

## 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.

“The Infrastructure Investment 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

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## National monument a double-edged sword for Utah county



**A hiker at Jacob Hamblin Arch, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in neighboring Kane County. It is jointly run by the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service.**

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

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## 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-

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# ‘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

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

saur 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 use of 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 as invested as anyone. This is our home and we’re here every day.

“You can love the land as much as I do, but you can’t love it any more than I do.” **CN**

‘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.’

the land is federally owned and nontaxable, instead receiving Payments in Lieu of Taxes at far below market rate. It’s a common problem for Western counties, though Garfield County is among counties with the highest proportion

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 dino-

# Infrastructure bill in House

From IJJA 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 IJJA is very impactful 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 brownfields restoration projects, clean water programs, lead service line replacement

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## SNAP/STATS



### VACATIONS

GOALS	PERCENT
Plan to use more vacation days than past years: .....	79 percent
Plan to check in with work less frequently:.....	82 percent
Canceled, delayed or shortened vacations due to work: .....	56 percent
Check in with work daily while on vacation: .....	61 percent
Disagreement with spouse over working on vacation:.....	42 percent

Source: Consulting firm Korn Ferry survey of 620 professionals, June 2021

*From IJA page 2*

and PFAS remediation.

“Infrastructure has been underfunded for years, our grandparents made the important investments that we need to continue to make to protect our shared infrastructure,” she said. “In my rural area, we’ve struggled for years to upgrade water treatment facilities in our forest communities. I have seen the hard choices that residents have had to make about improving their drinking water, because the cost of the needed upgrades often drive the drinking water bills up so high that our residents struggle to pay their water bills. This act would remove the false choice between drinking water and economic survival.”

The IJA prioritizes broadband as a core infrastructure, and NACo Telecommunications and Technology Steering Committee Chairwoman Tarryl Clark, a Stearns County, Minn. Commissioner, said that has become clear during the pandemic, when high-speed internet became a premium for parents working at home while students attended classes remotely. In addition, residents relied on broadband to access telemedicine, combat social isolation and counties adapted justice systems to operate remotely.

The infrastructure package allocates \$65 billion for broadband deployment, though mostly to states, but establishes several competitive grant programs for which counties could apply. Those could include middle-mile broadband expansion programs, wholesale service at reasonable rates on a carrier-neutral basis or connections to anchor community institutions.

“County officials play a crucial role as policy makers, funders, data aggregators, conveners and partners in pursuing sustainable solutions to broadband access, affordability and reliability,” she said.

“We are committed to eliminating the nation’s digital divide. The IJA provides the resources necessary to help ensure that we can provide universal, reliable and affordable broadband access to all counties.

“It will enhance our coun-

try’s and our communities’ competitiveness and vitality,” she said.

The IJA also includes a three-year extension of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) revenue-sharing program for public lands counties.

NACo Public Lands Steering Committee Chairman Joel Bousman called that provision “a key win for Western counties,” with more than 700 counties across the country receiving payments from the program.

Those payments fund an array of county services, including education, law enforcement and search and rescue operations.

“These services benefit both residents and visitors to our federal public lands,” he said.

He noted that Sublette County, Wyo., where he is a commissioner, uses SRS money to contract with a search and rescue helicopter service for the Bridger-Teton National Forest.

“We have saved numerous lives in our county by having this service available,” he said.

For the first time since 2013, counties will be able to choose, for FY 2022 and FY 2023, between Secure Rural Schools payments or timber receipts, the revenue for which the program was designed to compensate.

“Some counties have found they would receive more from timber harvest receipts than they would from SRS, so they will be able to decide which funding stream to receive,” Bousman said.

The bill would also create a new Resource Advisory Committee that would allow the directors of the U.S. Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management to present their recommended appointments to the secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior, respectively. That would expand on a similar pilot program in Montana and Arizona.

“This has cut down on waiting periods from two years to a few weeks, a huge improvement,” he said. **CN**

*View a detailed legislative analysis of the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act, including provisions for counties, at [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).*

*‘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*

er County Conservation Plan. “There’s much more certainty in the timelines for permitting now, and that directly influences the cost of development and construction.”

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.

“We set a higher standard,

but it’s one that meets everyone’s needs.”

“The end result is that we will conserve above and beyond what is normally required for mitigation,” McKenzie said. “We’re strategically going to be able to preserve larger habitats.”

