COUNTY LEADERS URGE HOUSE TO PASS BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Pointing to many ways it would help their local priorities, county leaders are pushing for the House of Representatives to pass the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which the Senate passed on a bipartisan vote Aug. 10.

The legislation would provide $973 billion over five years from FY 2022 – FY 2026, including $550 billion in new investments for all modes of transportation, water, power and energy, environmental remediation, public lands, broadband and resilience.

“Infrastructure and Jobs Act will support counties by making investments that will help us deliver stronger more efficient and more accessible transportation and infrastructure for our citizens,” said NACo President Larry Johnson, a DeKalb County, Ga. commissioner.

“Counties are major owners and operators of the nation’s transportation infrastructure systems,” he said. “We own and operate 44 percent of the nation’s roads, more than any other level of government. We own four out of every 10 bridges, many of them are off the federal highway system. We play a key role in supporting a third of the nation’s public airports and nearly 80 of the public transportation systems.

“Counties annually invest over $130 billion in construction of infrastructure and maintaining public works,” he noted. “Our local responsibilities range far beyond roads, bridges, airports and waterways, as highlighted by the pandemic, county residents rely on us for high-speed broadband.”

Fulton County, Ga. Commissioner Liz Hausmann, chairwoman of NACo’s Transportation Steering Committee, said the funding and the certainty counties would have to pursue transportation and infrastructure projects with the surface transportation reauthorization would be significant.

“As county officials, safety remains at the forefront of decision making, and when funding constraints force local governments to decide which projects should be carried out, our residents’ safety is leveraged,” she said. “New programs within IIJA help counties address our unique safety concerns, including 49 percent of fatalities that occur on our rural roads each year.”

She noted that more than $1 billion annually would go to bridges that are not part of the federal highway system.

National monument a double-edged sword for Utah county

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

When Sheriff Danny Perkins gets a call that someone is missing in Garfield County, Utah, that person is probably on the extreme end of missing.

“I have hundreds of miles to check trailheads looking for a vehicle to even start a search area,” he said. “It’s one of the biggest challenges I have as sheriff. Most times we get a missing person call, it’s been a few days already.”

But he’s not worried so much about the millions of visitors coming through the county to see one of three national parks. Visitors to Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef and Canyonlands usually have what they need to find their way around. It’s Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, the largest national monument in the Bureau of Land Management’s portfolio, but also bereft of many of the features visitors come to expect from National Park Service land.

“The problem is that people are naïve — they went down to see MONUMENT page 2

Placer County, Calif. debuts program to conserve land, streamline permitting

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

After 20 years of work, Placer County, Calif. is finally putting its conservation program in place. Real estate developers certainly know how a wait like that feels.

But now, thanks to that groundwork, permitting will be dramatically accelerated thanks to a detailed streamlining of federal, state and local regulations from nearly a dozen agencies. The program kicked off with the approval of a building that will serve as a multi-story vending machine of sorts for used cars.

“We were able to get permits immediately, otherwise they’d have been looking at five years,” said Gregg McKenzie, administrator of the Plac-
‘There has to be some kind of local control’

From MONUMENT page 1

see the staircase, but the monument is not like a national park... there’s really nothing there,” Perkins said. “There’s no marked trail, there are no facilities, there’s nothing... so they start to hike, and they get lost, they’ll come out miles from their vehicles.”

Perkins added that the state Legislature looks askance at search and rescue missions on federal land using the state’s two helicopters. But it’s treacherous territory, Perkins said. And Garfield County Commissioner Jerry Taylor points out that the search and rescue force that works when the helicopter isn’t involved is made up of volunteers. With fewer jobs in the county attracting younger workers, the talent pool for these missions dries up.

“Our population is growing in the county, but it’s mainly older people,” Taylor said.

The local topography and climate add a degree of difficulty, too. These costs are an added challenge for Garfield County, where 93 percent of federal land. Originally 1.8 million acres when President Bill Clinton designated the monument in 1996, President Donald Trump reduced the Grand Staircase-Escalante monument designation area to roughly 1 million acres in 2017, opening that territory to new mining operations and road building through the Bureau of Land Management.

Interior Secretary Deb Haaland has advised President Biden to reinstate boundaries at Grand Staircase-Escalante, along with Bears Ears, also in Utah, and an off-shore monument in Maine, The New York Times reported in June.

