



NACo's Broadband Task Force releases report

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

In an effort to bridge the digital divide in counties both rural and urban across the country, NACo's Broadband Task Force released a report, "High-Speed Internet is Essential for All Counties," July 12 during the 2021 NACo Annual Conference outlining nine specific themes that address communities seeking broadband.

Task Force Co-Chair and Montgomery County, Md. Councilmember Craig Rice said the pandemic has further highlighted the need for affordable, accessible, high speed broadband access.

"This is a starting point," he said. "There is so much more that needs to be done."

Co-Chair of the task force and Wise County, Texas Judge J.D. Clark said the task force formed four subcommittees to address the digital divide. Members of the subcommittees focused on preparing for broadband, barriers to build-out, the digital divide and future-proofing the local economy.

"Don't view this as a stopping point today, this is where we start," Clark said.

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NACo's new officers (L-r): Immediate Past President Gary Moore, Boone County, Ky. judge-executive; President Larry Johnson, DeKalb County, Ga. commissioner; First Vice President Denise Winfrey, Will County, Ill. board member; Second Vice President Mary Jo McGuire, Ramsey County, Minn. commissioner. Photo by Denny Henry

Larry Johnson, Georgia commissioner, takes the lead as NACo president

by Mary Ann Barton
editor

DeKalb County, Ga. Commissioner Larry Johnson was sworn in as NACo's new president July 12 at NACo's 2021 Annual Business Meeting in Prince George's County, Md.

Johnson began his journey to the top spot when he was elected second vice president of NACo in 2019 at the Annual Conference in Clark County, Nev.

"When I was growing up, I couldn't imagine being here today," Johnson said in his ac-

ceptance speech. "I'm the product of two teenage parents and sometimes it seemed like the world was against me. But I never would give up. I wish my mom could be here to see me now."

Delegates at the association's 86th Annual Conference elected Johnson to lead the executive

team along with Boone County, Ky. Judge Executive Gary Moore, immediate past president; Will County, Ill. board member Denise Winfrey, who becomes NACo's first vice president and Ramsey County, Minn. Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire, who was elected second vice

president in a three-way election.

Johnson laid out his vision for his year ahead in a speech to county officials. "I am pleased to announce that I will focus on the theme 'Counties thrive,'

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Optimism and drive power Johnson

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Ask Larry Johnson how he's doing, and chances are you'll get the same reply every time. "Best day of my life!"

That was as true years ago as it was when he was sworn in July 12 as NACo's president. The DeKalb County, Ga. commissioner is bringing a background in public health and public service to lead the association, but

also a backbone built of optimism.

"Every day is an opportunity," he said. "An opportunity to help somebody, make somebody smile, help your family, be the best father, the best husband and you have to take that attitude on, otherwise with all the doom and gloom going on around us, it's easy to get depressed.

"You have to choose to make this the best day of your life, and

that's what I do."

He assumed the NACo presidency at a pivotal time in the nation's history, at a largely in-person Annual Conference in Prince George's County, Md. The conference was possible because of a tremendous COVID-19 vaccination program that counties played a large part in administering after more than a year of serving as a life-

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Johnson urges NACo members: ‘Don’t just be a spectator, get on the field’

From JOHNSON page 1

line for millions of Americans during the pandemic.

The only son of teenage parents, Johnson grew up in Cook County, Ill., where he spent a summer running a Little League baseball team that he endeavored to make more than just a sport.

“I wanted to deter them from crime and gangs,” he said. “We played baseball all day, but I’d send them off with homework — writing a few paragraphs about sportsmanship and citizenship.”

Decades later, he keeps in touch with some of the young men he once coached, and takes pride in their growth, both personal and professional.

After earning a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree, he moved to DeKalb County, working in health education and pedestrian safety.

“A lot of people didn’t know what an MPH was, they joked that it stood for ‘miles per hour,’” Johnson said.

That wasn’t too far off, be-



DeKalb County, Ga. Commissioner Larry Johnson, elected NACo's new president July 12, makes a point during an interview at the Annual Conference in Prince George's County, Md. Photo by Hugh Clarke

cause Johnson soon found himself working on pedestrian safety issues, focusing on a part of the county that saw a high rate of deaths among African Americans attributable to poor pedestrian infrastructure.

“We had no sidewalks, no crosswalks, kids had to walk to school on dangerous streets and buses would stop in the middle of blocks and make it hard for people to reach them,” he said. “Transportation systems were an afterthought in these neighborhoods.”

In solving these problems, Johnson started to see an opening to make changes. While working with the state government and local community groups, he realized that despite living about 15 minutes from the state capitol in Atlanta, many of his neighbors had never been there. He was successful in having the third week of October designated “Pedestrian Safety Week,” a significant time given the safety challenges endemic to earlier sunsets and reduced visibility in mid-autumn. The next year, he pushed for a law giving pedestrians the right of way in crosswalks.

“I became an advocate for the community in the political process,” he said. “I wasn’t thinking about going into politics, I just wanted results.”

Seeing those legislative successes early in his career, before he might become jaded by legislative inaction, helped him to keep looking up.

“I started seeing how to get residents involved and engaged in the process,” he said. “They can make change in their governments, take steps to move in a positive direction and save their life.”

He spent a few years working on local community-building efforts with President Jimmy Carter, gaining an influential mentor in First Lady Rosalynn Carter, then ran for the DeKalb County Commission in 2000. Though he lost, he set his ego aside and worked as a commission aide for the victorious Hank Johnson. When redistricting opened up a congressional seat Hank Johnson was going to pursue, it offered another County Commission opportunity for Larry Johnson, one he was reluctant to take.

One of the prevailing voices

was one of his old Little League players, along with Johnson’s wife, Tanisha.

“I used to encourage them to be all they could be, and it came full circle,” he said.

His background as a commission aide helped him become effective quickly upon taking office in 2005, when his involvement with NACo began.

