

STATE EXECS TALK COVID-19 IMPACTS ON BUDGETS, MORE

by **Rachel Looker**
staff writer

Top concerns emerging from the pandemic for state association representatives center on fiscal issues, public health and workforce implications, according to a NACo survey of 24 state associations.

Members from county state associations found themselves in a different set of circumstances this year for the National Council of County Association Executives-National Association of Counties 2020 Knowledge Management Forum.

Meeting for the first time, Sept. 1, in a virtual setting because of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants discussed the current challenges facing counties during this public health crisis.

Kevin Leonard, executive director of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, said the group decided to shift from topics identified as priorities last year — cannabis policy and inmate medical and jail issues — to more pressing issues involving the pandemic including revenue generation, finances, advocacy and communication.

State association members addressed the relationship

between local public health departments and the states' response to the pandemic.

Kelli Brassfield, government affairs associate at the Idaho Association of Counties, noted there has been pushback from the public and the state legislature regarding county commissioners serving on public health district boards, raising questions as to whether commissioners have the expertise to create and implement COVID-related mandates.

In Georgia, where Dave Wills serves as executive director of the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, the "hodge podge" of regulations among the 159 counties throughout the state created confusion, he said, among private enterprises when operating from one county to another, resulting in the governor stepping in to create uniformity.

In Minnesota, where public health is a county-based system with many counties operating through joint entities, county powers have not been restricted, but counties take their lead from the state through a partnership arrangement, according to Julie Ring, executive director of the Association of Minnesota Counties.

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A Marion County, Ore. search and rescue volunteer looks toward Mount Hood last week, where a plume of smoke from a wildfire can be seen. Strong winds and dry conditions were also driving devastating wildfires in other counties across the West, including those in Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. Photo courtesy of Marion County Sheriff's Office

Demands amplify need for PILT, SRS for public lands counties

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Public lands are seeing a boom in visitors this year, as pandemic-weary Americans

look for places to get outdoors and enjoy safe, social distances.

But that popularity is wearing on the counties that are home to outdoor recreation ar-

reas, forests and national parks and monuments, bringing the fight for permanent funding for the Payment in Lieu of

See PILT page 2

Legal dispute leaves Washington county without commissioners

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

A legal battle in eastern Washington has left a county without sitting commissioners for what will likely be at least a month, with potential fallout for the pandemic-affected

business community.

The entire three-person Stevens County Board of Commissioners was removed from office Aug. 20 and forbidden by a restraining order from acting in an official capacity following a dispute over repaid misspent funding from the county's

homelessness program. Unresolved legal considerations are preventing the local Republican party from offering appointment candidates to Gov. Jay Inslee (D) until court proceedings resolve outstanding

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SRS, PILT funds 'more vital than ever' to provide essential services

From PILT page 1

Taxes (PILT) and Secure Rural Schools (SRS) programs into clearer focus.

In early September, Sublette County, Wyo., which is 80 percent public land, sent its search and rescue helicopter, paid for by Secure Rural Schools, to find a hiker who came to the Bridger-Teton National Forest "to get away," and he nearly did just that.

"He was a person who believed that you go to the wilderness to survive," said Commissioner Joel Bousman. "He didn't dress for the weather. We were told he wouldn't have survived another night on the wilderness without being plucked out of there."

That hiker wasn't a Sublette County taxpayer, but he benefited directly from Sublette County services, common in public lands counties. For many counties, those costs are borne indirectly. Ravalli County, Mont. is seeing day-in, day-out increases in visitors to its

National Forest Service campgrounds and the costs are adding up.

"They've been overflowing for 3.5 months," said Commissioner Greg Chilcott, president of the Western Interstate Region. "It's had significant impacts for things as simple as waste management, and most of those visitors are not accustomed to driving on our gravel roads in hot, dry weather, so conditions are deteriorating rapidly."

"We've had to spend more time and money to maintain these roads," he said. "If it wasn't for PILT or SRS, we wouldn't be able to sustain the services we need right now."

The Payment in Lieu of Taxes and Secure Rural Schools programs make up a significant portion of budgets that contain federally managed, untaxable lands, contributing \$515 million to 1,900 counties and \$243 million to 700 counties, respectively. Though those programs represent a fraction of what property taxes and timber revenue

'We've had to spend more time and money to maintain these roads.'

*- Greg Chilcott,
WIR president*

enue would bring the counties, the governments are still responsible for providing the essential services to residents and visitors as though they could fully tax their land and realize timber sales benefits.

Chilcott and Bousman, along with Coconino County, Ariz. Supervisor Liz Archuleta and Graham County, N.C. Commissioner Connie Orr kicked off NACo's Sept. 9-10 PILT Virtual Fly-In, asking Congress to fully fund both PILT and SRS and find a long-term funding solution.

Counties would benefit from PILT keeping up with inflation and to gaining more flexibility

for how to use SRS funding, including for broadband, and a choice between SRS or timber receipts, an option that counties have not had since 2013. Counties would also like to see an expansion of appointments to resource allocation councils.

PILT is currently a discretionary program, after being mandatory from 2008-2014. From FY 2018 to FY 2020, it has been a one-year mandatory program.

Bipartisan bills currently in both the House and Senate propose to fully fund PILT, though the Senate bill sunsets it in FY 2029. Congress has consistently reauthorized SRS with the exception of FY 2016.

"Counties really felt the pain from that, facing about an 80 percent drop in federal revenue-sharing," said NACo Associate Legislative Director Jonathan Shuffield. "The SRS payments are so much greater than what they get from timber harvest recipes off of federal lands, because those timber harvests have dropped so sig-

nificantly over 30 or so years."

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) has also sponsored a bill to create an endowment to pay for SRS, a program he originally sponsored.

Though on the smaller side for a public lands county, Graham County, N.C. struggles, and has spent its PILT allocation wisely.

"We are very rich in beautiful, natural resources," Orr said. "However, very few of these resources are accessible to us for normal economic growth and development, placing a staggering tax burden on our citizens, many of whom are elderly and on fixed incomes."

With the county's \$329,000 in PILT payments, the county can purchase an advanced life support ambulance to help make up for the lack of a hospital within a 45 minute drive of a motorcycle run that's the site of more than 100 search and rescue or recovery operations every year, 10 sheriff's cruisers, or pay nine paramedics.

Archuleta said Coconino County (87 percent public) has seen large increases in visitors to Flagstaff and the Grand Canyon, often to escape the heat elsewhere in Arizona. In addition, the county saw a spike in COVID-19 infections after the Memorial Day weekend and with similar numbers of visitors over Labor Day weekend, she expects a similar consequence.

"Secure Rural Schools and PILT are vital now more than ever for forested and rural counties to continue providing essential services while massive budgetary shortfalls as a result of the COVID pandemic," she said. "Counties are bearing the burden of increased demand for our services at a time when we are stretched very thin to provide them." **CN**

SNAP/STATS



TOP 5 PLACES FOR FALL FOLIAGE

Door County, Wisc.
White Mountains, N.H.
Finger Lakes, N.Y.
Pocono Mountains, Penn.
Upper Peninsula, Mich.

Readers Choice Award/USA Today

CN JOB MARKET

COUNTY ENGINEER

JACKSON COUNTY, IOWA

Application deadline: Until position is filled

The Jackson County Board of Supervisors is seeking applicants to fill the position of County Engineer. This position requires a four-year degree in civil engineering or related field and professional registered engineering license under the laws of the state of Iowa. Interested applicants must possess and maintain a valid driver's license. The county engineer is responsible for planning, coordinating, assigning and supervising the engineering and construction assignments associated with the maintenance and repair of the County's secondary

road system. The engineer will prepare and let contract documents for projects, present an annual budget and a five-year construction program identifying future road improvement projects. The ability to establish and maintain an effective working relationship with department personnel, other government agencies, other county departments, contractors and the public is essential. Previous experience as a county engineer or assistant in Iowa is preferred. Salary will be commensurate with qualifications and experience of the applicant. Oral interview and reference check will be required. Jackson County offers an excellent benefits package including

health insurance, IPERS, and paid time off. Applications and a detailed job description are available at www.co.jackson.ia.us under job openings or can be picked up from the Human Resource Office in the Jackson County Courthouse. Successful completion of a post-offer pre-employment physical and background check will be required. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled.

HOW TO APPLY: Interested applicants should forward formal application, resume and salary requirements to: Becki Chapin, Human Resource Administrator 201 W. Platt Street Maquoketa, IA 52060 or email to bchapin@co.jackson.ia.us

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State association execs talk challenges, solutions at national online meeting

From NCCAE page 1

Finances

As state associations identified fiscal issues as the top concern emerging from the pandemic, Clint Mueller, legislative director at the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, said the governor passed a marketplace facilitator bill earlier this year and it has been “a lifesaver” especially for rural Georgia counties.