The Antiquities Act, which presidents have used to designate monuments, does not include any additional funding for facilities forcing the managing agency to use funding allocated through Congress to establish visitors’ centers, bathroom facilities and interpretive signage.

“The people who come with their trailers, their ATVs in the back...we’re lucky if we get a tank of gas out of them,” Perkins said. “It’s not like they’re staying in our hotels and eating in our restaurants. A lot of times, the only thing we get out of it is the tab for a $15,000 helicopter rescue.” Taylor points out that the monument designation is preventing mining of low-sulfur coal, limiting Garfield County’s economic development opportunities through resource extraction.

He takes particular umbrage at the removal of dinosaur bones and fossils from the monument, including one that is kept in the basement of a Denver museum.

“They can mine our dinosaur bones, but we can’t mine coal,” he said. He would like to build a museum and science center focused on dinosaurs in Garfield County.

“We can bring college classes in paleontology, archeology,” he said. “If the federal government is going to make these monuments, why don’t we put some resources into it? Put them in a place here where people can come and visit. It would make a huge difference, especially for this area.

“We love having the visitors,” he noted. “That’s the only thing we have going for us if we can’t mine coal and can’t cut timber.”

The visitors also bring waste that overwhelms both the limited receptacles and bathroom facilities.

“We’re hauling away dumpsters worth of trash, and finding human waste out there,” Taylor said. “How’s that protecting the land?” The Utah congressional delegation is hoping to amend the Antiquities Act to require approval from a state’s delegation, something that is part of the American County Platform.

“I think there’s more than one way to skin a cat with it, but somebody needs to stand up and say there has to be some kind of local control,” Taylor said.

“Critics say that the locals are fighting the monument designation because they don’t love the land. We’re invested as anyone. This is our home and we’re here every day.”

‘Critics say that the locals are fighting the monument designation because they don’t love the land. We’re invested as anyone. This is our home and we’re here every day.’

From IIJA page 1

Federal highway system and mostly maintained by counties, and the codification of the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant program would allow a lot of flexibility for county projects.

Hausmann pointed out that Fulton County released a $1.3 billion transit master expansion plan, and the 13 Atlanta metro area counties had a $27 billion plan.

“Obviously we can’t accomplish that with local dollars alone, so the $39 billion in IIJA is very important to metro Atlanta counties.”

But infrastructure includes more than roads and bridges, and Coos County, Ore. Commissioner Melissa Cribbins, chairwoman of NACo’s Energy, Environment and Land Use Steering Committee, said the investments the bill offered were coming at the right time.

“It provides critical funding to counties at a time when we need it most to upgrade our energy grid and water infrastructure,” she said. “The bill also provides new opportunities to be better engaged and solution-oriented within this portfolio.”

Crucial programs include the Department of Energy’s weatherization assistance program, a carbon-utilization grant program for which counties would be directly eligible, a new carbon dioxide transportation infrastructure finance and innovation program and a revolving loan fund for transmission line replacement.

This bill would also fund brownfield restoration projects, clean water programs, lead service line replacement

See IIJA page 3

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"There were a lot of naysayers along the way..."

Robert Weygandt, chairman of the Placer County Board of Supervisors, speaks at the July 22 signing ceremony for the Placer County Conservation Plan. Photo courtesy of Placer County, Calif.

From CONSERVE page 1

The conversation plan preserves more than 260,000 acres of land in western Placer County, guaranteeing protection for a large swath of land and waterways, including a 47,000-acre reserve habitat to protect threatened and endangered fish and wildlife. The county will use development fees and grant funding to purchase land or conservation easements in the conservation district.

McKenzie worked in home building, giving him a comprehensive look at how the program works, and he considered it novel enough to come work for the county to shepherd it through the process. Rather than having developers seek individual permits from a variety of state and federal agencies, the conservation program helps streamline the process by setting standards that will meet all requirements at once, the highest common denominator.

"We follow the legal pathway that we would be able to substantiate that this was the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative," said Robert Weygandt, chairman of the county Board of Supervisors, who has been in office for the entire process.

McKenzie said that different personnel in different cooperating agencies took turns forging the path ahead, despite shifting priorities among them. "All of those agencies have their own agendas, whether they’re set by the president, Congress or governors," McKenzie said.

