance

From RURAL page 12

ask, who actually has the expertise to design the project," she said.

Kunkel said that although a lot of grants are certainly within the reach of most counties — and many counties need only adapt previously successful applications to win one in the next round, technical assistance may be just as effective.

"Sometimes, what you really need is someone to help you come in and figure out a strategy, figure out a plan," she said. "Sometimes you just need a temporary cat herder." **CN**



Phyllis Randall, chair of the Loudoun County, Va. Board of Supervisors, speaks out during the NACo Board meeting. Photo by Denny Henry





# How Tarrant County, Texas is investing in its youngest residents and its future

by **Arabella Pluta-Ehlers**

A new resource from NACo Research Foundation, Celebrating County Leadership in PN-3, showcases how counties are centering young children in COVID-19 recovery efforts and making investments that will improve outcomes for communities now and down the line.

The world-class Fort Worth Medical District — located in Tarrant County, Texas — is home to the county's major hospitals, clinics and medical schools. It is also home to the 76104 ZIP code, which has the lowest life expectancy in the state of Texas.

One driver of lower life expectancy is infant and maternal mortality. In 2019, Tarrant County had the fourth-highest rate of infant mortality in the region at 5.5 infant deaths per 1,000 live births. Across the state of Texas in 2020, the maternal mortality rate was 18.5 deaths per 100,000 live births. For Black women, this number rose to 37.1 deaths.

To determine the most impactful way to invest its State

and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF), Tarrant County's board of commissioners drew on a needs assessment that highlighted community issues like maternal and child health. The county decided to grant \$35.5 million to build infrastructure in local non-profits, ensuring that SLFR funds

**'Celebrating County Leadership in PN-3' is part of NACoRF's 'Counties for Kids' initiative, a public awareness campaign.**

reach the communities who need them most.

One grantee, the United Way of Tarrant County, is deeply involved in the 76104 ZIP code. As part of its BRAVER 76104 initiative, the organization will use its SLFR funds to establish a doula training program. The program will train 150 individuals to be doulas with the goal of reducing maternal mortality rates and improving maternal health outcomes, especially for communities of color.

Research shows that babies' brains develop fastest

from birth to age three. For today's infants and toddlers, much or all of these formative first years have been spent in the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. This new resource demonstrates that counties across the country recognize the importance of these first three years and are

investing federal relief funds in evidence-based, community-driven programs to improve outcomes for infants, toddlers and their families.

"Celebrating County Leadership in PN-3" is part of NACoRF's Counties for Kids initiative, a public awareness campaign for county leaders interested in improving outcomes for young children and their families. Counties for Kids grew out of Tarrant County Commissioner Roy Charles Brooks' 2017-2018 NACo presidential initiative, Serving the

Underserved, which highlighted the role counties play in breaking multi-generational cycles of poverty by investing in infants, toddlers and families.

For county leaders who want to learn more about moving the needle for infants and toddlers, NACoRF offers the Prenatal-to-Three County Leaders Academy. The Academy convenes a cohort of county leaders to explore policy levers for expanding and improving services for children and families. PN-3 Academy champions have the opportunity to learn from their peers and national experts, share successes and challenges and leave with a better understanding of how to champion PN-3 efforts.

To learn more about how your county can participate in future academies or engage with Counties for Kids, visit [www.countiesforkids.org](http://www.countiesforkids.org) or email [info@countiesforkids.org](mailto:info@countiesforkids.org). **CN**

*Arabella Pluta-Ehlers is senior program manager, Children, Youth and Families, in NACo's Counties Futures Lab.*

**BEHIND  
THE  
SEAL**

**ORANGE  
COUNTY, N.Y.**

**H**istorians debate the origins of the Orange County, N.Y. seal — the original form of which dates to 1691.



The seal features an orange tree, which some attribute to the county's namesake, the Prince of Orange, while others argue an orange tree couldn't be the sole focus of a seal with there not being one within 800 miles of the county.

The seal has been a topic of discussion locally since the 1960s and the orange tree seal was adopted officially in 1970 when the county charter changed. There were other options, including imagery of an eagle and a woman milking a cow, but the orange tree stuck.

A county executive attempted to change it to an oak leaf in the 1980s, but only a judicial decree can change the seal design, so it's remained an orange tree ever since.