He described how counties anticipated a significant loss in sales tax because of the pandemic, but counties are now seeing increases in local sales tax, due to the legislation.

“We think that’s because everybody is doing online shopping instead of going to the regional mall or the regional shopping center,” Mueller said. “They’re staying at home, they’re spending their money and they’re getting credit for that local sales tax coming back to their local counties since they made an online purchase for something they may have traveled to a neighboring county to buy.”

Broadband

State association represen-

tatives also reviewed how the pandemic has shed light on broadband issues throughout the country.

Leonard said in North Carolina, counties don’t have the statutory ability to build infrastructure. He said that broadband is not regulated and counties are at the whim of the Federal Communications Commission and state law.

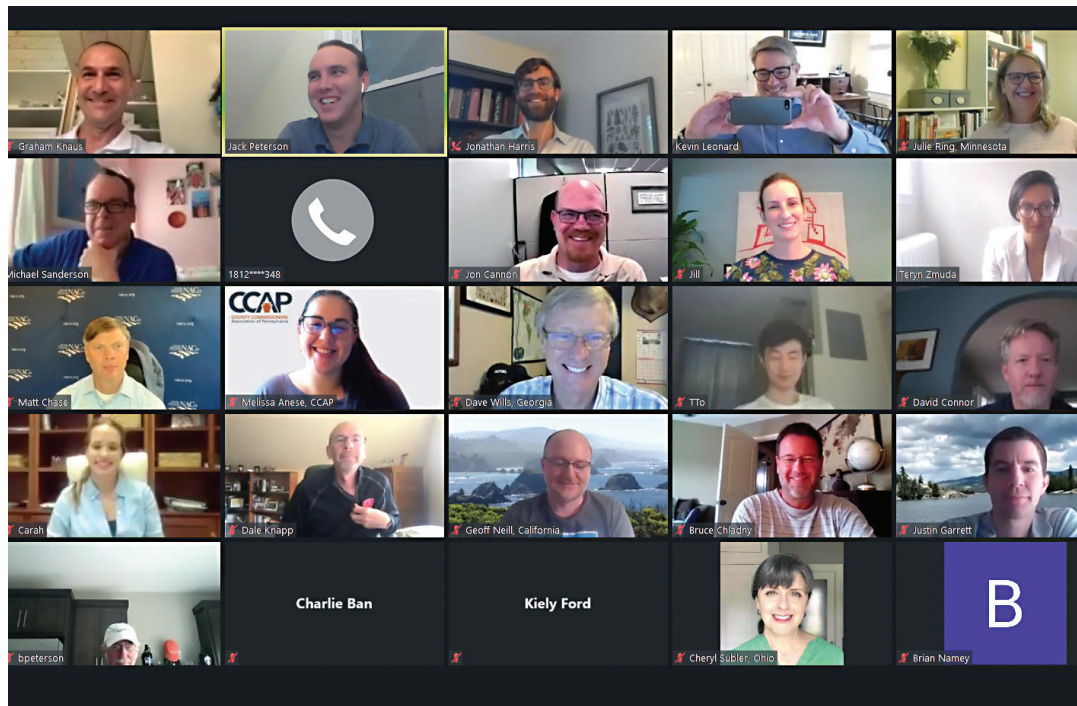
In California, there are significant geographical and financial challenges to building broadband in rural areas throughout the state, according to Geoffrey Neill, principal policy and fiscal analyst for the California State Association of Counties.

Telecommunications companies have added restrictions that make it hard to use funds to reach underserved areas, he said. Recently, neutral fiber providers are planning to enter the market and build fiber to lease out to any provider they want.

“Having the ability to have multiple providers helps costs,” he said.

Engagement, ‘webinar fatigue’

Members from state associations discussed the variety of



Participants meet in a virtual setting during the NCCAE-NACo 2020 Knowledge Management Forum Sept. 1 to discuss challenges facing counties during the COVID-19 pandemic.

issues that come with finding creative ways to engage with members and newly elected officials in a virtual environment.

Participants identified “webinar fatigue” as a main challenge and discussed how to find new ways to advocate and communicate the county story. Association representatives shared how they have been posting videos and webinars on YouTube, send-

ing daily or periodic notes to members, using social media, creating interactive charts or graphs and even sending branded packaging and annual reports to members as a way to spark engagement.

From an operational standpoint, many associations are completing a telework analysis to determine which staff members can continue working remotely versus those who need to return to

the office and how this would change team dynamics and impact costs.

“My hope would be that we move forward in setting up smaller conversations that are more focused on some of these issues and we’re able to make some additional progress and learn from each other,” said Graham Knaus, executive director of the California State Association of Counties. **CN**

Legal battle leaves uncertainty, including disbursement of CARES grants

From DISPUTE page 1

issues as early as Sept. 25.

The commissioners have requested immunity to perform their duties but are under a threat of a gross misdemeanor charge, a \$5,000 fine and up to 364 days in jail hanging over their heads if they do not surrender their offices.

“The goal for our citizens has been to continue to do what we were sent here to do, even if there’s uncertainty,” said County Auditor Lori Larsen. “We, as a group of remaining elected officials, are trying to determine what to do next.”

Although Larsen has received legal advice that she has the ability to process payments that fall within existing budget authority, she cannot act in the commissioners’ stead taking new action.

The timing of the vacancies may complicate matters given the challenges of the pandemic.

The commissioners, Chairman Don Dashiell, Wes McCart and Steve Parker, were all closely involved in the administration of CARES Act business stabilization grants, and because they are unable to perform their official functions, none of those grants can be awarded.

“Without them in the office, that’s been delayed,” Larsen said. “I shudder to think that this delay would be the make-or-break point for one of our community businesses.”

Meanwhile, Board Clerk Michelle Enright has canceled their agendas.

“We’re in a complete holding pattern here,” she said. “Normally they’d be approv-

ing contracts and vouchers for payment. Until we know more, we can’t schedule anything. Contracts normally go through the prosecutor’s office, but they haven’t sent us anything.”

Eric Johnson, executive director of the Washington State Association of Counties, said that the commissioners have recognized the legal peril that would come from violating the restraining order — a fine of \$5,000 and up to 364 days in jail. At the same time, the timeframe between the Aug. 20 judgment and Sept. 25 hearing brings up another hazard.

“There’s another statute out there that [says] ‘if you don’t act in an official capacity for 30 days, you vacate your office,’ so that’s out there, too,” he said.

While waiting for resolution, the association has helped the remaining elected officials

keep the county moving despite its frozen legislative authority.

“The governor’s office has made it clear there won’t be any movement to make appointments without judicial clarification,” Johnson said. “The state constitution has a continuity of government section in it for county commissioners, but it deals with a catastrophic incident, a natural disaster or a manmade act of terrorism. It doesn’t ponder having three commissioners removed from a legal action.”

The Stevens County Republican Central Committee ordinarily would offer Inslee three candidates for appointment to two commission seats, and those two would nominate a third. But without resolution over whether the commissioners have truly been removed

from office, the committee will not make recommendations.

Dashiell has two years left on his term, Parker lost the August Republican primary and McCart was re-nominated with nearly three-quarters of the vote.

The Sept. 25 hearing will address what the commissioners owe in interest and legal fees after they repaid roughly \$130,000 to reimburse the county for disbursements from the county’s homelessness fund that the state auditor found to be unallowable gifts of public funds.

Johnson noted that the process for awarding those homelessness funds, to nonprofits that built transitional housing and for a family to help move a house threatened by erosion, was all conducted in open meetings. **CN**

Counties create campaigns for COVID-19 safety protocols to engage young adults

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

In Contra Costa County, Calif. an increase of positive COVID-19 cases among young adults has left the county trying to find new ways to spread the message about the importance of COVID-19 protocols.

The county launched the COVID-19 Youth Ambassadors Program to target young adults and educate young people about the virus.

"COVID-19 has left young people really scared and confused on what to believe," Contra Costa Health Services Program Manager Rynn Schumacher said. "We established the program to not only help young people get educated about the facts regarding COVID-19, but it's also meant to help young people educate their peers through social media."

Schumacher said this is the first initiative with virtual programming specifically targeting youth throughout the county.

Ambassadors between the ages of 15 to 24 will craft messages through focus groups, surveys and interviews to resonate with their peers and communities. Each ambassador will receive a stipend funded by the Contra Costa Regional Health foundation. The county received more than 600 applicants for the program.

"Our Contra Costa teens want to be part of the change. They want to be part of whatever they can do to help stop this virus and get back to being normal," Schumacher said.

Ambassadors will create posts about COVID-19 safety measures such as wearing a mask and practicing social distancing in ways that relate to their own lives.