"Placer County knew it was going to be a long road, but they stuck to it, knowing it would be worth it in the end. "It’s the only plan in the country to involve a programmatic corps permit, a federal habitat conservation plan and a state conservation plan." The ultimate push the plan needed came from endorsement by the Audubon Society, to which a group of developers concurred. "It started out of general open space policy work we were doing and grew from there," Weygandt said.

"We were trying to do something different. We wanted to have much better conservation that complemented growth in our county within our communities while getting regulatory relief."

Weygandt said the continued political will in Placer County kept the program rolling forward for so many years, but it was helped along by the genuine good will and open mindedness of the county’s partners.

"There were always reasons to think we’d be successful, because people were always willing to say what we could change to make it work."
### Upcoming Events

**Western Interstate Region Conference & Rural Action Caucus Symposium**
Oct. 13-15, 2021 | Salt Lake County, Utah
www.naco.org/WIR21

**Fall Board Meeting & Large Urban County Caucus Symposium**

**NACo Legislative Conference**
Feb. 12-16, 2022 | Washington, D.C.

**2022 NACo Annual Conference**
July 21-24, 2022 | Adams County, Colo.
By Linda Langston

As if the challenge of safeguarding public health and citizens’ security during a pandemic weren’t enough for local government officials and law enforcement to manage, they are coping with another contagion of perhaps greater long-term concern: A pandemic of viral mis- and disinformation that challenges the stability of government and the public’s trust.

The way citizens view facts, define certainty and classify information no longer adheres to traditional rules. Fundamental changes have made it easier for bad actors — domestic and foreign — to exploit and amplify information to sow discord, push foreign nations’ policy agendas, cause alarm and ultimately undermine confidence and public trust in the core institutions of our democracy. Advancements in technology allow for the increasingly seamless manipulation or fabrication of video and audio, and the pervasiveness of social media enables false information to be swiftly amplified among responsive audiences.

In the days leading up to the November election, local election officials faced “a tsunami of misinformation,” The New York Times said, that would take “tens of millions of dollars to battle.” A story in The Washington Post says that “viral accusations repeatedly debunked by courts and authorities have persisted, hanging over local decision-making and saddling officials with the daunting task of somehow rebuilding public trust.”

The task of chasing and debunking viral disinformation isn’t easy. “The Hype Machine,” a 2018 research paper from MIT’s Media Lab, established that “false information spreads faster than the truth, misdirecting real behaviors and as it spreads throughout our democracy, a contagion of distrust appeared in its wake. Conspiracy exists at the trust we have for one another as fellow Americans by casting doubt on the American project itself.”

How can local, county and state government officials maintain their special relationship of trust with the American people? We suggest several approaches.

First, local governments must devote more resources to the monitoring and countermessaging of specific instances of misinformation in social media either by enhancing their public information offices or by outsourcing the task to professionals. There is value in monitoring and crafting real-time response and its impact on the public safety of civil society.

Second, local governments and public safety officials must work with trusted community leaders, faith-based organizations and other democratic institutions to better broadcast their commitment to one another and to the truth.

All parts of society must be vigilant to the risks of disinformation, but local officials bear a particular burden. They can no longer be complacent to these threats and must find partners in their local communities and at the state and federal levels to secure and support trusted information sources.

Third, and most important, it is critical that local government officials, county sheriffs and police leaders furnish citizens with the truth. In these challenging times, government and law enforcement leaders struggle to plan and pay for roads, hospitals, jails, and other critical infrastructure while supporting public health for citizens during a pandemic. Each of these vital missions is undermined by corrosive effects of disinformation.

We all must be steadfast in providing accurate information to the citizenry, while debunking the domestic and foreign disinformation campaigns that seek to undermine trust. Local officials are the most trusted government officials. To retain that status, they must recognize the threat posed by today’s toxic information environment. Working with business and community leaders, they must rebuild the public’s trust that the information government provides is accurate, timely, and truthful. In confronting mis- and disinformation as it propagates on social media platforms, local governments that invest in telling the truth and debunking falsehoods will be our best hope for a lasting inoculation against the chaos that such lies can create.

Linda Langston is principal of Langston Strategies Group and a former president of NACo. Paul Goldenberg, a senior fellow with Rutgers University Miller Center for Community Protection and Resilience and senior adviser to the Network Contagion Research Institute, contributed to this article. John Farmer, director of the Rutgers University Eagleton Institute of Politics and the Miller Center for Community Protection and Resilience, also contributed to this article.