*Which you like to see your county seal featured in County News? Contact Meredith Moran at [mmoran@naco.org](mailto:mmoran@naco.org)*

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WORD SEARCH

MASON COUNTY, TEXAS  
Created by Alyxa Hawkins

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

**AGRICULTURE:** Mason County is known for its progressive agricultural production including beef cattle.

**ART:** One of the first settlements in Mason County, Art, Texas was settled in 1856 by five German families.

**COMANCHE:** The original inhabitants on the land of Mason County were of the Native American tribe of Comanche.

**COURTHOUSE:** The Mason County Courthouse was built in 1909 and sits on the National Register of Historic Places. Unfortunately, it is undergoing renovations after a recent fire.

**EDWARDS:** Mason County is in the Edwards Plateau.

**GERMANY:** In 1918 after the US declared war on Germany in the first World War, Mason County banned the use of German language.

**GIPSON:** Fred Gipson, the author of Old Yeller was from Mason County.

**HILL:** Mason County is located in Texas Hill Country.

**HUNTER:** Historian J. Marvin Hunter was born in Mason County. He was the founder of the Frontier Times magazine.

**MASON:** The county is named for Fort Mason, a US military fort established in 1851 and named for US Army Second Lieutenant George Thomas Mason who was killed during the Mexican American War.

**POPULATION:** The current population of Mason County is 3,953.

**SEAT:** The county seat is Mason, Texas.

**SIZE:** Mason County is 932 square miles.

**TEXAS:** Mason County is in central Texas.

**WAR:** Erupting over cattle rustling and rogue law enforcement, the Mason County Hoo Doo War resulted in a period of unrest in the 1870s.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

BILL NOVOTNY

**NACo Board Member**  
Chair, Johnson County Board of Commissioners  
President, Wyoming County Commissioners Association



Novotny

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

**Years in public service:** Nine

**Occupation:** Political Consultant

**Education:** B.A. Michigan State University, M.A. United States Naval War College

**The hardest thing I've ever done:** Giving up my career path to move home to Wyoming to care for a family member.

**Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner:** James Baker, Teddy Roosevelt and my grandfather who passed when my mother was 5.

**A dream I have is to:** Backpack through Europe for a month.

**My favorite way to relax is:** Take my German Shorthair Maggie out to the ranch and let her swim in the irrigation ditch.

**I'm most proud of:** When Johnson County was selected by the Wyoming Legislature for the site of the state's first veterans skilled nursing facility. We had to beat the president of the Senate and speaker of the House who wanted the facility built in their home county even though Johnson County has been the location of the state veterans' retirement home since 1898.

**Every morning I read:** The newspaper and Drudge Report

**My favorite meal is:** Steak that we raised.

**My pet peeve is:** Lack of follow-through.

**My motto is:** Never be out-worked or outflanked.

**The last book I read was:** "My American Journey" by Colin Powell

**My favorite movie is:** "Hoo-siers" or "Vision Quest"

**My favorite music is:** Classic rock

**My favorite U.S. president is:** Ronald Reagan

**My county is a NACo member because:** We may be geographically different, but we are stronger with united voices, advocating for our shared interest.



The most adventurous thing I've ever done is:  
  
Moved to Thailand for a two-month internship, not knowing the language or anyone.

What do Sonoma, Erie, Cook, and DeKalb counties have in common?

They are counties featured in Season Three of the Good Government Show!

Download the podcast from your favorite audio app or listen at goodgovernmentshow.com

PREMIERING APRIL 6



# Just a phone call away: County program matches seniors with new friends to deter isolation

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

“Louise is stuck with me – I’m not letting her get away,” Rita joked.

New friendships can fuel a new enthusiasm for life — which is more important than ever at a later age — so Dutchess County, N.Y. is making matches to enrich the lives of its elderly population. Louise and Rita, who are 93 and 80 respectively, are proof of that, having developed a close relationship through the county’s new Friendly Calls program.

The aim of Dutchess County’s Office for the Aging is to address feelings of isolation in older adults and to encourage friendships across all ages. Friendly Calls pairs up seniors who are looking for more socialization with interested volunteers based on their shared interests, hobbies and backgrounds. Calls between the two are arranged weekly for at least 20 minutes, but can be longer and more frequent depending on what the pair want.

“As we were starting to kind of come out of COVID in the fall of last year, we were thinking about the loneliness and isolation many of our seniors were feeling — even before the pandemic, but certainly as a result of the pandemic, that condition worsened,” said Todd Tancredi, director of the Office for the Aging. “... We thought that this program would be a perfect way for us to reach seniors who maybe don’t have anybody actively in their lives on a daily basis and if we’re lucky some friendships might grow out of it.”