“We were able to bring in some sidewalks, make school zones safer, build better bus shelters,” Johnson said. “I had the training ground for what it took to get things done. Having a chance to make a difference for people has allowed me to be who I am today.”

As the country emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, Johnson sees a bright spot in public health getting recognized.

“People are gaining a greater appreciation for how messaging is done, working from the bottom up to connect with people to get them to adopt behavioral changes,” he said. “Now people understand how important prevention is.”

“Now it’s in vogue, it’s great to see people going into it and put resources into public health,”

he said. “It’s a very noble cause. It’s a field that allows me to do a lot, it allows you to evolve into many public policy spheres that just one field might now allow you to go into.”

He also wants to orient counties toward growing and prospering, coming out of survival mode from COVID to THRIVE — the theme of his NACo presidency:

- Technology
- Health
- Readiness
- Infrastructure
- Working with Vulnerable communities
- Economic impact

“Counties have excelled in COVID, doing what we always do,” he said. “Let’s not stop there.”

Part of that involves calling on counties to do more. If they aren’t NACo members, Johnson wants them to understand that membership has its privileges, including being a party to the strengthening federal-state-local partnership. If they are members, Johnson said their ideas and participation are what NACo needs to get stronger.

“Don’t just be a spectator, get on the field,” he said. “Take the next step,” and join a steering committee.

Johnson looks to former Chicago Mayor Harold Washington, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Presidents Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt as leadership role models.

“Those are the folks I look at in terms of tenancy, determination and resiliency,” he said.

All qualities county officials have shown during the pandemic, and what will be necessary to take the next steps forward every day.

“Counties need to make sure our residents have what they need,” he said, “so they can make this the best day of their life.” **CN**

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Ramsey County, Minn. Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire elected second vice president

From PRESIDENT page 1

Johnson said. “We’ll focus on six areas,” he said, noting that the THRIVE acronym stands for: Technology, Health, Readiness, Infrastructure, Vulnerable Populations and Economic Opportunity.

“I hope you all will join me because this is not a one-man show,” Johnson said. “NACo, we’re going to go on this ride together.”

The 2021 Annual Conference was the first large gathering of NACo members since early 2020, when county officials gathered in Washington, D.C. for the Legislative Conference, just ahead of the big shutdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

NACo committee chairs

Johnson took the opportunity to introduce the chairs of NACo’s committees, task forces and boards who will help guide policy decisions through the next year. They are:

Agriculture and Rural Affairs: Supervisor Craig Pedersen, Kings County, Calif.

Arts and Culture: Commissioner Renée Price, Orange

County, N.C.

Community, Economic and Workforce Development: Judge Joseph Wood, Washington County, Ark.

Defined Contribution and Retirement Advisory Committee: Auditor Grant Veeder, Black Hawk County, Iowa

Environment, Energy and Land Use: Commissioner Douglas Smith, Martin County, Fla.

Finance Standing Committee: Board Member Denise Win-

frey, Will County, Ill.

Finance, Pension and Intergovernmental Affairs: Supervisor Nathan Magsig, Fresno County, Calif.

Geospatial Information Systems: Surveyor Reid Demman, Salt Lake County, Utah

Health Steering Committee: Council Chair Derek Young, Pierce County, Wash.

Healthy Counties Advisory Board: Chair at Large Phyllis Randall, Loudoun County, Va.

Human Services and Education: Council Member Craig Rice, Montgomery County, Md.

Immigration Reform Task Force: Supervisor Manuel Ruiz, Santa Cruz County, Ariz.

Information Technology Standing Committee: Supervisor Patricia O’Bannon, Henrico County, Va.

International Economic Development Task Force: Councilmember Stephanie Wright,

Snohomish County, Wash.

Information Technology Advisory Board: Commissioner Christopher Constance, Charlotte County, Fla.

Justice and Public Safety: Mayor Jerry Demings, Orange County, Fla.

Large Urban County Caucus: Commissioner John O’Grady, Franklin County, Ohio

Membership Chair: Circuit Clerk Matthew Prochaska, Kendall County, Ill.

Programs and Services: Supervisor James Gore, Sonoma County, Calif.

Public Lands: Commissioner Joel Bousman, Sublette County, Wyo.

Resilient Counties Advisory Board: Supervisor Deborah Lucero, Butte County, Calif.

Rural Action Caucus: Commissioner Greg Puckett, Mercer County, W.Va.

Telecommunications and Technology: Commissioner Tarryl Clark, Stearns County, Minn.

Transportation: Commissioner Liz Hausmann, Fulton County, Ga.

Veterans and Military Services: Chairman Tom Snider, Winnebago County, Wis. **CN**



Ramsey County, Minn. Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire and supporters celebrate her election to the NACo second VP position July 12 at the 2021 Annual Business Meeting. Photo by Denny Henry

Investment, cooperation needed to deter wildfires

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

With droughts and record-high temperatures already hammering the West, the 2021 wildland fire season is looking worse than 2020.

That’s apparent from the June 22 National Interagency Fire Center declaration of a Level 4 Preparedness Level, the second highest designation. U.S. Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen pointed out to the Public Lands Steering Committee July 9 that 2002 was the last time the country reached Level 4 in June, and the loss of moisture in wild-fire fuels is a month ahead of 2020’s progress.

“I’ve been, in some form, a wildland fire manager or line officer for 20 years and it’s not the same, it’s not the same,” she said. “The resistance to control the fires, the intensity

of our fires has changed and we must do something different. It’s not just working harder to treat more acres, we also need to treat the right acres.”

Christiansen is due to retire in August after a 40-year career and three years as Forest Service chief.

“These changes to our wildland fire systems are rooted in extraordinary drought, a legacy of fuel buildups and legacy of fire exclusion, compounded by a changing climate,” she said.