The program required cooperation with a wide variety of agencies, including:

- Army Corps of Engineers
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- Fish and Wildlife Service
- Environmental Protection Agency
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- California Regional Water Quality Control Board
- South Placer Regional Transportation Authority
- Placer County Water Agency, and
- City of Lincoln.

“It took a long time to get consensus around what would be covered and what wouldn’t be covered,” McKenzie said.

“If it were simply a federal habitat conservation plan, it probably would have been done 15 years ago, but stakeholders said you can’t separate waters from species, they’re all interrelated.”

McKenzie and Weygandt 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,” McK-

enzie said.

“It’s hard not to be whipsawed by different administrations — bouncing between presidents every few years was challenging.”

For instance, with the shifting definition of a navigable waterway under the Clean Water Act’s “Waters of the U.S.” rule, the Placer County program shoots higher and defines “Waters of Placer County.”

“There were a lot of naysayers along the way, but we had strong supporters in each stakeholder group,” Weygandt said.

“There was always someone who kept this going in each agency.”

It’s one of the first programs of its kind in the United States, a fact McKenzie owes to the intricate nature of so many cooperating agencies.

“A lot of people wouldn’t even try this because it’s so complex, there are so many moving parts,” he 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.” **CN**



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# Counties must battle disinformation

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 spread[s] faster than the truth, misdirecting real behaviors with real impact.”

The challenge for local and county government officials is especially significant. Election commissioners, health inspectors, city managers, mayors, and county sheriffs are the face of the government for most Americans and they enjoy the



highest levels of trust. But that essential trust is placed at risk with every new uncorroborated rumor, every new groundless conspiracy theory and every new fragment of muddled fact intended to persuade Americans that government at every level is not to be trusted.

Misinformation is a virus that knows no race, socioeconomic status or political persuasion and as it spreads throughout our democracy, a contagion of distrust appeared in its wake. Conspiracy eats 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 countermanding of specific instances of mis- and disinformation 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. **CN**

*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.*

**WORD SEARCH**

**MACON COUNTY, N.C.**  
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

M	H	P	Q	J	W	P	D	I	S	O	E	D	Y	J	Z	C	Y	L	S
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- APPALACHIAN:** Part of the Appalachian Trail is located in the county.

**CHEROKEE:** This Native American tribe once flourished in the area.

**FOREST:** About half of the county is made up of the Nantahala National Forest, more than 500,000 acres.

**FOUNDED:** The county was founded in 1828.

**FRANKLIN:** The county seat is Franklin, incorporated in 1855.

**GEMSTONES:** Gemstones including sapphires, garnets and rubies can be found in the county. The county seat of Franklin is known as the “Gem Capital of the World.”

**HAYWOOD:** The county was formed from Haywood County.

**HIGHLANDS:** The mountain town of Highlands is a popular retirement and golfing community in the county.
- 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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PROFILES IN SERVICE

PHILIP KUYERS

NACo Board Member  
Commissioner  
Ottawa County, Mich.



Kuyers

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 grandsons.

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.

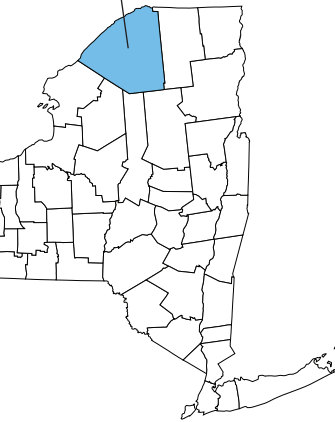


GET TO KNOW... St. Lawrence County, N.Y.

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. The city of Ogdensburg, also known as the "Maple City," is located on the St. Lawrence River and features the Maple City Trail for biking and walking. Ogdensburg is located directly across from Canada and connects the two countries by the Ogdensburg-Prescott bridge.

"Get to Know" features new NACo member counties.



Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge by lezumbalaberenjena/Flickr

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](http://www.civicvolunteer.com). The nomination period will run through Oct. 15.

HometownHeroes

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 coun-

ties 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."



## 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 com-

munications 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 Bluewater 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 goosebumps 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.

**CN**

*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.*



Residents pass through the #OaklandTogether COVID-19 Tribute Walk to mark the one-year anniversary of the first case of COVID-19 in Oakland County, Mich.