Louise participates in the Office of the Aging’s Home Delivered Meals Program, and Rita volunteers to deliver meals. They’ve been talking on the phone since the end of January and plan to continue well beyond the eight-week period, Rita said.

“I live alone myself, so I know how important it is to be in touch with somebody,” Rita said. “Louise is absolutely delightful, and she makes my day when I get off the phone, she really does, she’s so sweet.”

Louise and Rita have only spoken to each other over the phone so far, but they’ve made plans to meet in person and Rita said she’s particularly excited to see Louise’s garden, as they speak often about the flowers she grows.

“When you can’t socialize

**‘I live alone myself, so I know how important it is to be in touch with somebody.’**

*- Rita, program participant*

and you’re in your house like I am — for two weeks here, I haven’t gone outdoors at all — and then someone calls you, it’s so good because it’s taking the place of socializing, you contacting each other,” Louise said.

Former state Sen. Sue Serino runs the program and connects people based off of questionnaires and follow-up conversations. Serino helped Dutchess County adapt Friendly Calls from the state-level program of the same name.

“During COVID, in my office, we were calling the seniors because everybody was home and seniors grew up in a time when they didn’t ask for help,” Serino said. “Knowing that they

were isolated, we were making calls and we found that even just bringing some of the seniors a mask or what have you, you know, you show up to their door, wave to them, and it just felt like they were still having tough communication because there are a lot of seniors that

might not have family members or people to talk to or try to help them, so socialization is really important.”

Louise said she’s thankful for the program and the genuine friendship she’s gained from it.

“Sue and Rita are beautiful people to call you — they know what questions to ask and how to make me open up and talk about my life and what’s happening, and once they call several times, they know certain things to continue that conversation — it’s not just that day, it goes into all the things you’ve talked about previously and it makes them very close to you,” she said. “Rather than somebody on the other end

just talking at you, they’re my friends now, which is what I really need. I’m a very social person and when I’m alone in my house, it’s really hard to take that — I try to do all I can to not feel anxiety from it, but they are a great help.”

While Louise and Rita are close in age, the program has volunteers as young as students at the nearby Marist College.

“That’s the special thing about this program — a lot of times when people volunteer for something — and I’ve noticed this in my own life — we feel like we’re helping someone else, but lots of times we get as big a blessing out of volunteering as we give to the people we’re volunteering to serve,” Tancredi said.

Volunteers go through a short training process consisting of watching four videos and discussion surrounding boundaries, active listening and problem-solving guidance.

To find older adults who were interested in receiving calls, the Office for the Aging reached out to seniors who receive home-delivered meals through the agency, 43 of whom chose to be a part of Friendly Calls.

The structured calls also serve as a wellness check-in for those who might not have people keeping up with them regularly, Tancredi said.

“If Rita’s calling her person, and Louise says something that’s of concern, we want to make sure there’s room so that Rita can jot that down and get that information back to Sue and the office right away,” Tancredi said.

The program is currently running through word-of-mouth referrals, but moving forward, the plan is to work with other groups, like libraries and hospitals, in the hopes that they can eventually reach all of the county’s elderly population, according to Serino.

“I don’t think there’s any limit to the size this program could grow to, because there’s so many lonely people in the world,” Tancredi said. “The main thing we always want older adults to know is that they’re not alone — even if they don’t have family or friends around, they’re not alone — because the Office for the Aging is here and we have people who care about them, whether it’s our staff or volunteers.” **CN**





## BRIGHT IDEAS | SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY, Calif.

# County Museum Works with Tribes to Portray Evolution of Community's History

**PROBLEM:** Make sure all voices are represented to tell the history of the region.

**SOLUTION:** Collaborate with local tribes to tell their story.

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

The San Bernardino County Museum worked with the San Manuel and Morongo bands of Mission Indians to establish a formal land acknowledgment that recognizes the museum was built on the indigenous tribal governments' ancestral land.

"Fifty years ago — even 20 years ago — there was a different focus and priority and a lot of what you saw when you came into the museum was isolated, it was untouchable, only academics really knew what was going on," said Tamarra Serrao-Leiva, the museum's anthropology curator. "If anything was represented, it didn't have a tribal voice, it was all interpreted from a Western perspective, so with the land acknowledgement, it's just a very loud way of saying, 'Your voice is represented here, you're here and we're partners in the interpretation of your own history.'"