"It comes across really authentic because it's their story, it's how they're doing their part to be able to prevent COVID-19," Schumacher said.

He described the importance of utilizing social media platforms where young people



A graphic from the "One Moose Apart" campaign promotes social distancing in Cook County, Minn.

ple have peer-to-peer conversations including on Tik Tok, Twitter and Instagram.

"When we do billboards and we do radio ads or TV, we can reach a lot of people," he said. "But we inherently know that young people are on social media and so we have to change our tactics."

Ambassadors will lead their followers back to the county's website through their posts to encourage other young adults to learn more about COVID-19

from the public health department.

"Public health departments are perceived to be very authoritative. The message is going to come across like we're parents," Schumacher said. "What we wanted to do was make sure that we provide the tools for young people to feel empowered and make them be the ones to deliver messages."

Schumacher advised other counties aiming to create message specifically to target youth to form a steering committee combined with government and community leaders who work with young adults. He also advised counties to utilize data to back up their messages and create youth-centric and youth-friendly promotional material, starting with the application for the ambassadors program.

"The one thing that Contra Costa County is all about is health equity," he said. "We don't try to do a cookie-cutter approach where one solution is going to solve all of the problems of every single community within the county."

In Barnstable County, Mass., officials are also aiming to target youth and created a Tik Tok account for the county as part of the #ShowUpWithAMask Campaign.

Barnstable County, Mass. Communications Manager Sonja Sheasley said the county, which includes Cape Cod, saw a spike in positive COVID-19 cases because of house parties where many young people were not wearing masks.

"We really wanted to target not only that age group, which is the younger drinking age, but also teenagers as well who are on the beaches not wearing

masks," she said.

The county is utilizing its Tik Tok page as part of the campaign to create videos that promote mask-wearing.

"I think it may be a fun way to get young people engaged and learn more about the role that our county plays locally," Sheasley said.

She is encouraging youth to create their own videos on the app that will be shared on the county's page.

"Tik Tok is all about fun and being engaging in an entertaining way so I think that's how you pull young people in," she said. "I'm hoping that we can get some other youth to make videos that are more creative, and the end result is to get people to remember that we need to wear masks."

Other counties across the country have also turned to unique messaging to promote health measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 to all county residents and even visitors.

In Cook County, Minn., Kjersti Vick, marketing and public relations director for Visit Cook County, brainstormed the idea for the "One Moose Apart" campaign.

Cook County has one of the largest moose populations in the state, Vick said, inspiring the idea for the campaign to promote social distancing in a way that is friendly and informative.

The One Moose Apart logo, which features a moose wearing a mask, has donned T-shirts and even face masks for children.

"Imagine a big, giant moose between you and the next person. It's a big animal so a lot of people instantly think that's a lot of space," she said.

"It is fun to play on that and it provides a great welcoming message, but it's also very informative." **CN**

For more information about Contra Costa County's Youth Ambassadors Program, contact Rynn Schumacher at rynn.schumacher@cchealth.org.



A youth ambassador from Contra Costa County, Calif. posts about wearing masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



A Contra Costa County, Calif. Youth Ambassador posts about the importance of social distancing during Labor Day Weekend.

PROTESTS SPEED ACTION ON EQUITY IN OREGON



The Multnomah County, Ore. Justice Center is boarded up May 31 in anticipation of potential property destruction during demonstrations. Three county offices have been damaged over the last three months. Photo by Motoya Nakamura

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The sight of thousands of people lying down on Portland's Burnside Bridge in George Floyd's memory told the Multnomah County commissioners more than any poll or even an election could. Mostly white residents were demonstrating that they wanted the same kind of future for their Black neighbors that they themselves enjoyed. And rather than seeing those people as obstacles, the commissioners knew it was time to move even faster.

Over the last three months, daily protests have fueled the drive to craft policy to bring about better lives for the Black residents who make up 6 percent of the county's population but end up worse in every measurable outcome not just compared to other ethnicities in the county, but Black communities in other counties in the region, like King County, Wash.

"We're doing it much more quickly than we would have otherwise," Board Chair Deborah Kafoury said of a variety of measures aimed at achieving racial equity. "The protests

have changed the way we do business. We're going to be able to pack a lot more action into a very short amount of time."

It's a momentum that can't be slowed even by the violence at night, when protestors clashed with federal law enforcement, causing property damage and leading to the shooting death of one man and another in the resulting manhunt, among various injuries resulting from the use of less-than-lethal ammunition. Protestors set three different county offices on fire, with damages surpassing \$1.3 million.

Portland police have handled most of the law enforcement, but the county district attorney's office has drawn a distinction between serious damage associated with the protests, prosecuting cases of deliberate property damage, theft, or the use or threat of force, while dropping hundreds of misdemeanor cases associated with the protests.

"We're going to give people three months to make it right, to work with the victim to pay back any restitution," District Attorney Mike Schmidt told Oregon Public Broadcasting

in August. "And if those things can happen or we can come up with a restorative resolution, we're going to dismiss those cases."

Kafoury said that damage, plus the death of a protestor and subsequent death of his

killer following a manhunt, have at times overshadowed the positive results of the demonstrations.

"People are justifiably upset," she said.

"Trying to manage protests and do the work they are calling for is a tricky, tricky issue. Supporting people who are peacefully protesting while trying to control the violence and vandalism is a really fine line."

But for the most part, the protests are working. What's in the works might not be verbatim what people are asking for, but the county is focused on achieving the same ends.

When protestors suggest defunding the police, the county works on getting the same result — treatment more tailored for the situations by bringing in behavioral health specialists or enhanced services for families of youth on probation.

"It's not as sexy as someone getting tear gassed, that's what's making the news," Kafoury said.

"I do think the overall package of what we're working on will be transformative, but it will take time because we're trying to do it with the com-

munity, and it takes longer. It's not a couple of dudes in a back room smoking cigars, writing legislation."

In many cases, Multnomah County already had these plans in mind, though it was testing them out as components of coronavirus measures, protecting communities of color who have seen disproportionate effects of the pandemic nationwide. Public pressure sped up their implementation to a more general application.

Though coronavirus measures led the county to close a jail dorm, the money saved in the process will be used to expand culturally specific programs for Black residents. The same will be done with funding saved by eliminating prosecution of low-level drug charges. The county hopes to divert and deflect people from entering the criminal justice system and assist them with re-entry support.

Kafoury said the city's police department and the county sheriff's office, run by Portland's former police chief, have coordinated well in protecting public safety, but the arrival of personnel from the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Marshal Service, Customs and Border Protection and Federal Protection Service, assigned to protect Portland's federal courthouse, did not come at the county, city or state's request and have not coordinated with local law enforcement.

"Having federal interference when it's not warranted has done nothing to help us out," she said.

Kafoury described federal forces as bringing a heavy hand that has inflamed violence at night, but abated as of late.

The daily peaceful protests have been manageable because the county has acknowledged the frustration that people in the community are feeling.

"This is a chance to change the direction of the country," she said. "There's a lot of pain and frustration but there's also a lot of hope." **CN**

SPEEDREAD

A MULTI-DEPARTMENT APPROACH HAS ALSO ADDRESSED DETAILS INCLUDING:

Strategy on wages for jail labor

Ending of unnecessary fines and fees by the Department of Community Justice

Ensuring a baseline living wage for frontline workers who are contractors with the county

Housing policies aimed at preventing gentrification and enforcing mandates on ending racial segregation in housing

Increasing funding for maternal health services for Black families

Reform of the pre-trial system.

Counties partner with cable TV to bring virtual learning to students during pandemic

by **Rachel Looker**
staff writer

Preparing for the back-to-school season this year goes beyond buying pencils and notebooks. Counties are equipping students with new tools they'll need for learning in a virtual environment because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local governments are forming partnerships and initiatives with cable TV companies to provide connectivity for students to learn in online classrooms.

In Arlington County, Va., the County Board allocated \$500,000 to fund a joint county and school internet essentials grant program that provides broadband internet access to Arlington Public School students in need.

The program provides high-speed internet access

to low-income families who qualify for Comcast's Internet Essentials, a program to connect low-income families to home internet.

Households that qualify will receive free, high-speed internet for one year through the program.

"The board has really wanted to be on the forefront in seeing that technology is going to be crucial to any community thriving or succeeding in the future," Arlington County Board Chair Libby Garvey said.

When schools initially closed in the spring, Arlington County Chief Information Officer Jack Belcher said students and teachers received "MiFi" hotspots to fill the gaps for those without internet access.

However, the hotspots did not fully meet the needs for online learning.