## the HR DOCTOR

with Philpot  
& Winkler

**B**ack to school. As a kid, that idea filled you with excitement or dread. Across the country, the first day of school can be as early as July or as late as September, depending on where you live. This year, as kids return to school while the pandemic intensifies all over again due to the Delta variant, the staggered starts allow us to see the impact of COVID-19 on another school year. According to an Indianapolis Star article from August 4, “just one week into the new school year and COVID-19 is already disrupting learning for Hoosier students. Three dozen positive cases in schools were reported to the state last week and already several school districts have had to send dozens of students home to quarantine after just the first few days of class.” According to King5, the NBC affiliate in Seattle, on August 4, “COVID-19 cases among children force Washington childcare centers to temporarily close.”

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 additional 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 masks may feel like a setback when people were just seeing light at the end of the tunnel. With a return to school uncertain and vaccines for children and childcare unavailable, employees with children have many factors weighing on them. Even if kids return

to school, will the schools remain open? Employees with family members who work in healthcare and small businesses worry once again. These latest changes may challenge our patience, but we’re not through with this yet.

So now what do we do about returning to work?

Like the start of a school year, return to work dates are not uniform. Many employers have gradually brought employees back over the summer as restrictions eased and others have planned a return on the Tuesday after Labor Day. How do employers and employees navigate this latest change together?

First, much of the country is in substantial and high transmission again, meaning the CDC guidelines recommend everyone, regardless of vaccination status, wear masks while indoors. If your county has reinstated (or never revoked) mask requirements and other mitigation strategies, it is at least a change that employees have traversed successfully within the last year. While disappointing, the change is less severe because it is familiar. We know how to successfully wear masks, socially distance, meter lobbies and telework as needed.

Second, as employees receive COVID-positive test results, are departments being notified? Previously, some or-

ganizations sent messages to department staff to notify them of a positive test in the department so employees could get tested and to quickly respond, knowing contact tracing was working beyond its limits and vaccines were unavailable. Now, is department notification necessary? Contact tracing is currently able to keep up with demand in many communi-

### How do employers and employees navigate this latest change together?

ties, although that may change quickly. Also, CDC recommendations involve mask-wearing, social distancing and vaccination. Department leadership will need to weigh the pros and cons of notifications, with part of the consideration being the size of the team, what the positive employee has shared with co-workers, and operational needs.

Third, will your organization require vaccinations? In several states, governors or state legislatures have preempted counties from enacting vaccine requirements. If a vaccine requirement is still an option for you, you will still need to contend with what that means

for your employees. The federal anti-discrimination laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and similar state laws may require exceptions in certain cases. In those cases, you may consider requiring regular testing or other mitigation strategies, as a substitute.

Fourth, if vaccines are not going to be required, can they be incentivized? On Thursday, August 5, the White House held a webinar on vaccine incentives and while that webinar focused on incentives for citizens and communities, some employers are considering doing the same for employees. Will employees be able to “double dip,” possibly receiving an incentive from both the city or state in which they live and their county employer? Or are you providing an incentive to both employees and citizens? It’s worth considering just how effective incentives are. A recent NPR article titled “Get \$100 For a Vaccine? Cash Incentives Work for Some, Others Not So Much,” suggested while there is some impact, it is limited and will likely not reach those strongly opposed to vaccines.

Throughout the pandemic, flexibility has been the key to success. Clearly, the shifts in the pandemic are neither entirely predictable nor linear. Employers will need to continue to embrace flexibility to

support their employees, serve their residents and simultaneously help their community get through this. To prevent reverting all the way back to closing county buildings, it may also help to give employees time off work to get their vaccinations. Or offer additional sick leave to ensure employees are not coming into county buildings while they’re feeling sick, have had a direct exposure or are having to care for someone who is sick.

Back to work? County public servants have been working diligently to serve others all through the pandemic. How and where citizens receive service could still change several times as we navigate continuous change and acknowledge the continuous change residents are also experiencing. It is important to reflect on all of our success and how adaptable we have been for over a year. Utilization of employee assistance programs, flexibility and understanding are as important as ever. We will look back at this time with relief and awe at all we accomplished. We will realize the end of this pandemic together, with dedication, teamwork, communication and public service. That’s what we do and that is who we are. **CN**

*Erika Philpot is the human resources director and Rose Winkler is the deputy county attorney for Coconino County, Ariz.*

# Back to the Office?





# NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

## 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, WB-MA-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 ‘88 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.

and safer community for us all.” For more information about the Yavapai Reentry Project visit [YavapaiReentryProject.org](http://YavapaiReentryProject.org) or call (928) 708-0100.



## 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

## 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.



## 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

to make it easier for residents to do things like renew vehicle registrations.