The land acknowledgment is displayed at the museum's entry and features audio of one of the tribal community members discussing the land acknowledgment in Serrano, a native language of the Mission Indians.

The wildflower imagery behind the acknowledgment is meant to represent "new life," Serrao-Leiva said.

"It became this really beautiful collaboration — from the language itself to even the images we picked out to celebrate it," Serrao-Leiva said. "It's right there in our front lobby, so it's the first thing you see. A lot



San Bernardino County officials, Serrano representatives and museum staff pose at the land acknowledgment's opening ceremony.

of [tribal members] came out during our opening, and it was really moving — one in particular mentioned how cool it was to bring her kids and for them to feel like this is their space, too. I think everyone was crying during that part, it was really beautiful.

"...To actually have San Manuel leadership and Morongo leadership in the same room — they're kin, they're Serrano and they work a lot together anyway — but that was another aspect that was really neat to see, having both tribal agencies speak at our opening reception and just everyone having an equal voice was just a cool, unexpected gift."

The project is the first land acknowledgment in San Bernardino County, the largest county in the country.

The creation of land acknowledgments has increased in recent years, particularly in academic spaces, following the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe protests to stop the construction of

the Dakota Access pipeline in 2016 and 2017.

"It all came about really organically — we were just chatting about what more we could do, in addition to our exhibit spaces that can speak to representing that group," Serrao-Leiva said. "...Having the first one to ever come out and really work with the county on logistics on that was monumental for us. We were allowed to add the land acknowledgment to our county signature line, which is actually pretty standard."

"The way I've seen it, when you go to conferences or a tribal museum library conference, most indigenous individuals before they even begin, they'll say their traditional greeting, they'll say, 'This is ancestral land,' so I think that's how the museum started grasping that concept and saying, 'Oh, we should really do that, we should establish from the very start that we are on the unceded territory of ancestral peo-

ple.'"

The museum is a county department in the Community Services Group, and everyone at the county level — from managers to supervisors on the Board — were excited and supportive of the land acknowledgment, according to David Myers, the museum's director. However, it couldn't have been made possible without the help of the San Manuel and Morongo tribal governments, he said.

"We're focused on the work we did within the county, but there was also obviously a lot of work on the side of the tribes, a lot of support and just the fact that they allowed us to do it," Myers said.

"It's not something we would have done had they not wanted to support it. They guided us the entire way, gave us access and allowed us to use the language, they approved the design and they celebrate with us, so they were absolutely an equal partner in all of this."

The land acknowledgment

was established in 2020, but the museum has worked with the tribal governments dating back to 2015 with its "Welcome to Our World" exhibit and most recently on the immersive "Mosaics in Mojave" that features a walk-through cave dwelling and allows visitors to design their own rock art.

"They helped us [on Mosaics in Mojave] with content, themes, object selection, layout, the Serrano language," Serrao-Leiva said.

"It's really cool to see how much has changed and how much we've evolved together, the tribe and the museum — both government agencies really coming together to create something really beautiful, so the [collaborations] have gotten bigger and better throughout the years." **CN**

*The program was a NACo Achievement Award winner last year in the Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation category.*



NEWS  
FROMACROSS  
THE NATION

## ARIZONA

**PIMA COUNTY** granted a local child named Felicity a “unicorn license” after she mailed in a request to register her pet unicorn. Pima Animal Care Center Director Monica Dangler outlined rules for Felicity in a letter with the county’s first ever unicorn license attached, including: “The unicorn is taken for a walk in the sunshine on a daily basis to restore its powers of positivity and share its happiness with others” and “The unicorn is given a monthly farrier treatment with pink nail polish to ensure the stability and beauty of its hooves during flight.”

## CALIFORNIA

**SANTA CLARA COUNTY** is investing \$20 million in **child-care services** and workforce development through American Rescue Plan Act dollars. The funding will help reopen some of the more than 300 day-

cares across the county that closed over the COVID-19 pandemic, prioritizing facilities that serve low-income families. **FIRST 5**, an organization focused on child development, will receive \$5 million to create three programs, an apprentice-

ship for college students to gain work experience while getting their education, a support system for family childcare home providers and training for transitional kindergarten teachers.

## FLORIDA

• **MARION COUNTY** Parks and Recreation is putting a donated mobile home to use, making it the location of its sixth **on-site resident program in the county’s parks** that allow people from agencies including the county sheriff’s office and Florida Fish and Wildlife to live on the grounds. The intention is to increase law enforcement presence in an effort to deter crime in the parks.