Hamilton County, Tenn. Mayor Jim Coppinger announces the EdConnect Initiative, a public-private partnership that provides broadband capacity to support video-based learning and high bandwidth educational applications for online learning. Photo by Jennifer Pukenas

Garvey described how the lack of fast internet connections extends beyond students with many teachers lacking sufficient broadband to teach

from home.

"To really do instruction at home or to do it virtually from wherever you are, you've got to have a really good amount

of ability to download and upload," he said.

The Comcast Essentials pro-

See BROADBAND page 7

 A graphic with a bright yellow background. Several white speech bubbles of various sizes are scattered across the upper half, each containing a black and yellow lightbulb icon. In the top right corner, the NACo logo (National Association of Counties) is displayed next to the text "NACo Knowledge Network". At the bottom, the text "Inspiration Overload!" is written in a large, bold, black serif font. Below that, "NACo Knowledge Network | Coming Fall 2020" is written in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font. At the very bottom, the website "naco.org/education-events" is written in a smaller, black sans-serif font.

Inspiration Overload!

NACo Knowledge Network | Coming Fall 2020

naco.org/education-events

Counties close broadband gap

From BROADBAND page 6

gram provides a faster speed with 25 Mbps downstream and 3 Mbps upstream.

Students who already received a Mi-Fi device in the spring are eligible for the program, as well as students who are on the free or reduced lunch program or receive federal assistance.

Arlington County, which already has a fiber hub, used CARES Act funding for the grant program, which is administered through Arlington Public Schools under a contract with Comcast.

"We've basically committed to make sure that every student in the county that needs internet has got their household connected to the internet and Comcast Essentials seemed the best way to do it and the most cost effective," Belcher said.

Arlington Public Schools identified over 8,000 students in 4,000 residences in need of internet, according to Belcher. Eligible families can submit an application for the internet essentials program.

Hamilton County, Tenn. is a funding partner for a similar initiative.

Hamilton County Schools joined with the Electric Power Board of Chattanooga, a telecom company, to ensure all students can access the internet for online learning.

The EdConnect Initiative was made possible by public and private partners and the community-wide fiber optic network that already existed in the county.

Hamilton County provided \$1.5 million for the program, according to Hamilton County Mayor Jim Coppinger.

"One of the things I'm really proud of that we do in this county is public private partnerships," he said.

The initiative will provide internet services to 28,500 economically challenged students in Hamilton County schools who are beneath the federal requirement and receive free or reduced lunches. This includes 17,000 households.

"We wanted to try to connect to obviously as many

homes as we possibly could to have our children have an opportunity with a good education," he said.

Families will receive a router and at least 100 Mbps internet service for free through the initiative. The broadband capacity should support video-based learning and high bandwidth educational applications.

Qualified students will receive internet services at no charge for at least 10 years if the partnership reaches its

'We've committed to make sure that every student in the county that needs internet has got their household connected...'

- Jack Belcher

fundraising goal.

When the coronavirus pandemic shut down schools in March, Coppinger described how the Electric Power Board came up with a short-term fix for virtual learning and installed hot spots.

"It became apparent that if we were going to try to fix the digital divide as well as the educational divide, that we needed to have a more permanent, long-term fix," Coppinger said.

The program has raised \$6 million of its \$8.2 million goal.

"It will afford people the opportunities for more education and even members of their family having the opportunity to pay bills online, clip coupons and have the opportunity to look at other educational choices," he said.

While schools in the county opened on Aug. 12 with a combination of in-person and virtual learning, Coppinger said they are now prepared if at any point they need to revert back to full-time virtual learning.

"I like to say we're in uncharted waters when you start to talk about COVID-19 and the uncertainties," he said. "At any point in time, they could become all virtual again and so there's just the need to be prepared so that our young people have the opportunity to learn." **CN**



NIAGARA COUNTY, N.Y.

Niagara County, N.Y. residents designed the county seal

through a contest held in 1998 by the county legislature. The seal-judging committee looked at 18 entries and selected four drawings to be incorporated into the final design of the seal.



The round seal includes blue lettering on a gold background with a shield in the center. The shield represents the county's military tradition from the War of 1812 to the more recent presence of several Air Force divisions.

The top half of the seal depicts the American Falls which symbolize the birth of the county and its natural resources of hydro power and tourist trade.

The bottom half depicts the locks of the Erie Canal, which run through the eastern end of the county, and represent the birth of small cities, towns, industry and trade that came to the area following the canal's construction.

Carousel horses represent North Tonawanda, the "home of the carousel," and symbolize hard work and craftsmanship.

A basket of apples, peaches and grapes above the words "State of New York" represent the county's agriculture.

The seal features leafy vines which rim the outside of the seal, symbolizing the importance of working together to build a community. Each leaf represents a city, town, village or subdivision within the county.



From left: Jack David Woodrum, Summers County, W.Va.; Rick Handley, Mason County, W.Va.; Tim McCormick, Ohio County, W.Va. and Larry Johnson, DeKalb County, Ga.

NACo Officers

- First Vice President **Larry Johnson** spoke at the County Commissioners Association of West Virginia Annual Conference, held Aug. 1-3 in Tucker County.

NACo STAFF

- Deborah Cox** is now NACo's full-time deputy executive director. She has served partly in that capacity while maintaining her role as legislative director.
- Mark Ritacco** is now NACo's legislative director. He has served as deputy legislative director since joining NACo in March.
- Teryn Zmuda** is interim director of the County Innovations Lab. She is NACo's chief economist.
- Arabella Pluta-Ehlers** has joined NACo as program manager for children, youth and families in the County Innovations Lab. Prior to joining NACo, Arabella worked at the Bipartisan Policy Center as project coordinator and at Hanover Research as a senior research associate. She earned a bachelor's degree in comparative human development from the University of Chicago.
- Charlotte Resing** has joined NACo as program manager for justice. Prior to joining NACo, she served as a policy analyst with the American Civil Liberties Union and interned at the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. Charlotte earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Tulane University and a JD from David A. Clarke School of Law.



Cox



Ritacco



Zmuda



Pluta-Ehlers



Resing

COUNTIES HELP SAVE FOR RETIREMENT

The fifth annual Aspire Award, presented by NACo in partnership with Nationwide to honor innovative leadership in promoting county employee retirement savings, goes to two counties this year: Riverside County, Calif. and Yuma County, Ariz.

Riverside County earned its award for partnering with Nationwide to promote virtual webinars to increase participation in the deferred compensation plan as well as offering healthcare and Social Security workshops provided by the Nationwide Retirement Institute.

Yuma County, Ariz. won its award for offering financial wellness webinars to employees to optimize their retirement savings and by adding a Roth feature to the plan.

Riverside County is located in Southern California and spans from eastern San Bernardino to the Arizona border. The county offers a 457, 401(a) and post-employment health plan to approximately 19,700

eligible employees and there are currently 13,410 participants in the plan totaling \$764 million in assets.

Nationwide created and developed a series of virtual webinars aimed at all county employees, both non-participants and participants enrolled in the Deferred Compensation Plan.

The Nationwide Retirement Institute also participated by presenting Social Security and healthcare webinars, both of which received impressive numbers of registrations. County staff partnered with Nationwide by sending weekly email reminders which included the webinar schedule as well as links to schedule a virtual one-on-one appointment, access forms and other information to encourage participation.

The main objectives of the virtual webinars were to drive registrations and interest in the broad range of seminar topics and to reach out to all employees who may not have an



account or are enrolled with a competing vendor.

Nationwide has given seven webinars for the county with a total audience of 1,135 attendees (162 per webinar). Total registrations are even more impressive at 1,768 (252 average).

The average survey score was 4.5 on a 5-point scale and 99.59 percent of surveyed respondents said they learned something new.

One final note: Forty-five percent of attendees were not enrolled with Nationwide.

The partnership between Nationwide and Riverside County

is extremely important in organizing and promoting virtual webinars. It requires collaboration between the county and Nationwide to achieve results.

Yuma County, Ariz.

Yuma County has a colorful history, which lives on today in a fast-growing, vibrant community.

Yuma County is bordered by California on the West and Mexico on the South.

Living close to the Mexican border offers a great opportunity for residents to experience multicultural and international business opportunities. Yuma County has a year-round population of approximately 200,000 residents.

During the winter, the population increases by about 90,000 due to the sun-seeking winter visitors affectionately known as “snowbirds.” Yuma County offers the Nationwide 457b and Roth option for the retirement savings plan.

Working with financial ad-

visors, the county was able to help employees plan for their future. Retirement planning is a multistep process that evolves over time. To have a comfortable, secure and fun retirement, employees need to build the financial cushion that will fund it all.

Planning for retirement starts with thinking about retirement goals and how long they have to meet them.

With health insurance premiums increasing, the human resources benefits division at Yuma County is helping to ensure employees have access to resources. The county wanted to focus on where retirement assets are invested and how they can help employees optimize retirement savings.