“Homes spreading into fire-prone landscapes and the volatility of the wildland fuel itself contribute to the growing complexity of a broader wildland fire system.

“We need to focus on the factors that we can control — the depth and quality of our working relationships and understanding how we really are involved in this together,” she

noted. “We can’t do it without federal, state, local, tribal and private contractors, it takes all of us.”

Christiansen has some ideas on how to get the wildland fire system under control. Treating or breaking up the fuel continuity in 30 to 40 percent of the fireshed (an area where social and ecological concerns

regarding wildfire overlap), that can confine fire to a more manageable and natural territory. She projected that would mean treating twice as much land as the service could currently.

“In most of our landscapes, fire is a necessary land component, we just have too much volatility to do this job correct-

ly and it puts too many people at risk,” she said.

Fixing this will cost money, because firefighters have not been working on a competitive pay scale, and they have been overworked over the past year, adding vaccination work after an exhausting 2020 fire season, with a harder year on the horizon.

While bonuses will help retention, Christiansen said it was a stopgap measure while personnel deal with exhaustion and mental health concerns.

In short, it has to change.

“The only way we’re going to do this is to up our game and be very strategic about how we treat these landscapes and how we prepare these communities to become ‘fire adapted,’” she said.

“It’s a big call to action, it’s a big challenge, but I also think it’s a big opportunity.” **CN**



Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen speaks to NACo members July 9 at the 2021 Annual Conference. Photo by Leon Lawrence III



BENEWAH COUNTY, IDAHO

Commissioners in Benewah County, Idaho adopted the official county seal in 1989 for the Benewah County Centennial shield that was used by the Idaho Centennial Commission in Boise, for the state's centennial. Local artist Gale T. Sharp worked with commissioners to design the seal. Elements of the seal represent different aspects of the county.



Former Commissioner Jack Buell asked that a tree be incorporated into the seal to represent the timber industry.

A garnet in the center of the seal, requested by former Commissioner Norman McCall, represents the south end of the county and its proximity to the Emerald Creek Garnet Mine.

Former Commissioner Dave Johnson suggested wheat to depict the farming industry on the west side of the county.

A stream represents the many rivers and creeks that flow throughout Benewah County.

If you would like your county's seal featured in "Behind the Seal," contact Rachel Looker at rlooker@naco.org.

Investing in early childhood enables economic mobility

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

County leaders held a panel discussion July 10 at NACo's Annual Conference on innovations and strategies for expanding services for children as part of Counties for Kids, a public awareness campaign that focuses on young children prenatal to three years old.

In Stearns County, Minn., the county reached an additional 1,000 infants and their parents during the pandemic through Women, Infants and Children (WIC) because of an increased number of telehealth visits.

The county began using community connectors who are paired with public health nurses to work with moms and teen parents throughout their pregnancy and post-delivery, Stearns County Commissioner Tarryl Clark told county officials.

In Pierce County, Wash., Council Chair Derek Young said about one-fifth of children in the county are in households that are below the poverty line.

Pierce County launched the Family Connects International Model to provide free nurse

home visits to every household in targeted ZIP codes with the goal of expanding the visits throughout the entire county.

"The reason we're doing that is it connects families to services that are already out there," he said.

He referenced the county's

211 program, which connects residents to services over the phone, and a diaper bank program that provides free diapers to families.

"You want to make sure you leverage every pot of money that comes your way."

Mecklenburg County, N.C. Manager Dena Diorio said childhood services started in the county with the goal of improving economic mobility.

The county created a task force to improve mobility and found early childhood educa-

tion was key to improving economic mobility. She explained how the county is working to implement universal pre-kindergarten and is the only county throughout the state implementing a universal pre-kindergarten program.

Mecklenburg County com-

missioners also invested \$21 million to ensure that every child who was on a wait-list for childcare slots was able to access childcare and help working families.

"It's a two-generational program that allows families to put their children in a place where they can be safe and allow them to go out and make a living," Diorio said.

Additionally, Mecklenburg County created an Early Childhood Executive Committee to help guide efforts in the early childhood sphere. The county partnered with the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council

to complete an early childhood education study that looked at how to advance the early childhood program and pre-kindergarten initiative.

"I think that was one of the biggest things that helped us enhance this," she said.

The panelists also discussed making investments to expand services for children with American Rescue Act funding. Diorio advised counties to go slow with the dollars.

"You want to make sure you leverage every pot of money that comes your way," she said. "Right now, we're really more in the planning stages in creating a framework and child and family stability is one of the pillars in our framework that we will put dollars in."

Young said he encourages counties to partner with cities. Pierce County is looking at capacity-building and obtaining resources to expand more services countywide.

"I think with small investments at the local level, smoothing out those cliffs, marginal investments can have really big and great policy outcomes," he said. **CN**



Tarryl Clark, commissioner, Stearns County, Minn., Dena R. Diorio, county manager, Mecklenburg County, N.C. and Derek Young, council chair, Pierce County, Wash. discuss the benefits of early childhood programs July 10 at the 2021 NACo Annual Conference in Prince George's County, Md. Photo by Leon Lawrence III



Broadband Task Force Co-Chair Craig Rice, councilmember, Montgomery County, Md. discusses findings of the Broadband Task Force report released July 12 at the 2021 NACo Annual Conference. To his right is Task Force Co-Chair J.D. Clark, county judge, Wise County, Texas. Photo by Denny Henry

Broadband report provides policy recommendations

From BROADBAND page 1

The nine themes included in the report are:

1. Defining a “minimum standard” of broadband

The policy recommends broadband systems are designed and constructed in ways that are scalable and meet community needs.

“We have to have minimum standards,” Rice said.

The committee is recommending the federal broadband definition should be scalable and meet a community’s needs.

2. Implementing “dig once” policies and including “rights of way” as public assets

The task force recommends that federal “dig once” policies are established across agencies.