MACON: The county was named for Nathaniel Macon, an early 19th-century political leader who served as a U.S. senator.

MOUNTAIN: The county is located in North Carolina’s western mountain region.

NEWSPAPERS: The county is served by several local media outlets including The Macon County News, The Franklin Press, The Highlander, Highlands Newspaper and The Mountain Laurel Magazine.

PEACHES: The county is the leading peach-producing county in the state.

SIZE: The county measures 520 square miles.

WATERFALLS: Popular waterfalls are located throughout the county.

WHITEWATER: Nantahala River in the county offers whitewater rafting.
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Search is on for America’s top 100 ‘Hometown Heroes’

The second annual Small Town America Civic Volunteer Award program was launched last month nationwide in counties with populations of less than 25,000. The country’s top 100 small-town public service volunteers will again be recognized and honored for their outstanding service, with the top three winning cash awards for their communities.

Details of the awards program, as well as the nomination form, can be found at www.civicvolunteer.com. The nomination period will run through Oct. 15.

In addition to recognizing these “hometown heroes,” the program is designed to spotlight the decline in the availability of citizens to fill critical local government roles, such as county boards and city councils, volunteer firefighters, EMTs, and the many advisory committees that support other key local government functions.

The program is sponsored by CivicPlus, a technology platform created for local governments. The program is co-sponsored by NACo, the National Volunteer Fire Council, the National Association of Towns and Townships, Main Street America and Points of Light. Representatives of these organizations are serving on the awards program advisory team. The Barton Russell Group has again been retained to administer and judge the 2021 program.

Municipalities and counties represented by the top 100 nominees will qualify for a free volunteer management module that can be integrated with their website to help engage, recruit, track and retain community volunteers.

They will also receive 12 months of free support services for the module from CivicPlus. Localities represented by the top three national award winners will also receive cash awards of $20,000, $10,000 and $5,000 respectively.

Local government representatives may nominate citizens or citizen organizations, using the online application. Nominators are asked to describe their candidate’s story of local volunteerism and its positive impact on their community. Winners will be announced at a ceremony to be held in November.

“We hope in some small way the STACVA program will encourage people to step up volunteer at the local level for these critical civic roles,” said Millard Rose, VP/GM of CivicEngage and CivicOptimize. “Ultimately, that’s what this program is all about.”

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**PHILIP KUYERS**

NACo Board Member
Commissioner
Ottawa County, Mich.

**Number of years involved in NACo:** Eight

**Years in public service:** 28

**Occupation:** Retired dairy farmer/golf course owner

**Education:** High school diploma

**The hardest thing I’ve ever done:** Sold my dairy farm

**Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner:** Ronald Reagan, Donald Trump and Egbert Kuyers, my dad

**A dream I have is to:** See Ottawa County parks become the gathering place for any and everyone who enjoys the outdoors.

**You’d be surprised to learn:** I love to mountain bike.

**The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done:** Mountain biked down a mountain in Oregon or maybe kayaking in the fog at Pictured Rocks.

**My favorite way to relax is:** Running my dogs in the early morning.

**I’m most proud of:** The independence of my children and the births of my grandchildren.

**Every morning I read:** My county commissioner emails

**My favorite meal is:** Pork tenderloin on the grill with fresh veggies.

**My pet peeve is:** People who know how to use the system and take advantage of it.

**My motto is:** If it’s worth it, work for it.

**The last book I read was:** Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson

**My favorite movie is:** Jeremiah Johnson with Robert Redford

**My favorite music is:** All music genres. If it has a beat, I like it. LOUD.

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

**My county is a NACo member because:** The survival of Michigan depends upon all counties working together to create an atmosphere of inclusion and economic growth.

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**GET TO KNOW...**

St. Lawrence County, N.Y.

Welcome, St. Lawrence County, N.Y.

St. Lawrence County is the largest county in New York and located along the Canadian border. Formed in 1802, the county is named after the St. Lawrence River that forms the border between the United States and Canada. French Explorer Jacques Cartier named the river after arriving to the estuary on Saint Lawrence’s feast day.

The county seat of Canton is a college community home to St. Lawrence University and the State University of New York (SUNY) Canton. St. Lawrence County has additional colleges and universities including Clarkson University and the Crane School of Music.

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.