The Benefits Division worked closely with Nationwide Retirement Specialist, Ninoska Metcalfe, who provided education and meetings to county employees.

See RETIREMENT page 9



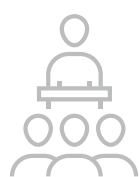
HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY



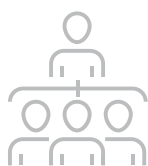
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With a curriculum developed by **General Colin Powell** and public and private sector leaders, NACo High Performance Leadership Academy gives students the opportunity to learn from world-class faculty. All content is guided by an expert facilitator.



Counties help save for the future

From RETIREMENT page 8

During 2018-2019, Metcalfe had 18 onsite visits that included: New Hire Orientation, Lunch and Learns, Health and Wellness Fair and Benefit Fair.

The goal was to communicate with employees directly to offer education about their plan and other plan features available.

It was discovered that employees were seeking to have a Roth option available.

Yuma County, with the assistance of Nationwide, amended

the plan to include a Roth contribution.

As of 2019, a total of 206 participants are enrolled in the Nationwide Roth option.

As the county continues to educate and empower employees to plan for their futures, the county has seen more interest in holding onsite visits. The average contribution per pay period, as of 2019, is \$209 with a peer average of \$324. Yuma County will continue to educate employees and participants to reach their retirement goal. **CN**

NACo relaunches Live Healthy discount program



Owen County, Ind. Auditor Patty Steward and Councilman Anton Neff pause for a photo with updated brochures highlighting the Live Healthy discount program.

by John Losh

As county residents seek ways to save on healthcare costs, NACo is increasing access to savings through the Live Healthy Prescription, Health and Dental discount program provided to NACo member counties at no cost. Now more than ever, saving feels better.

The new Live Healthy discount program helps residents save valuable time and money. Residents in participating counties, boroughs and parishes now have access to*:

- An average of 30 percent prescription savings at more than 66,000 participating pharmacies nationwide
- 10 percent savings (up to \$10) at MinuteClinic walk-in health clinics in select CVS and Target locations
- 24/7 telemedicine access through the health discount program, providing unlimited calls with a clinician without co-pays, and
- Savings on dental services at more than 110,000 participating dentists across the country.

“Baxter County is not a high-income area, so the ability to save is important,” said Sue Edwards, director of Human Resources for Baxter County,

Ark. “The new telemedicine service is fantastic for our residents who live in rural areas.”

NACo has also removed administrative hurdles for counties to participate. NACo members can access information about the program and enroll simply by visiting [NACo.org/health](https://naco.org/health). Additionally, with a new online self-service portal that allows counties to order customized physical and digital Live Healthy materials, promoting the program is easier than ever, at no cost and with minimal time commitment for counties.

“We’re excited about the new options for our low-income residents, especially during the time of the coronavirus where budgets are already tight,” said Dawn Pittore, social worker supervisor for Shasta County, Calif. “The new brochures are catchier and have more information.”

Live Healthy discounts are provided to residents with no annual limits, no shopping around, no forms to complete, no waiting periods, no age or income requirements, no medical condition restrictions and no catch. Residents simply visit LiveHealthyCard.com to find participating locations and access savings.

“The new benefits are a great selling point for residents to participate,” said Anton Neff, Owen County, Ind. councilman and president of the Association of Indiana Counties. “We’ve worked with our local library to setup a display of materials for residents. We plan to work with other locations around the county to host Live Healthy discount materials like our Health Department and Probation Office where we see a lot of residents without insurance.”

“Now that the materials are in place, we’re going to work with our local newspaper to promote the program alongside a matching social media presence,” he said.

You can help your residents save money and enroll now at NACo.org/health. If you have questions, contact live-healthy@naco.org.

The Live Healthy discount program is not insurance. Savings may vary by drug and pharmacy. Health and dental discounts are available in every state except Washington. MinuteClinic discounts are available in 33 states and the District of Columbia. **CN*

John Losh is the membership outreach manager at NACo.

WORD SEARCH

CALCASIEU PARISH, La.
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

AIRCRAFT: After an Air Force base was decommissioned, it was turned into Chennault Industrial Airpark, where aircraft are refurbished.

ALLIGATORS: You'll find alligators in the parish, especially near the Creole Nature Trail.

BRIDGE: The parish is home to a 1 ¼-mile long, 165-foot high, four-lane bridge connecting its county seat with the western portion of the parish.

CABIN: The parish's first courthouse was a log cabin built in 1841.

CALCASIEU: The parish's name means "crying eagle," which was the name of the chief of the Atakapa tribe, which inhabited the area. (The parish is pronounced cal-ca-shoo.)

CASINOS: After gaming was approved in the mid-1990s in the state, the parish is home to several casinos.

CRAWFISH: The area is known for its fine cuisine. Be sure to stop by Hollier's Cajun Kitchen for a crawfish burger.

CREATION: The parish was created March 24, 1840 from the parish of Saint Landry, one of the 19 original parishes.

EDUCATION: The parish is home to McNeese State University and Sowell Technical Community College.

LAKECHARLES: The county seat is Lake Charles.

MUSIC: Rhythm and blues and zydeco music are popular in the parish.

PARISH: The parish is governed by a policy jury.

PETROCHEMICAL: The oil and gas industry is big in the region.

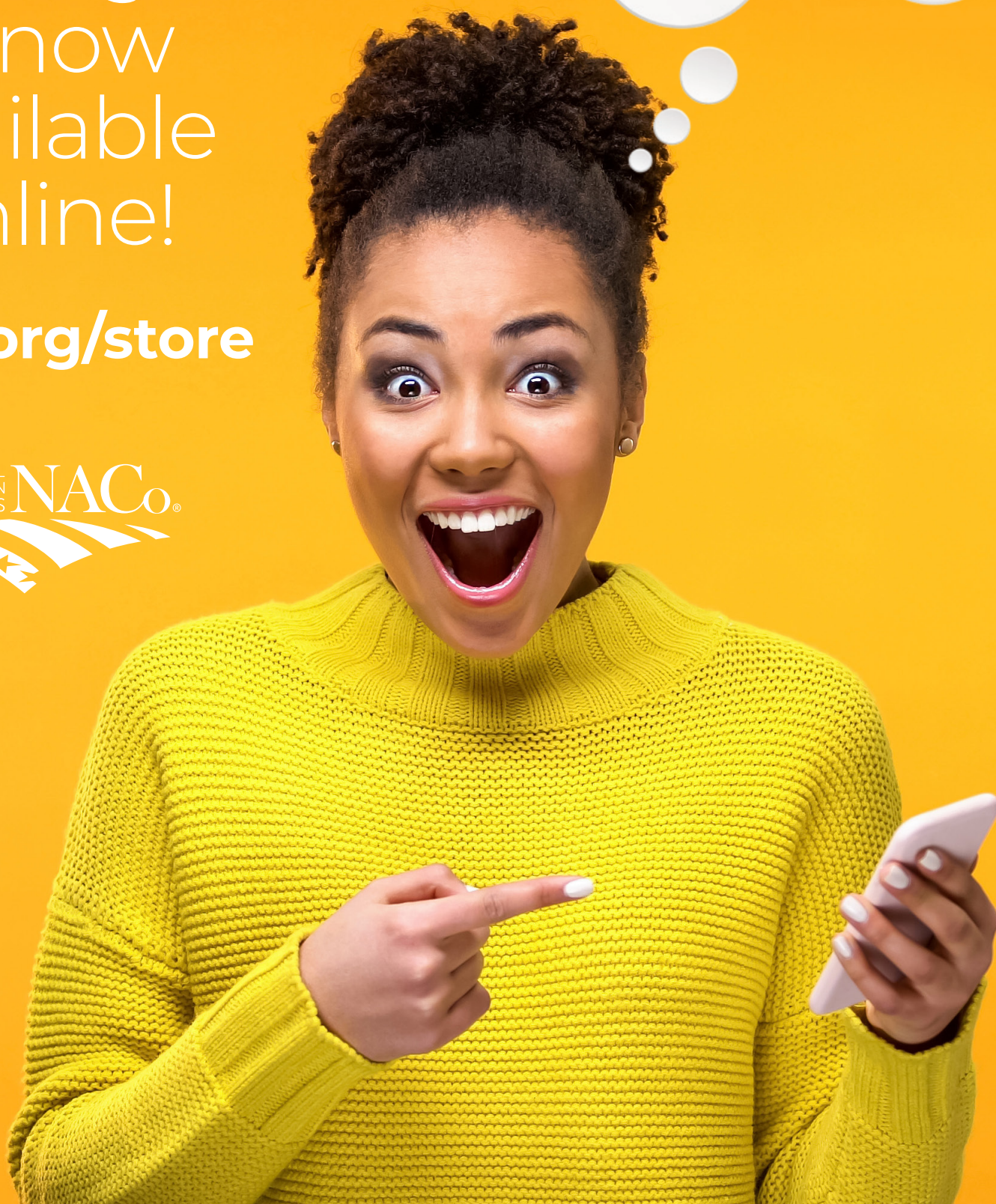
PORT: The parish is home to a deep-water port, Port of Lake Charles, 34 miles from the Gulf of Mexico.