“When we’re doing big projects, let’s think about how we can be proactive to digging once and getting conduit laid as well as part of that project,” Clark said.

3. Testing and deploying fiber, cellular, satellite and emerging technologies

“You don’t just want to build for today, you have to build for tomorrow and future realities,” Rice said.

He added that developing standardized processes and removing state and local government legislative obstacles will aid in the delivery of broadband services.

4. Focusing on local commu-

nity engagement and partnerships

Rice said collaboration with service providers, colleges, schools, small businesses and economic development groups is crucial to successfully expanding broadband.

5. Tackling the homework gap

Rice emphasized how the pandemic revealed the number of young people who are disconnected and unable to access high-speed internet.

“[The homework gap] affects our economic development and workforce development and so it’s incredibly important for us to advocate for making sure that we have a program that is there that sets aside resources for our children,” he said.

6. Removing bans on municipal broadband

With some counties living in states where there are restrictions on local governments being involved in broadband, Clark said the task force identified that these restrictions should be removed.

“For local governments to be able to encourage competition and to encourage internet service providers to expand, they have to be able to have a role and get involved on broadband,” he said.

7. Establishing a national grants and loans clearinghouse

Restrictions and guardrails on how to use money in the infrastructure plan may place restrictions on how to use funds for broadband, Rice said.

“Implementing a broad game plan program for some of our unserved and underserved areas is essential,” he said.

8. Regulating broadband as a utility

“Broadband is not just a luxury, it is absolutely essential to our families and businesses,” Clark said.

The task force recommends peer-reviewed mapping that ensures minimum speeds are met and that middle-mile systems should be an open network.

9. Committing to world-leading broadband data and mapping analytics

“If that data is flawed, there’s no way we’re going to get to a possible solution,” Rice said.

He said it is crucial to make sure data is accurate and referenced NACo’s TestIt App, which highlights the gaps in the FCC’s broadband maps that have been used by federal agencies to determine funding needs for investments.

Both Clark and Rice told county officials the appendix of the report will grow as the report itself evolves and local governments use ARP funding for innovative broadband projects.

“I hope that through this document, you’ll be able to get a synopsis of some of the challenges that we identified with all of your various communities,” Rice said. “They may not be exact, but certainly should be able to give you a framework for how you can possibly move forward.” **CN**

GET TO KNOW... Jefferson Davis Parish, La.

Welcome, Jefferson Davis Parish, La.

Jefferson Davis Parish is located in southwestern Louisiana. Founded in 1912, the parish is named after Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy during the Civil War. The parish was one of the last parishes to be incorporated in Louisiana. Its parish seat is Jennings.

The first oil well in Louisiana was established in Jefferson Davis Parish in 1901, which brought the oil and gas industry to the parish in addition to its growing agricultural industry.

With a current population of 31,000, the parish is home

to the newest distillery in the state of Louisiana producing “Bayou Rum.” Visitors can try a variety of dining experiences stopping by one of five restaurants on the Seafood Sensations Culinary trail that runs through the parish.

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.



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ARP architects stress importance of execution in recovery

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

For the Biden administration, properly addressing the nation's economic needs in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic meant making up for what they missed during the Great Recession.

Several senior economic officials were Obama administration veterans determined not to repeat the history of an uneven recovery that saw many parts of the United States lag years behind others.

That meant passing the American Rescue Plan was only the beginning, and to ensure a full recovery, the Biden administration prioritized successful implementation of the \$1.9 trillion stimulus, a task equal in importance to summoning the political will to pass it in the first place.

"This is historic legislation, but people will judge it later," Gene Sperling told a General Session audience July 12 at NACo's Annual Conference. Sperling is overseeing the plan for the administration, playing the same role Biden did during the Great Recession.

"We understood that it would not be possible unless



Gene Sperling speaks during a July 12 Q&A with then-NACo President Gary Moore and Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo at the NACo Annual Conference. Photo by Denny Henry

we provided sufficient support to state and local governments," Jacob Leibenluft told a July 11 joint meeting of NACo's Large Urban County and Rural Action caucuses. He is the chief recovery officer and counselor for Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

The burden will be on counties to demonstrate that they have properly used the \$65.1 billion in direct ARP funding in the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund that

they received to mitigate damage caused by the pandemic, including helping businesses, addressing learning losses in children, reducing health disparities and rehiring government employees. The direct funding was a departure from the 2020 CARES Act cutoff to counties with populations of under 500,000 residents needed for direct funding.

"We needed to provide the resources to take on the public health crisis," Leibenluft

said, noting that states would hardly be a better judge of where money was most needed in each county. "And fiscal distress cannot only result in cutbacks but be a drag in a recovery."

Sperling pointed out estimates that more robust funding to help return governments to pre-recession employment levels could have meant a 3 percent rate of economic growth over four years, rather than 2.3 percent. That made direct funding to counties a priority.

"It's on us not just to implement well, but to tell the world what was done," he said. "We're going to have to show that, because I don't think there's any in this room who wants the idea of direct county assistance after a recession to be one-and-done, so we have a lot of work going forward."

Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo told the July 12 audience that the administration had thus far been impressed with initial plans for ARP spending, including investing in water infrastructure, investing in small businesses and bringing back employees.

"The president, in designing the American Rescue Plan, decided that he was going to give a historic amount of money to local, county and state officials for a very specific reason: Because the needs of each one of the people you serve is different and we knew that by pro-

viding the resources to you directly, that you would have the ability to meet those needs," he said.

He predicted a 6 percent GDP growth, due in large part to the local investments that counties were making.

Leibenluft said ensuring counties had access to their own relief money was crucial to properly targeting that funding.

"We wanted to ensure that those resources went to every government," he said, noting that states would hardly be a better judge of where money was most needed in each county.

When asked whether the Treasury Department could relax spending rules to give counties more latitude, Leibenluft pointed to statutory language that demanded those guide rails, and it would take congressional action to allow that, which would be unlikely.