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Ogdensburg- Prescott International Bridge by iezumibalaberejenjena/Flickr
**BRIGHT IDEAS | OAKLAND COUNTY, Mich.**

**County Reflects, Pays Thanks and Educates with COVID-19 Tribute**

**PROBLEM:** Find a creative way to acknowledge the one-year anniversary of the first COVID-19 case appearing in Oakland County.

**SOLUTION:** Launch an initiative to reflect on the first year of the pandemic and its impact on community members.

by Rachel Looker, staff writer

The year 2020 was a difficult one for Oakland County, Michigan's Brandy Boyd.

Boyd, chief of recreation programs and services with the county's parks and recreation department, lost both her parents to COVID-19 within days of one another.

On March 10, 2021, on the one-year anniversary of the first case of the virus appearing in the county, Boyd found herself counting down at the #OaklandTogether COVID-19 Tribute Walk to ceremoniously light a half-mile trail to honor those lost during the pandemic.

"I just thought it was important for people to hear my story about what my family and I are going through and how it's impacting our lives," she said.

Boyd spoke about her experience to honor her parents at the opening event for the walk.

The Tribute Walk was just one of multiple initiatives Oakland County launched as part of the #OaklandTogether COVID-19 Tribute to mark the anniversary of the first COVID-19 case in the county.

"I think it's important to put that spotlight on people and I was honored that I was able to highlight my parents, but it was also an honor that the county put the effort and resources into not just the families, but the community," Boyd said.

Kaitlin Keeler, Oakland County's marketing and communications officer, said the tribute focused on remembering and reflecting on those who were lost, paying thanks to frontline workers who helped throughout the pandemic and educating the public about the virus.

"We chose the word 'tribute' specifically, because we thought it was a nice way to both honor those we lost and also pay thanks to those we were grateful for," she said.

The tribute included multiple activities throughout March with one being the Tribute Walk, a half-mile immersive and interactive light display located in a county park.

Oakland County partnered on the light display with Blue Water Technologies, an Oakland County-based company that works on lighting for trade shows. With events cancelled last year, the company had previously created a similar outdoor immersive experience.

"The collaboration made everything easy and just added another layer of love to the project," Keeler said. "It was a passion project and a labor of love."

More than 3,000 visitors came to the walk for the 11 days it was open in March.

One section of the walk, dubbed "The Radiant Path," included candles that each represented 10 lives lost to COVID-19, Keeler said. Another section of the walk featured lights that swirled around those passing by to signify that those who are lost are always with us.

"That just gave me goose bumps when the company pitched that part of the idea and they were able to bring it to life," Keeler said.

The county livestreamed portions of the walk to reach those who were unable to attend the path in person.

At the walk, visitors had the opportunity to add names to a yellow heart and black ribbon sign, the symbol for those who lost their lives to COVID-19 or write a message to frontline workers on a green heart. The signs will be displayed at different locations throughout the county.

Boyd said she had the chance to write messages thanking the nursing staff and the doctors who took care of her parents at the hospital.

"It was nice to share the positives and obviously the tragedy of it," she said.

Oakland County also used their geographic information systems (GIS) team to launch Remembrance and Gratitude Story Maps as part of the tribute to collect stories and photos of community members who lost their lives. The maps are still open and available for anyone to contribute to or view.

"We wanted just to make a safe personal space where you could share your story," Keeler said.

County Executive David Coulter and Michigan Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist held a virtual discussion and COVID-19 update about vaccines and the inequities people of color faced throughout the pandemic as part of the tribute.

Keeler said it was crucial all activities were open and accessible to the public.

"Everybody has a story throughout COVID to tell," she said.

"I just think it's so important because regardless of where you are politically, COVID has touched everybody's life in one way or another," Boyd added.

Oakland County's #OaklandTogether COVID-19 Tribute is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the Civic Education and Public Information category.
Back to the Office?

Employers and employees navigate this latest change together

How do employers and employees navigate this latest change together?

The reports of COVID’s resurgence are also impacting employers’ plans to return employees to the workplace. According to CNBC on August 5, Amazon corporate employees won’t return to offices until January 2022, after previously planning a return after Labor Day. So now, employees who were anticipating their return to the office are thrust into added uncertainty, their plans and preparations changing as the Delta variant makes us once again pivot.