SOUTHWESTERN: The parish is located on the southwestern border of Louisiana.

finally!

NACo
swag
is now
available
online!

naco.org/store



Interactive maps provide county-level COVID-19 data

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

Interactive data and tools are helping counties make decisions when it comes to battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

Organizations and universities created tools specifically for counties to provide insight into how the virus is impacting local communities. The following are a few tools that provide county-level breakdowns of data that may be helpful to decision-makers working to combat the spread of COVID-19.

COVID-19 county policies

Researchers at Harvard created an interactive map that shows local policies established related to the coronavirus pandemic. Through the tool, each county is given a policy score. The number correlates with how many policies are in place in the county out of seven main policies used in the tool. The dataset includes more than 2,700 observations of policy data.

The map shows the status of county policies related to event cancellations, school closures, shelter-in place orders, shelter enforcement, testing facilities, public transportation and workplace closures.

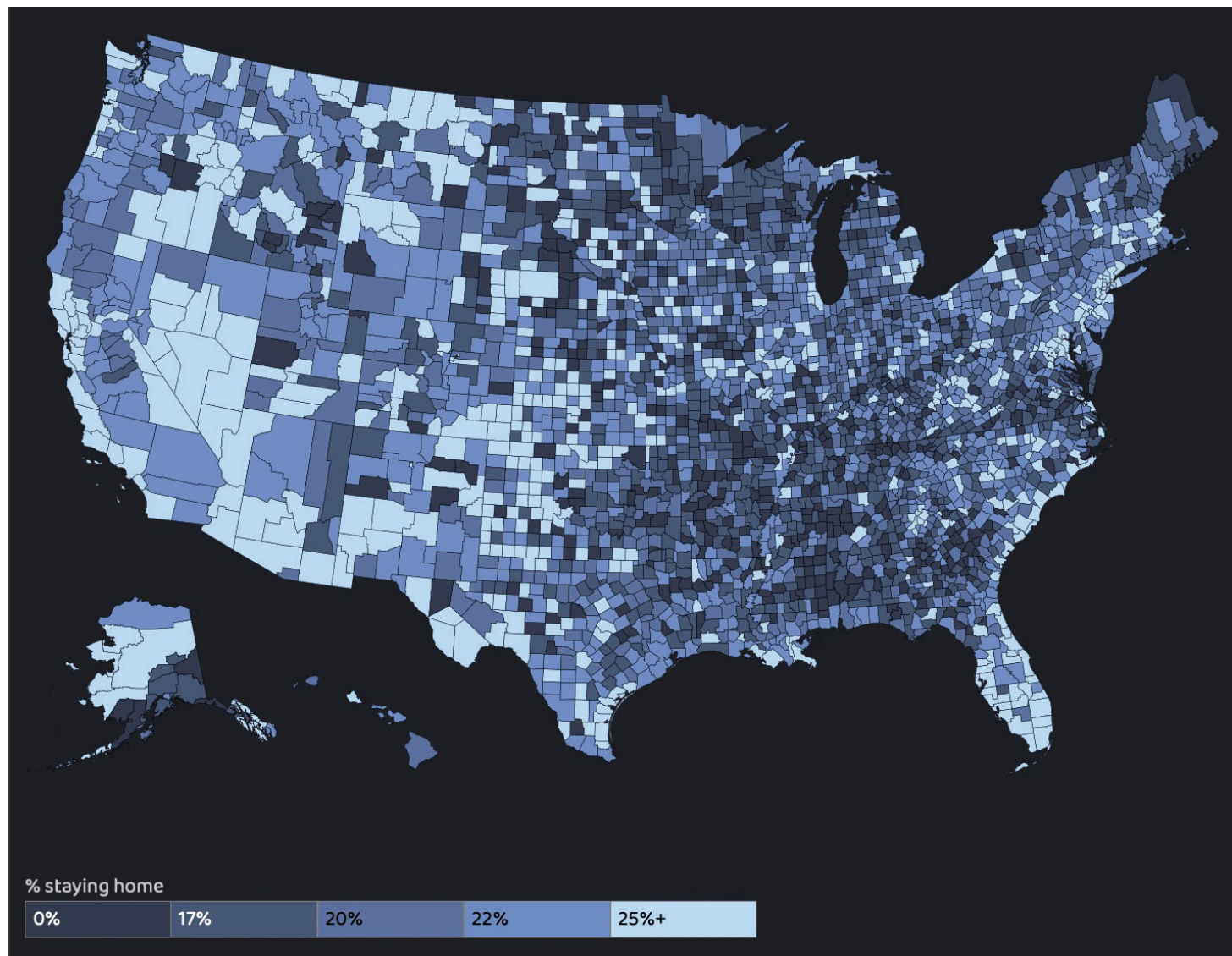
Hikma Health, a healthcare nonprofit, organized the dataset which was crowdsourced by Harvard volunteers and other organizations. The map also shows the total number of positive COVID-19 cases in each county as well as the percentage of a county's population that has had COVID-19 to date.

View the tool here: <https://www.hikmahealth.org/map>.

Risk level for attending events

A research team at Georgia Tech created the COVID-19 Event Risk Assessment Planning Tool that shows the risk level of attending an event given its size and location at the county level.

The risk level is the estimated chance that an individual who is COVID-19 positive will be at an event. Users can choose to view data for various event sizes ranging from 10 to 10,000 peo-



A screenshot of the interactive data analytics platform from the Maryland Transportation Institute (MTI) at the University of Maryland shows the percentage of a county's population staying at home because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Photo courtesy of the University of Maryland/Maryland Transportation Institute

ple to see the risk level in each county. The tool assumes that there are 10 times more cases than what is being reported but notes the rate may be lower in areas with higher testing rates. Users can adjust this number from 10 to 5 to see differences in risk levels.

View the tool here: <https://covid19risk.biosci.gatech.edu>.

Mobility and social distancing

The Maryland Transportation Institute (MTI) at the University of Maryland, in partnership with the Center for Advanced Transportation Technology Laboratory, created an interactive data analytics platform to track the percentage of a county's population who are staying at home and social distancing.

The platform, which is updated daily, tracks mobility that correlates with outbreak patterns and incorporates data on hotspot monitoring and containment efforts.

Through the tool, each coun-

ty is given a social distancing index number. Users can view the percent of a county's population staying at home, the percent of out-of-county and out-of-state trips and the average number of trips taken by an individual each day.

The platform uses MTI metrics, location data from mobile devices and computer algorithms to calculate mobility trends. The tool has been used by various governmental agencies to track trips across the United States, predict future cases, determine reopening timelines and for economic and financial analysis.

View the tool here: <https://data.covid.umd.edu>.

Cluster surveillance and health factors

A team from the University of Chicago's Center for Spatial Data Science launched the U.S. COVID-19 Atlas, which provides statistical cluster detection and information on each county's health profile.

The tool identifies emerging risks based on hotspots and identifies outliers where cases may be high in a specific county, but low in neighboring counties. Users can view each county to see what community health factors and health risks may play a role in COVID-19's impact.

The COVID-19 Atlas provides a visual to show the spread of the virus from county to county and to track hotspots over time. The map also shows a visual timeline of the spread of the virus each day since January.

View the tool here: <https://geodacenter.github.io/covid/map.html>.

Risk levels

Harvard's Global Health Institute and Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics created metrics that determine how severe the COVID-19 outbreak is in each county.

The Key Metrics for COVID Suppression framework and COVID Risk Level map labels

each county as green, yellow, orange or red based on the level of risk for new daily cases.

Counties labeled green are on track for containment and the framework recommends monitoring for viral testing and creating a contact-tracing program. The yellow risk level means there is community spread and recommends rigorous test and tracing programs.

Counties at the orange level are in accelerated spread where stay-at-home orders and/or rigorous test and trace programs are advised. Counties in the red are at the "tipping point" where stay-at-home orders are necessary. The map also includes data on daily new cases per 100,000 people, total cases and total deaths.

View the tool here: <https://globalepidemics.org/key-metrics-for-covid-suppression>. **CN**

Be sure to check out NACO's coronavirus information page here: <https://www.naco.org/resources/covid19>.

GET TO KNOW...

Marion County, Ga.

Welcome, Marion County, Ga.