"Those guard rails are there because of what the legislation requires," he said. "It's an approach that ensures accountability and transparency. That's our 'North Star' in implementing relief at Treasury."

The American Rescue Plan is the largest piece of federal spending in American history, but it was allocated with great intention. With counties largely still returning their staffing levels to what they maintained before the Great Recession 13 years ago, the funding was meant not only to restore those personnel but also to start to advance.

"There are 77,000 fewer workers in public schools teaching 2 million more students," Leibenluft said. "Government jobs are still 1 million below the pre-pandemic levels."

"Our hope is that the passage of the ARP will finally allow us to do what most of us who came to govern came for," to advance the cause of helping citizens.

Counties provide ARP feedback

Sperling said that outreach to county governments on APR spending rules has been

See ARP page 7

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White House answers county questions on American Rescue Plan spending

From ARP page 6

as valuable for the Biden administration as for the counties seeking guidance.

"I can't tell you how [often] I will be on a phone call and even though it may seem we don't have the direct answer, that informs us," he said.

"We recognized that the implementation of this... Do you have clarity? Do you have guidance? If there's a place to resolve, can we get out new guidance? This is critical."

The Treasury Department recently closed the comment period for the Final Interim Rule for the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund. NACo fielded more than 1,000 comments, recommendations and case studies from counties, which were summarized and submitted to the Treasury.

The consensus was that current restrictions and limited clarity on eligible and ineligible uses of the Recovery Funds might inhibit counties' ability to achieve an equitable economic recovery.

Overall recommendations included:

- Providing additional flexibility for Recovery Funds to ensure our nation's preparedness and responsiveness continues
- Providing further clarity on eligible uses of Recovery Funds to ensure counties comply with the U.S. Treasury's goals and the intentions of the IFR
- Incorporating additional eligible uses of Recovery Funds that will help support local and national recovery

Other suggestions included:

Public health support and negative economic impacts

- Explicitly allowing for addiction crisis services as an eligible use
- Permitting long-term equity endowments that address racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare access and outcomes
- Expanding eligible use of Recovery Funds for capital investment projects and the definition of public sector staff engaged in the COVID-19 re-

sponse

- Clarifying activities addressing behavioral health and well-being to include both acute and chronic care as well as services, including support groups, that do not often directly accept insurance payments
- Clarifying expectations for services in Qualified Census Tracts
- Drawing on additional metrics as a proxy for disproportionate impact
- Allowing early learning facility construction and improvements
- Including Community Development Block Grant expenditures as an eligible use
- Permitting property acquisition
- Expanding definitions within affordable housing development
- Providing safe harbor for households receiving direct assistance, a definition of low-income and additional flexibility for expenses incurred prior to March 3, 2021

Premium Pay

- Expanding premium pay for eligible employees

Revenue loss formula and calculation

- Adjusting revenue loss calculation and fiscal year-end dates
- Allowing revenue loss funds to be used for rainy day and reserve funds, for debt service and to be calculated on a source-by-source basis
- Including public transit system fares in revenue loss calculation
- Including revenue and losses from municipally owned utilities
- Excluding new taxes imposed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

Water and sewer infrastructure

- Expanding eligibility for water and sewer projects outside of the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund
- Expanding eligible uses of Recovery Funds to include

dams and reservoirs

- Allowing routine maintenance of water and sewer infrastructure projects

Broadband infrastructure

- Expanding the definition of "unserved and underserved" households
- Allowing for scalability when determining broadband investments
- Expanding general use of Recovery Funds to include cybersecurity

Ineligible uses of funds

- Allowing for non-federal match requirements as an eligible expense

Recommendations for additional uses

- Expanding eligible use of Recovery Funds for capital investment projects and for election-related activities. **CN**

For more information, visit naco.org/covid-19-recovery-clearinghouse.



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WORD SEARCH

HARRISON COUNTY, Mississippi
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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



- ASTRONAUT:** Astronaut Fred Haise, who took part in the 1970 Apollo 13 flight, is from the county.
- AUTHOR:** Writer Jesmyn Ward, who won the National Book Award in 2011, calls the county home.
- BARQS:** Barq’s Root Beer was invented in the county in 1898 by Edward Barqs.
- CASINOS:** Annual revenue from casinos in the county is over \$1 billion per year.
- DAVIS:** Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, moved to the area after the Civil War.
- GULF:** The county is located on the Gulf of Mexico.
- HARRISON:** The county is named after President William Henry Harrison.
- HISTORY:** The county was founded Feb. 5, 1841.
- HURRICANES:** The county was heavily damaged by hurricanes Camille and Katrina.
- KEESLER:** Keesler Air Force Base is located in the county.
- MILES:** The county is 976 square miles — 574 square miles of land and 402 square miles of water.
- PIE:** Next time you stop in the county, try a slice of Mississippi Mud Pie.
- POTTER:** Artist George Ohr, known as the “Mad Potter of Biloxi” created innovative pottery.
- ROBERTS:** Robin Roberts of Good Morning America hails from the county.
- SEATS:** The county has two county seats, Biloxi and Gulfport.

COVID-19 RECOVERY CLEARINGHOUSE

The State and Local Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds legislation, part of the American Rescue Plan Act, provides **\$65.1 billion in direct, flexible aid** to every county in America.

NACo is here to help.

Ask your questions and share your story on how your county is investing these funds at **NACo.org/coronavirus.**



PROFILES IN SERVICE

LARRY JOHNSON

NACo President
Commissioner
DeKalb County, Ga.



Johnson

Number of years involved in NACo: 16

Years in public service: 19

Occupation: Commissioner

Education: Honorary doctorate, Philosophy & Humane Letters CICA International University; Bachelor’s degree in community health, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Master of Public Health degree from the University of Northern Colorado

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Graduating from undergrad as I was the first generation to accomplish that goal.

Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: My mother, grandmother and Martin Luther King Jr.

A dream I have is to: Be the CEO of a non-profit organization or foundation

You’d be surprised to learn: I like to cook.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done: Fly an airplane at the age of 16.

My favorite way to relax is: Watching sports and reading.

I’m most proud of: My wife and daughter for achieving their goals.

Every morning I read: The Bible

My favorite meal is: Pizza

My pet peeve is: People who forget where they come from.

My motto is: Speak softly and carry a big stick.

The last book I read was: *Influence and Impact* by Bill Berman and George Bradt

My favorite movie is: *The Green Mile*

My favorite music is: House music

My favorite U.S. president is: Theodore Roosevelt and Barack Obama (change agents)

My county is a NACo member because: NACo is a strong advocate and cares for the residents and the counties.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done:

Fly an airplane at the age of 16.



NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ALABAMA

• **BALDWIN COUNTY** is using **GPS technology** to help emergency officials responding to 911 callers who do not know their address or location. The “what3words” technology uses three words to create unique addresses for 10-foot squares throughout the world. The technology also works through text where a link converts GPS coordinates of an individual’s phone into a three-word address that is easier to communicate with responders. The county has used the technology to help three callers so far. “What3words” is faster than the time it takes 911 dispatchers to determine locations through cell phone towers, WPML-TV reported.

• The Department of Health in **JEFFERSON COUNTY** has launched a hospital-based violence intervention program to help **curb future gun crimes**. Those who have been shot and taken to the hospital have the option to meet with an individual who helps them through the trauma in an effort to avoid further homicides or revenge killings. Jefferson County Health Officer Dr. Mark Wilson said gun crime is a public health emergency in the county, WBRC reported.



CALIFORNIA

• Animal Services in **CONTRA COSTA COUNTY** is offering **residents free digital identification tags for pets** through a new program in partnership with PetHub, a pet identifica-

tion company. Residents registering or renewing a pet license will have the option to receive an ID tag with a QR code that can be scanned to view contact information. The program aims to reunite lost animals with their owners and reduce the number of animals kept in shelters, DanvilleSanRamon.com reported.

• An online platform called “Earn, Learn, Play” in **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** is helping **connect youth to recreational programs and paid internships**. The platform connects those between the ages of 4 and 24 to sports, music lessons, arts classes and job or internship availabilities. The platform launched in partnership with the city, county and other nonprofits, according to KNBC-TV.

• **SANTA BARBARA COUNTY** Emergency Medical Services is providing **free car seats and helmets to county families**. The California Department of Health awarded the county the Kids’ Plate grant, which is funded through a bill for the sale of specialized vehicle license plates to support the health and safety of children. The county distributed 105 helmets and 32 convertible car seats, the *Santa Barbara Independent* reported.

FLORIDA

• Commissioners in **ESCAMBIA COUNTY** unanimously voted to contract with Magellan Advisors to use nearly \$650,000 in CARES Act funding for planning a **county broadband network**, if approved by the board. A study by Magellan found there were 3,000 unserved or underserved residents without access to broadband in North Escambia. The project would include a fiber-based wireless network.

• **SEMINOLE COUNTY** is



County officials unveil a “20 is Plenty” sign as part of the county’s Vision Zero pilot program to protect bicyclists and pedestrians.

MARYLAND

• The Department of Transportation in **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** launched the Vision Zero pilot program “20 is Plenty.” The program **lowers speed limits** on targeted roads to 20 miles per hour in an effort to protect the safety of bicyclists and pedestrians. Five local roads have been included in the pilot program. The county experienced 1,200 speed-induced crashes in 2019 that resulted in 32 deaths. “As we continue to reopen, traffic will increase, which will lead to more cars on the road and pedestrians crossing streets,” said County Executive Marc Elrich.

also helping to bridge the digital divide by **opening a computer lab for residents to apply for rental assistance**. Five stations with computers and scanners are available along with staff to help residents submit paperwork for assistance with rental or mortgage payments, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported. The computer lab aims to help those who lack broadband access, don’t own a computer or scanner or who need help navigating pandemic relief. The computer lab opened alongside the launch of the county’s mortgage assistance program, according to North-Escambia.com.

GEORGIA

The Human Services Department in **DEKALB COUN-**

TY is providing a number of summer **vouchers and scholarships for summer camp programs** for county youth. The Dekalb Summer Camp Voucher Program is available for income-eligible families and youth between the ages of 5 and 15, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported. The program is in partnership with the DeKalb Community Development Department. The county parks and recreation centers are also offering scholarships for eligible families.

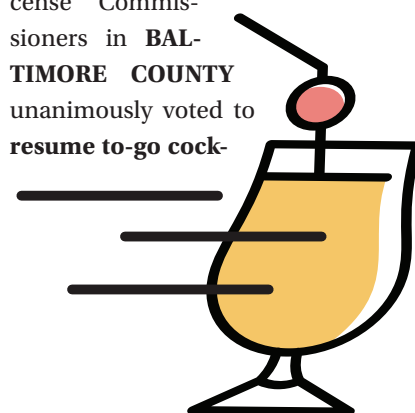
KANSAS

BUTLER COUNTY is participating in the “Be Air Aware” program, which **promotes good air quality**. The organization encourages individuals and businesses to take certain

actions to improve air quality such as using public transportation to conserve energy and keep ozone levels low. **SEDGWICK, HARVEY and SUMMER** counties are also participating in the program, *The Butler County Times-Gazette* reported.