## KANSAS

**SEDGWICK COUNTY** reinstalled its oldest Thunderbolt siren, refurbishing four of the sirens that date back to the Cold War, and held a public ribbon-cutting attended by elected officials and the manufacturer from Indiana. The sirens are one of the numerous ways the county alerts residents about **tornado warnings**, including through local

media, cell phones and weather apps.

## NEW MEXICO

**BERNALILLO COUNTY** received approval from the state Department of Transportation to operate **speed vans** to

further automate the county’s speed monitoring and enforcement systems. In addition to operating outside of Albuquerque, the vans will be able to travel on state roads.

## NEW YORK

• Farmers in **NIAGARA COUNTY** will have a more formal input into county policy. The county Legislature approved an **Agricultural Rights Advisory Panel**, which will allow farming citizens the ability to suggest agricultural solutions and local laws to the legislature to be approved. The panel will be made up of six people and be co-chaired by a county legislator, WKBW-TV News reported.

• Several **OSWEGO COUNTY** departments are teaming up with businesses, Jefferson Community College and SUNY Oswego’s Small Business Development Center to help people become registered and licensed **in-home child care providers**. Program participants will receive free business and education training to gain the knowledge and skills needed to provide high quality child care, and support with state registration and licensing processes.

## PENNSYLVANIA

See NEWS FROM page 31

## FLORIDA

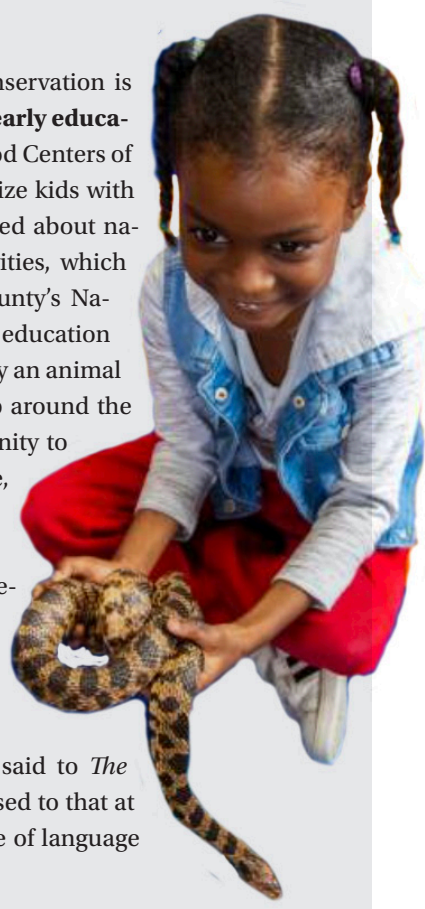
• **HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY’S** new program in partnership with Goodwill Suncoast aims to **reduce trash and the county’s carbon footprint** by encouraging people to recycle. The waste diversion program, which was created after Solid Waste Department employees noticed people were throwing away usable items, makes it easy for residents to reuse items by creating one location for trash and donations at the Goodwill. “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure,” said Daniel Gallagher, the county’s recycling coordinator. So far, around six tons of material have been saved through roughly 5,000 donations.



## IOWA

**JOHNSON COUNTY** Conservation is providing programming to **early education classes** at Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County to familiarize kids with animals and get them excited about nature. Examples of the activities, which are an extension of the county’s Nature Buds program, include education on animal tracks followed by an animal track scavenger hunt set up around the classroom and the opportunity to hold a Western Fox Snake, Sniffles.

“Their brain is just more likely to have a fuller comprehension of all the different pieces of the ecosystem around us,” Kristen Morrow, a naturalist with Johnson County Conservation, said to *The Gazette*. “If you’re not exposed to that at an early age, it’s like a piece of language that’s missing.”







## NEW YORK

- More than 200 people attended **WESTCHESTER COUNTY's Diverse Abilities Job Fair**, which was born in 2022 out of an initiative to combat the nationwide high unemployment rate among people with disabilities. Open to all qualified candidates who are differently abled, job seekers were able to request accommodations, connect with local employers and interview on the spot.

The Diverse Abilities Job Fair is a partnership between the Westchester County Office of Economic Development, the Westchester County Office for People with Disabilities and several local organizations. More than 14 employers, including several county departments, were represented.

## From NEWS FROM page 30

- Vendors doing business with **ALLEGHENY COUNTY** will have to submit a “**sustainability profile**” to help evaluate the vendors’ environmental performance and social responsibility.