Marion County is located in west central Georgia. It was formed from Lee and Muscogee counties in 1827 and named after Gen. Francis Marion, a military officer known as “Swamp Fox” who served in the Revolutionary War. The 367-square-mile county has a population of about 8,700.

Buena Vista, the county seat, was named in honor of President Zachary Taylor’s victory in the Battle of Buena Vista during the Mexican War. The county seat features shops and old-fashioned stores, as well as restaurants and is home to the annual Rural America Festival.

The Pasaquan, a 7-acre art site, is a popular tourist attraction located near



Buena Vista. Marion County native and folk artist Eddie Owens Martin painted and decorated every structure on the compound with pictures from Asian, African and Native American cultures. The internationally acclaimed art complex is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.



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PROFILES IN SERVICE

RICK MOOREFIELD

Board Member
County Attorney
Cumberland County, N.C.



MOOREFIELD

Number of years involved in NACo: 20

Years in public service: 25

Occupation: County attorney

Education: BA in Economics and JD degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Master of Public Administration from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Be the parent in a single-parent household.

Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: Meriwether Lewis, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey and Neil de-Grasse Tyson.

A dream I have is to: Thru-hike the Appalachian Trail.

You’d be surprised to learn that: I have served as a commissioner and county manager in addition to county attorney.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done: Taking my family on multiple road trips into the contiguous 48 states without a plan for what we would see or do.

My favorite way to relax is: Do anything on my farm.

I’m most proud of: The good people my children have become.

Every morning I read: I don’t read every morning, but when I do it’s usually something from *The Economist* magazine.

My pet peeve is: Unnecessary business meetings.

My motto is: Be kind.

The last book I read was: *Good Economics for Hard Times*

My favorite movie is: No single movie, most recent favorite is 1917.

My favorite music is: ‘80s alternative

My favorite U.S. president is: Franklin D. Roosevelt

My county is a NACo member because: NACo is an invaluable resource on how other counties have addressed challenges and issues that have or will eventually impact us. NACo directly provides great education and training through webinars and conference work sessions. Its Leadership Academy and signature projects provide elected officials and management staff excellent guidance on best practices to tackle complex challenges. Most importantly, NACo provides opportunities for us to network and connect with our counterparts around the country and discover that regardless of geography and demographics, our counties share more commonalities than differences. In one word, what NACo means for us is information.

My favorite meal is: Any meal that includes fried okra.



BRIGHT IDEAS | SUTTER COUNTY, Calif.

Students Take to the Lectern at Board of Supervisors Meeting

PROBLEM:

Students often lack engagement and knowledge about county government.

SOLUTION:

Engage with youth through a speech contest to increase community outreach and youth participation in local government.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

For one day each year in the Sutter County, Calif. board chambers, a new set of younger voices speak from the lectern about local government issues.

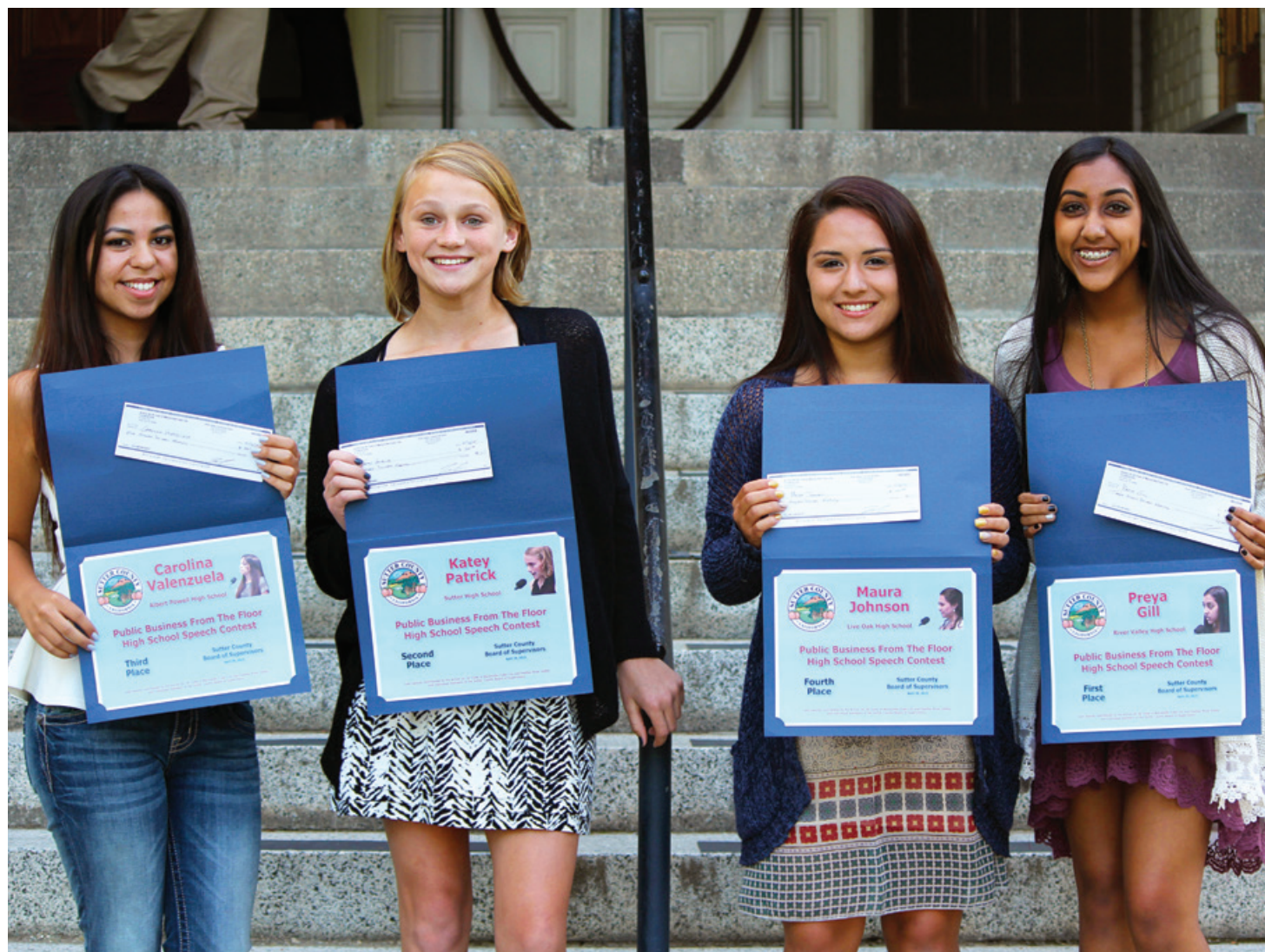
The Sutter County Board of Supervisors launched the Public Business From the Floor Speech Contest to engage students in local government.

"We came about the idea of 'let's bring the kids in and give them an opportunity to do what Americans do all the time' and that is to petition their government," said Chuck Smith, public information officer for Sutter County.

For the contest, high school students are encouraged to research county issues and advocate a position during a real Board of Supervisors meeting. Ron Sullenger, who chairs the Sutter County Board of Supervisors, has served as a judge for previous contests and said he has heard students speak on a variety of topics ranging from substance abuse to homelessness and even to property exchange agreements.

"Our agenda and our goal is to try to encourage and start students early and get them, hopefully, to realize that they are going to be required to make grown-up decisions sooner or later that affect their parents, their lifestyle, the way the country does business," he said.

Participants choose a topic



Winners from the Sutter County, Calif. Public Business from the Floor High School Speech Contest stand with their awards and cash prizes.

that is under the jurisdiction of the county, identify a position or action they wish the board to take, use facts and examples to support their topic and have overall polished speaking skills.

The 20/30 Club of Yuba City-Marysville provides cash prizes of around \$1,000 to be split among the top three winners. Supervisors and members from the service club serve as judges.

"It's a unique way of encouraging the youth to participate," Sullenger said. "Hopefully if the youth participates, mom and dad will be there to hear their own child and one thing leads to another so it's a way of stimulating public participation and youthful participation."

Each contest is covered like any other board meeting, with media outlets in attendance.

The meeting is also livestreamed like regular board meetings and each student is given three minutes to speak — the same amount of time allocated to speakers at regular board meetings.

"It's not just about giving a speech in a safe place and doing it technically correct," Smith said. "This is about learning a subject about local government, applying the subject to making an ask."

The contest is open to any high school student who lives in the county or goes to school in the county. In 2019, 17 students from seven public and private high schools participated in the speech contest.

"We really like to reach the youth," Smith said. "We'd like them to be engaged in their communities. We would really like them to understand that governments are run by those

who show up, so that's where the concept developed."