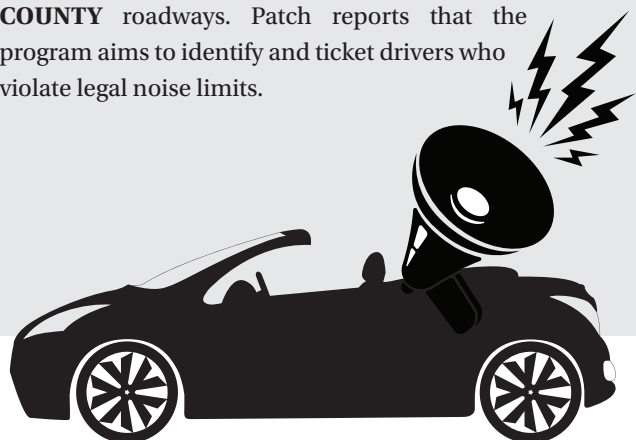
MARYLAND

• The Board of Liquor License Commissioners in **BALTIMORE COUNTY** unanimously voted to **resume to-go cock-**



NEW YORK

- The Board of Legislators approved financing for a plan to place automatic **noise detectors** near **WESTCHESTER COUNTY** roadways. Patch reports that the program aims to identify and ticket drivers who violate legal noise limits.



tails throughout the county. The suspension of the state of emergency ended the allowance of to-go alcohol, WBAL-TV reported. The Maryland General Assembly passed legislation this year that allows local liquor licensing boards to authorize a two-year allowance of to-go cocktails for restaurants, bars and taverns.

NEW JERSEY

The Legislature has passed a bill allowing counties to establish **overdose fatality review teams**. The **OCEAN COUNTY** Health Department implemented the state's first program in 2018. It identifies common trends that point to systemic issues, which then inform intervention practices. The bill requires the Commissioner of Health to report the process for drug overdose deaths and forward the information to the review team. It also promotes more cooperation and data-sharing between state and local government agencies, develop new prevention strategies and provide recommendations for programming and policy.



NEW YORK

- The **NASSAU COUNTY** Legislature approved a plan to install **school bus cameras** to record drivers who pass by stopped buses. It will start with a 60-day, no-penal-

ty warning period to educate drivers, then begin fining violators.

- **ONONDAGA COUNTY** has launched the Production Incentives for Movies and Entertainment Development program to offer rebates to different film, television and commercial advertising productions for local spending in hopes of **keeping film production crews** in the area. LocalSYR reported that the county is investing \$5 million of its American Rescue Plan funds into the program and aims to generate an additional \$15 million to \$20 million.

NORTH CAROLINA

Following an April **dog attack** that killed a seven-year-old and severely injured his mother, the **FRANKLIN COUNTY** Board of Commissioners passed an ordinance that states that any dog that has killed a human will be confiscated and put down. The ruling is effective immediately and if a dog that has previously killed someone is brought into Franklin County, officials will hold it at the county's animal shelter and then euthanize it unless a judge intervenes.

PENNSYLVANIA

- **ALLEGHENY COUNTY** is partnering with the Pennsylvania Resources Council to offer a **traveling glass recycling program** at different county parks in the second half of the year.

- Acting Secretary of State Veronica Degraffenreid announced that the state would **decertify any election**

equipment that is subject to third-party access and the state would not reimburse counties for the cost of replacing that equipment. **TIOGA, YORK** and **PHILADELPHIA counties** have been targeted by a state senator for a forensic audit of election equipment. Tioga and York counties have objected to the request, the Associated Press reported.

TEXAS

- Six **BEXAR COUNTY** election workers who took part in the November election have **died from COVID-19** complications, Texas Public Radio reported. Elections Administrator Jacque Callanen said there is no way to know for sure if the workers contracted the virus from voters who did not wear masks, which were not mandated by the state at the time. More than 2,300 workers helped with the November Election Day and early voting period. Their average age was approximately 72 years.

- **EL PASO COUNTY** is participating in a three-year program to **expand broadband access**. Digital El Paso, a public-private partnership collaboration among the city,

county, El Paso Independent School District and the city's housing authority, will work with the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas and technical consultant, Magellan Advisors, to better understand community needs, infrastructure and other factors in expanding broadband Internet access, *Government Technology* reported.

VIRGINIA

A dozen **LOUDOUN COUNTY roads** named for **Confederates or segregationists** are candidates for renaming. The Board of Supervisors told InsideNoVa.com it will be looking into additional names submitted by the public that are not already included in the current list, to see if any more should be added. The county's school system is doing its own review of its buildings.

WASHINGTON

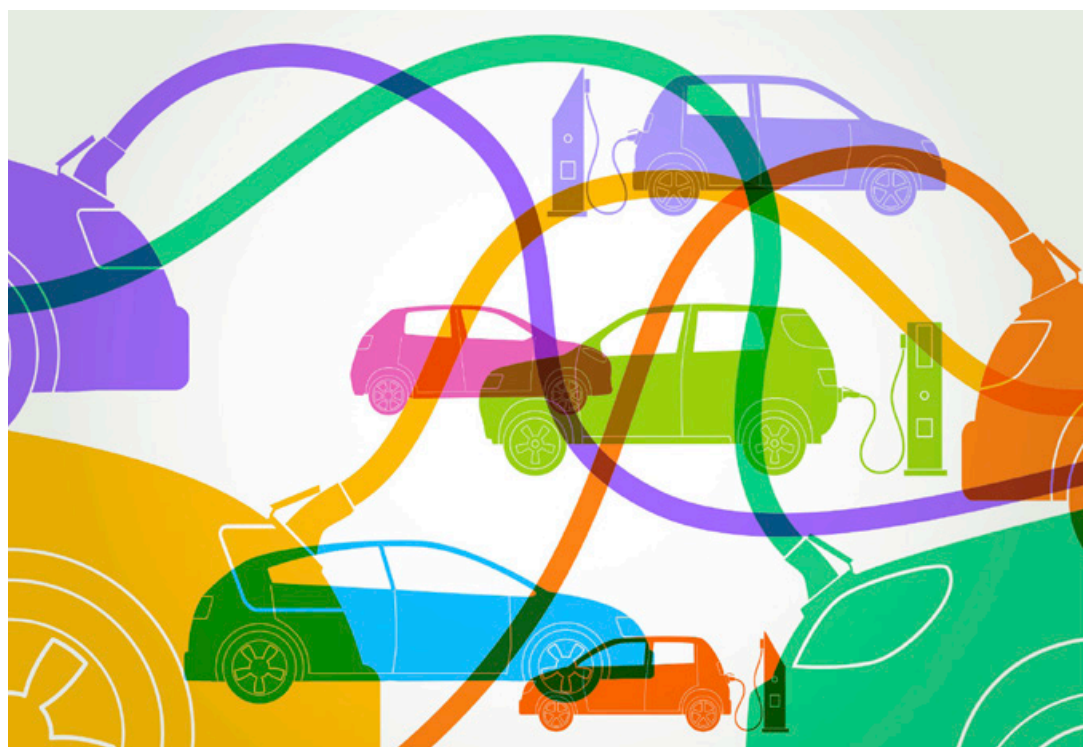
- The **CHELEN COUNTY** Public Works Department is installing 70 signs on 17 county roads **warning drivers about the extreme fire hazard level**. The chosen county roads typically lead to U.S. Forest Service Roads.
- The **CLARK COUNTY** Jail has reached a settlement with