## ILLINOIS

**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.”

## 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.

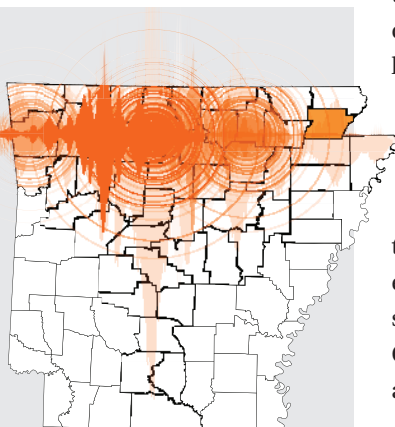
## NEVADA

• **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 for homelessness programs, the *Las Vegas Review Journal* reported.

• 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 lift 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.

## 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.





From NEWS FROM page 10

## 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

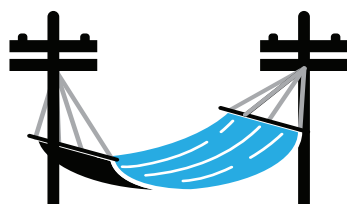
The Texas Supreme Court has **temporarily blocked mask mandates** issued by **BEXAR** and **DALLAS counties** until their cases could be heard, a few days after appeals courts sided with the counties

## 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.



in defiance of Gov. Greg Abbott’s (R) ban on such mandates. **HARRIS COUNTY** has sued Abbott, seeking the right to order a mandate.



## 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 pursuing 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**

Police Department may **stop chasing speeding motorcycle drivers** on county highways while enforcing traffic law violations or other misdemeanors. Officers would continue to chase vehicles involved in a violent felony or a serious crime with the threat or use of violence, Patch reported.

Chief Kevin Davis said technology often can identify motorcyclists who are traveling at high speeds.

• **PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY** supervisors approved a law that would fine residents who **fail to register their vehicles** or use out-of-state license plates. The ordinance will charge \$100 annually for a resident who does not have Virginia license plates on their vehicle and allows the county to fine a resident \$250 for failing to register their vehicle within 30 days of establishing residency, Patch reported.

## WASHINGTON

Facing **recruitment difficulties**, **SPOKANE COUNTY** 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.

*News From Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Mary Ann Barton. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact cban@naco.org and mbarton@naco.org.*

## 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.



## ROSCOMMON COUNTY, Mich.

**A**fter separating from Midland 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.



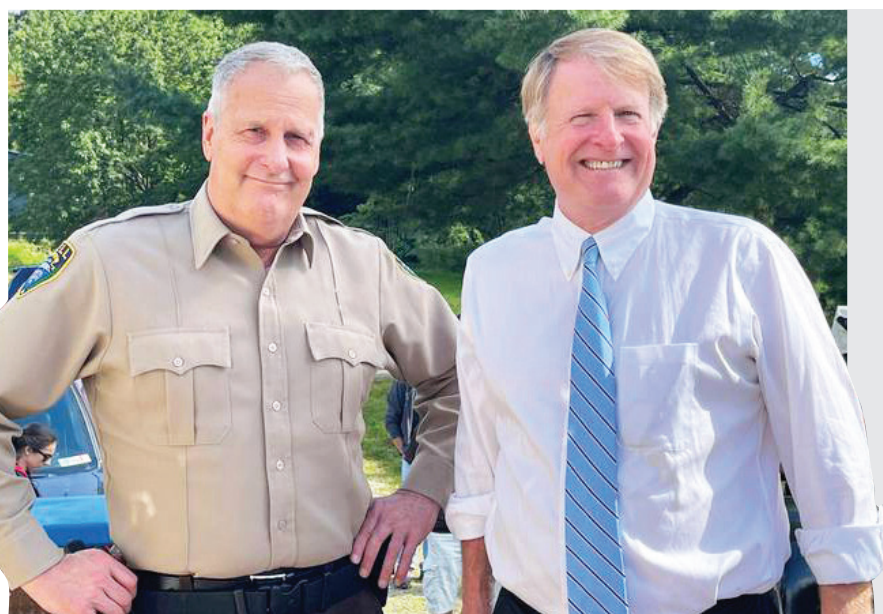
A plow represents the farmers who tilled the county’s land. Roscommon County relied on agriculture in its early days.

A wheat bundle depicts a farmer’s harvest.

The tall pine tree symbolizes the vast forests throughout the county. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, lumber and forestry were the major industries in Roscommon County.

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

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