Employees have experienced much change over the last year and a half, personally and professionally. The rising COVID-19 cases and return of restrictions has been disheartening, and uncertainty continues. The CDC guidelines have consistently changed, making it difficult for employees to keep up with the latest changes. However, there are some best practices that employers can follow to navigate this latest change.

First, employers should continue to communicate with employees. Regular updates on the status of the pandemic and any changes to the return-to-work plan will help employees feel informed and supported. Additionally, employees should be encouraged to communicate with their managers if they have concerns or questions about the return-to-work plan.

Second, employers should offer flexible work arrangements. Many employees have had success working from home, and allowing them to continue doing so can help them feel more comfortable and productive. This can also help with employee retention.

Third, employers should provide resources for employee wellness. The pandemic has been a stressful time for everyone, and employers should provide resources to help employees manage stress and anxiety. This can include mental health resources and wellness programs.

Fourth, employers should be proactive in vaccinating employees. While vaccine availability and mandates vary by location, employers should consider offering incentives for employees to get vaccinated. This can help increase vaccination rates and ensure a safer return-to-work environment.

Fifth, employers should be prepared for changes in government regulations. The pandemic has been a fast-changing environment, and government regulations can change quickly. Employers should be prepared to adapt to any changes and continue to communicate with employees.

In conclusion, employers and employees should work together to navigate this latest change. Communication, flexibility, and resources can help employees feel supported and comfortable as they return to the office.
ALABAMA

A SHELBY COUNTY 9-1-1 dispatcher, Philip Morris, was being feted earlier this month at his retirement party when an emergency call came into the center, for his own father, WBMA-TV reported. “In the middle of receiving the plaque, my co-worker who was a call taker that day received a call for my father’s house and my father was unresponsive. So, I had to dispatch a call to my father’s house,” Morris explained. “Unfortunately, what should have been a great day into retirement, turned into the day my father passed away. My last radio transmission before retiring is ‘98 command reports, death in the field’ of my father. That’s how my career as a dispatcher ended.” Morris worked for the county for 23 years.

 COLORADO

They’re talkin’ trash in PITKIN COUNTY. Home construction and demolition trash has taken over more than half the waste buried at the county landfill, according to Cathy Hall, the county solid waste director. She estimates the landfill will be full in a decade, she said during a recent county council work session.

To encourage recycling of the materials, the county requires a $1,000 deposit per ton of estimated waste when project crews get permits for demolition or building. The county refunds the deposits depending on how much material is recycled. The county keeps the entire deposit if a company diverts less than 20 percent of all waste diverted, the Aspen Times reported.

GEORGIA

Sixty-five counties are participating in a program that brings DMV kiosks into grocery stores and other locations to make it easier for residents to do things like renew vehicle registrations.

MICHIGAN

More than 100 people turned out for the Aug. 7 weekend shredding event sponsored by WAYNE COUNTY Commission Chair Alisha Bell and Shred-it, a local company.

After the recent Detroit-area flooding caused by heavy rainstorms, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the event provided a welcome chance for residents to safely rid themselves of old, but sensitive, paperwork.

NEVADA

• CLARK COUNTY is using nearly $6 million from marijuana licensing fees to assist those adversely affected by marijuana laws and to combat unlicensed marijuana sales. The county was already using licensing fees to combat the digital divide in advanced digital equity, with nearly a quarter of the households in Cook County lacking access to broadband,” Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said. "We’ve been through a storm with the pandemic upending life as we knew it. But after a storm, always comes the rainbow.”

ARKANSAS

GREENE COUNTY recently unveiled an interactive kiosk at the county courthouse that helps residents learn how to protect themselves if an earthquake strikes, KAIT-TV reported. Erik Wright, the Arkansas emergency management director, said the county is entrenched in a seismic zone, making it important for residents to be aware of the hazards. Residents need to be prepared because unlike other natural disasters, earthquakes cannot be predicted, according to the department’s website. The kiosk is the first earthquake educational kiosk in Arkansas.

MARYLAND

Devora Guerrero, a coronavirus outreach volunteer in MONTGOMERY COUNTY, saw five family members, including her grandmother, get the virus last year. She herself tested positive in December — and despite it all, Guerrero was afraid to get the vaccine, The Washington Post reported.

The 23-year-old’s friends had nearly convinced her that the vaccine was not safe — but then she met “Abuelina.” This animated character commissioned by the county’s Latino Health Initiative, Por Nuestra Salud y Bienestar, a community partner focused on reaching the Latino population, reminded Guerrero of her own abuela — a short, hard-working and wise Chilean 74-year-old grandmother.