the U.S. Department of Justice to ensure that people who are **deaf or hard of hearing** have equal access to services. The jail must provide interpreter services for things like medical appointments, educational classes, classification reviews and religious services and modify its restraint and handcuffing policy so inmates can communicate with sign language or writing, the *Daily Record News* reported.

WISCONSIN

The **MILWAUKEE COUNTY** Sheriff's Office is creating three deputy sheriff positions to deploy with mental health specialists to respond to such crises in the 17 Milwaukee County communities without such services, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported. **Crisis Assessment and Response Teams** are pairs of one deputy sheriff and one mental health counselor — as opposed to two deputy sheriffs — to respond to 911 calls that require mental health services.

News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact cban@naco.org or rlooker@naco.org.



WASHINGTON

- Electric-powered cars are going to find **KING COUNTY** to be a lot more friendly thanks to legislation that will require new or substantially remodeled developments to set aside room for **charging stations**. Their parking lots must include enough charging stations for 10 percent of the parking lot spots.

BRIGHT IDEAS | ERIE COUNTY, N.Y.

‘Erie Grown’ Website Promotes Local Agriculture

PROBLEM:

Supply chain disruptions at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and consistent farmland loss negatively impact the agricultural economy.

SOLUTION:

Create a website that promotes farming and connects consumers directly to locally grown food sources.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

With just a few clicks of the mouse, those living in or near Erie County, N.Y. can find the closest producer of locally grown agricultural products.

The Erie County Office of Agriculture launched the Erie Grown website to promote local produce and encourage residents to purchase food from area farmers.

The office formed with the mission to address loss of farmland and improve the agricultural economy.

The Erie Grown website includes a site locator map and a produce finder with 145 producers. Users can search for a specific type of produce to find a location where they can make a purchase from a local grower.

“If you want to find who has apples in Erie County, you can do that,” said Sarah Gatti, senior planner with Erie County Environment and Planning.

Users can search for farms or farm-related businesses or search for specific produce within a set distance from their location.

The website provides links to various farms’ websites or social media pages.

“It was in the hopes of just really better connecting the farmers and the consumer,” Gatti said.

The website features resources for producers including links to Local Harvest, Meat-Suite, Farmland Relief Fund as well as a list of farmers markets throughout the state and oth-



Erie County, N.Y. launched the Erie Grown website to encourage residents to purchase local produce.

er government and non-profit agencies that support farmers.

Gatti said the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant catalyst to launch Erie Grown, which was originally planned to be a downscaled version of what was created following the pandemic.

She said the pandemic caused supply chain disruptions that impacted grocery stores and left shelves empty while many local growers created food boxes to provide deliveries or curbside pickup for customers.

Prior to the pandemic, she said outreach to farmers often proved challenging.

“But after the pandemic hit, I was in touch with those people who were kind of in crisis mode,” she said.

Over 145 farms, farmers markets, wineries and cideries have enrolled in the Erie Grown website.



Erie County, N.Y. resident Catie Dillemath (right) visits a local farm as part of the Erie Grown Passport program.

At last count, the website had over 50,000 views. The website also includes information for farms in other counties to connect residents to neighboring communities.

“We added the other counties because agriculture doesn’t respect county boundaries,” she said. “A farmer may and probably does own land

in Erie County and then our neighboring counties.”

The site was developed and built by the county’s Department of Information Support Services and the Office of Geographic Information Systems, which created the mapping features.

In addition to Erie Grown, the county launched the Erie

Grown Passport to further incentivize local purchasing.

Through the program, those who visited local producers had a chance to win agriculture-related prizes.

“We hope it incentivizes people to visit the Erie Grown website, but more importantly to visit our local farmers,” Gatti said.

The passport program encourages consumers to purchase produce from different farmers and post about it on social media.

The Office of Agriculture also began planning for the passport program before the COVID-19 pandemic but launched a modified version to eliminate points of contact. The program now includes QR codes on posters and postcards where individuals self-report visits to local growers instead of marking physical passports.

Individuals can visit a site, fill out the online passport or printable brochure and turn them in. The individual with the most passport points won a prize.

Gatti said she used existing networks to encourage farmers to sign up for the website through email blasts and organizations in the community. There were more than 40 enrollments the first day the website launched.

The Erie Grown website was also expanded to allow restaurants to search for farms and growers that have local meats and produce.

Gatti advised counties to partner with agricultural agencies that have relationships with farmers to increase their involvement with the county and local community.

“I think that trust in those long-standing relationships go a long way in getting farmers on board with something like this,” she said. **EN**

Erie County’s Erie Grown website is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the Community and Economic Development category.