The County Council passed an ordinance instructing county purchasing offices to consider supporting companies that focus on reducing consumption, and vendors will include life-cycle assessments in their bids, summarizing a product’s lifetime environmental impact – from the extraction of raw materials to the product’s eventual disposal, WESA-FM News reported.

- Collaborating with several school districts, a local non-profit and the Richard King Mellon Foundation, the **WESTMORELAND COUNTY** District Attorney’s office is launching a pilot program to support children exposed to traumatic events.

The **Handle With Care** program will coordinate communication among law enforcement and school districts and will work to ensure that children who are exposed to trauma receive appropriate and immediate intervention to help

them feel safe and succeed in life, letting schools know if a child should be handled with extra care and compassion to prevent cognitive, behavioral or physical impacts. The New Kensington-Arnold School District, one of the participating members, tried the program out previously, the *Latrobe Bulletin* reported.

## TEXAS

**HARRIS COUNTY** will develop a paid **election workers corps** made of its own employees. Those employees would provide support for the Elections Administrator’s Office and receive additional compensation for their election-related duties. Last year, 150 employees served in a volunteer capacity during the midterm election, earning a day off in exchange, Houston Public Media reported. The program would aim to cut costs associated with hiring temporary outside workers to help with election administration.

## VIRGINIA

- **FAIRFAX COUNTY**’s Fire and Rescue Department is using Geographical Information Systems to provide immediate information including service coverage and resource avail-

ability, mutual aid and unit rosters.

**RescueVision** will provide real-time situational awareness and decision support at the 911 dispatch center. It will display how units are distributed throughout the county, how any resources are ready to respond to new incidents, how many medics and ambulances are at medical facilities after transporting patients, which areas of the county are being covered by other jurisdictions and more.

- **HENRICO COUNTY** is triaging critical staffing needs in public safety and mental health by **allowing retired employees to return** to temporary, part-time positions with compensation that will match the hourly rate received at the time of retirement. The Encore Program will help the county avoid overtime costs in a competitive job market that has made hiring a challenge while making use of an experienced talent pool. Applicants must be retired from the county’s general government for at least six months and have completed the probationary period during full-time employment. They can work up to 29 hours a week.

## WYOMING

Bibliophiles in several counties will get a heads-up that can

help them avoid a truth that is scarier than fiction when it comes to their health. The counties’ library systems are loading out **self-measured blood pressure monitoring kits** in hopes of helping readers spoil surprise endings through a collaborative pilot project among the Wyoming Center on at the University of Wyoming and the state Department of Health’s Chronic Disease Prevention Program. Participating counties include **ALBANY, CARBON, LARAMIE, LINCOLN, NATRONA, PARK, SHERIDAN, SWEETWATER, SUBLETTE** and **WASHAKIE**.

The kits, available in both English and Spanish, include an automated home blood pressure cuff; blood pressure logbooks; educational materials from the American Heart Association; information on what blood pressure is and ideas for healthy lifestyle changes. The kits also include a resource directory for local community-based organizations and referral resources to the “Cent\$ible Nutrition Program” and the “Healthy U” chronic disease self-management program.

*Charlie Ban and Meredith Moran compile News From Across the Nation. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact [cban@naco.org](mailto:cban@naco.org) and [mmoran@naco.org](mailto:mmoran@naco.org).*



## WISCONSIN

**WALWORTH COUNTY** is trying to encourage property owners to help prevent snow from blowing on the roads during winter months. The **living snow fence program** would plan plantings including grasses, shrubs and trees that would serve as a natural barrier to blowing snow. That includes convincing farmers to not cut down cornstalks.

# ON THE MOVE

## NACo STAFF

- Executive Director **Matt Chase** attended the V. G. Young Institute of County Government School for Commissioners Courts in Brazos County, Texas and the New York State Association of Counties’ Legislative Conference in Albany County.



### Hurley

- Government Affairs Director **Eryn Hurley** attended the South Carolina Association of Counties’ Day of Legislative Action in Richland County.



### Gimont

- Legislative Director **Sarah Gimont** attended the Montana Association of Counties’ Legislative Conference in Yellowstone County.



### Mattson

- Legislative Director **Brett Mattson** attended the Missouri Association of Counties’ training for new commissioners in Camden County.





2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION

# TRAVIS C O U N T Y

AUSTIN, TEXAS | 

JULY 21 *thru* 24