MARYLAND

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ARIZONA

A program in YAVAPAI COUNTY offers residents a chance to find out about barriers the incarcerated may face upon release, Signals Arizona reported. “It’s important to understand the barriers that a person returning from incarceration might encounter through a free simulation experience,” said John Morris, chief adult probation officer for the county. “If we can identify, understand and address these barriers early before they are released, those individuals are more likely to have a smoother transition back home. This means they are less likely to reoffend ... thus, making a healthier and safer community for us all.” For more information about the Yavapai Reentry Project visit YavapaiReentryProject.org or call (928) 708-0100.

ILIO

COOK COUNTY has created an education program aimed at helping fill a three-month learning gap brought on by the pandemic, the Chicago Sun-Times reported. An early education initiative called Project Rainbow will feature video content and repurposed learning materials via the county TV channel and a new county app. The content was created and mostly paid for by 24 partner organizations.

“Project Rainbow speaks to the county’s efforts to bridge the digital divide in advanced digital equity, with nearly a quarter of the households in Cook County lacking access to broadband,” Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle said. “We’ve been through a storm with the pandemic upending life as we knew it. But after a storm, always comes the rainbow.”

NEVADA

• The WASHOE COUNTY Sheriff’s Office has launched a three-person HOPE team — homeless outreach proactive engagement. The team includes one sergeant and two deputies, who provide resources to help keep the homeless out of poverty and into stable homes, though the program is still looking for a non-profit partner to expand housing options, KOLO News reported.

See NEWS FROM page 11
NEW YORK

• Nassau County Executive Laura Curran vetoed a bill that would have allowed police officers to sue and collect financial damages from protesters who harass them. Curran said the proposed legislation “would inhibit residents’ rights to free speech and protest.” The bill would have made police officers and other first responders a protected class under the county’s Human Rights Law, which bars discrimination based on race, religion, gender and sexual orientation. No other professions are protected under the Human Rights Law.

OKLAHOMA

OKLAHOMA COUNTY’s SHINE program — Start Helping Impacted Neighborhoods Everywhere — is expanding to weekends, helping alleviate the county jail’s most crowded days. The program assigns community service hours to low-level, nonviolent offenders versus spending that time in jail, giving offenders a chance to keep their jobs and still take responsibility for their offenses.

TEXAS

The Texas Supreme Court is siding with Rocky Mountain Power to conduct extra patrols near the power lines.

NEW YORK

• Albany County is distributing reusable shopping bags bearing a design by a third grader in the Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk School District. County Executive Dan Coy held a county-wide reusable bag art contest to encourage the public to reduce the reliance on disposable paper bags and protect the environment.

utah

The WEBER COUNTY Sheriff’s Office is pleading on social media for residents to stop setting up hammocks on power lines. The department is teaming up with Rocky Mountain Power to conduct extra patrols near the power lines.

virginia

• Arlington County is moving away from its historical relationship with Robert E. Lee. In addition to purging a redesign of the county logo, which currently depicts Lee’s mansion, the Arlington House, the county Board renamed Lee Highway, one of its central thoroughfares, for abolitionist John Langston, the first Black person to be elected to Congress from Virginia.

• The FAIRFAX COUNTY Sheriff’s Office is pleading on social media for residents to stop setting up hammocks on power lines. The department is teaming up with Rocky Mountain Power to conduct extra patrols near the power lines.

Pennsylvania

“County executive?” “That’s right.” “He yours?” “Uh huh.” “Both of them?” After years of being told they look alike, ALLEGHENY COUNTY Executive Rich Fitzgerald met actor Jeff Daniels while Daniels was in Western Pennsylvania to film the TV series “American Rust,” set in a fictional FAYETTE COUNTY town.

Washington

Facing recruitment difficulties, SPOKANE COUNTY’s Detention Services is offering signing bonuses of up to $10,000 for some new hires. The county’s sheriff’s office is offering $15,000 hiring bonuses and taking out billboard space in cities such as Denver, Portland and the Seattle area, The Spokesman-Review reported.

Oregon

The Oregon Department of Forestry has approved an official seal for Roscommon County, Mich. in 1875, supervisors in Roscommon County approved an official seal for a flag and other identification purposes. The seal focuses on the themes of agriculture and forestry.

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