The county works to recruit students for the contest through increased outreach efforts with schools by holding presentations, advertising in the local newspaper and on social media. Smith explained that many students from high school Future Farmers of America chapters participate in the contest because it has an already established speech program.

Sullenger said that one contest specifically stood out to him because he saw a high school principal sitting in the front row cheering on her students.

"When the high school principal takes a couple hours out of her evening, I think that says a lot," he said. "I was encouraged as a judge seeing the principal participate with her

two students. These youngsters hopefully are getting an informational source that will allow them to be objective in their approach to our participation and anything they do."

Sullenger advised other counties to find a co-sponsor to cover the financial tab for a similar contest.

"It has grown exponentially from there and we hope that the base will continue to expand and the youngsters that participate will not only look at this speech contest as a one-time, one shot 'I'll get off the stage and never participate again,'" Sullenger said. **CN**

Sutter County's Public Business from the Floor Speech Contest is the recipient of a Best in Category 2020 NACo Achievement Award in the Civic Education and Public Information category.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ARIZONA

MARICOPA COUNTY launched an **antibody study** to **estimate infection rates** and possible immunity of those who may have had COVID-19. The project involves testing blood samples from 29 neighborhoods to look for antibodies, *AZCentral* reported. The goal of the study is to give public health officials insight into how vulnerable county residents are to the virus, how often asymptomatic and untested cases occur and the county's proximity to herd immunity.



CALIFORNIA

The library system in **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** launched a program to **lend laptops, Wi-Fi hot spots and provide free printing** for patrons. The program helps to bridge the digital divide for those who do not have access to the internet but are trying to find employment, receive telehealth calls or complete virtual learning. The county has established more than three dozen sidewalk service locations to pick up printed materials and 10 locations to lend kits that include a Chromebook, a Wi-Fi hot spot,

chargers and a carrying case, the *Los Angeles Times* reported.

- **SANTA BARBARA COUNTY** joined a new program to **provide temporary housing** to isolate farmworkers and food processing employees who may have been exposed to COVID-19 or who have tested positive. The Housing for the Harvest program helps employees who cannot self-isolate at home, the *Santa Barbara News-Press* reported. Certain sections of a hotel will be designated for potential or confirmed COVID-19 patients.

- **SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY** has **stopped generating revenue from phone calls made by incarcerated individuals** and their families. The county is the first in the country to provide free phone calls for those who are incarcerated after the sheriff's office negotiated a fixed-rate contract with a jail phone service. San Francisco will now pay a fixed monthly rate per phone device as opposed to paying the vendor for each minute of a call.

HAWAII

A CARES Act-funded **partnership with local ranchers** in **MAUI COUNTY** is providing ground beef to individuals in need. The county has committed \$200,000 to supporting the local ranching community and purchasing cattle. Feed My Sheep, a mobile food distribution program, will receive the

COLORADO

The sheriff's office in **SUMMIT COUNTY** is expanding its Systemwide Mental Assessment Response Team (SMART) to **assist individuals struggling with mental health crises**. The SMART team initially launched in January and responded to a high number of calls throughout the county, the *Summit Daily* reported. Each team consists of a deputy, clinician and case manager to respond to calls, which have significantly increased since the COVID-19 outbreak.



Photo by Sawyer D'Argonne, the Summit Daily

ground beef and distribute it to nonprofits, community food programs and other individuals in need, *Maui Now* reported.

ILLINOIS

The Housing Authority of **COOK COUNTY** has partnered with Comcast to provide **free broadband internet** to families with school-age children in public housing buildings. Nearly 14,000 children in more than 6,500 houses will receive internet through the program, the *Chicago Tribune* reported. The county is using CARES Act money to fund the program, which will run for at least nine months.

LOUISIANA

Parishes in Louisiana are recovering from **Hurricane Laura** which brought strong storm surge, damaging winds and power outages throughout the area. Gov. Bel Edwards declared a major disaster declaration for 23 southwestern parishes. The hurricane made landfall in the Lake Charles area in **CALCASIEU PARISH**, which, as of last week, remains under a mandatory evacuation

order. The Calcasieu Parish Police Jury's Division of Planning and Development is aiding with recovery efforts and opened a temporary permit

office to help residents who need recovery work and issue licenses for construction, electrical, plumbing and mechanical work.



Photo by Dar'Juan Pitts

MARYLAND

WICOMICO COUNTY Tourism held a **photo contest** and received more than 300 entries to show off areas throughout the county. Dar'Juan Pitts took the winning photo which depicted The Cove, a beach along the Nanticoke River. The top three winners received cash prizes and the opportunity for their photos to be displayed online as well as in the next Wicomico County Visitors Guide.



FLORIDA

The corrections and rehabilitation department in **MIAMI-DADE COUNTY** turned its **correction facility into a blood donation center** to help members of the community during the COVID-19 outbreak. The blood drive called for individuals who recovered from the virus to donate convalescent plasma which contains antibodies that may be used to help others fight the virus.

Miami-Dade Corrections Department Director Daniel Junior donates blood and plasma during the blood donation.

MARYLAND

- **BALTIMORE COUNTY** is converting gas created from waste into electricity to reduce its carbon footprint. Energy Power Partners will collect gas produced at a landfill to create power using on-site engine generators. The county will purchase the energy which will be used to offset needs of municipal facilities, *The Baltimore Sun* reported. There will be enough energy generated through the project to power more than 1,600 homes.

NEVADA

- Commissioners in **ELKO COUNTY** approved cannabis sales in the town of Jackpot near the Idaho border, the first unincorporated part of the county to get that distinction since commissioners banned sales there in 2017, *The Sierra Nevada Ally* reported.

NEW YORK

- In an effort to shed some waste capacity, **ULSTER COUNTY**'s solid waste removal agency is encouraging residents to donate or recycle used textiles rather than throw them in the trash. Textiles currently make up 11.4 percent of the county's solid waste stream and the average New Yorker throws out an average of 70 pounds per year.

- Aiming to give residents more outdoor recreation options during the pandemic, **WESTCHESTER COUNTY** is keeping its beaches open for two additional weeks.

NORTH CAROLINA

MECKLENBURG COUNTY partnered with various social service agencies to launch MeckBetterTogether, a resource list that includes services available for children and youth that provide learning opportunities as well as recreational, social and emotional support activities. It also includes stress management resources for parents.

OHIO

A decision by the **FRANKLIN COUNTY** appeals court ruled that landlords must appear in court hear-



NEW YORK

- **SUFFOLK COUNTY** Sheriff Errol D. Toulon, Jr. cuts the ribbon for a resource center located on the campus of the Yaphank Jail, which now includes the Sheriff's Transition and Reentry Team (S.T.A.R.T.) Resource Center. It opened in late July and offers a range of transitional services for people leaving the county jail, including employment assistance, connections to housing, treatment and mental healthcare, clothing, food and pandemic advice. It is staffed by corrections officers and volunteers.

ings for evictions. Previously, *The Columbus Dispatch* reported, unlike courts elsewhere in Ohio and across the nation, landlords could simply submit testimony, a practice dubbed "eviction by affidavit." The change could affect 18,000 eviction cases filed in the county each year.

PENNSYLVANIA

ALLEGHENY COUNTY Council approved the use of purple paint markings on trees to keep hunters from trespassing on private property as an alternative to paper "No Hunting" and "No Trespassing" signs. To qualify as a trespassing notification, the purple paint must be applied to trees or fence posts in 8-inch long, 1-inch-wide vertical strips, between 3- 5 feet above ground level, *The*



Post-Gazette reported.

UTAH

With some **SALT LAKE COUNTY** students attending school remotely, the county library is helping parents shoulder the load. Library card hold-

ers can use an online tutoring website for 10 hours a day on weekdays that allows for peer communication. They can also access language training software, and research databases and additional resources for different age levels.



NEVADA

- Some inmates in the **WASHOE COUNTY** jail will be able to use tablet computers as part of a six-month pilot program. They will be able to use them for 15 minutes, for free, every four hours, with the option to buy more time using their commissary account. The tablets can be used by inmates to file requests, grievances, order commissary, send and receive emails, access approved books, music and games, access the law library and access educational resources.

VIRGINIA

The lack of childcare options in **LOUDOUN COUNTY** prompted the Board of Supervisors to turn two of the county's libraries into daycare facilities for county employees during the pandemic. The county is also using 11 schools (which are closed to students) and three community centers for the effort, *WTOP News* reported.

WISCONSIN

DANE COUNTY will analyze the affordability of all cash bails given over a three-year period. The County Board hopes to determine whether inmates could afford to post the cash, how serious their charges were and whether race was a factor, among other questions, the *Wisconsin State Journal* reported.

News From Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have news that we should consider? Contact cban@naco.org and rlooker@naco.org.

the HR DOCTOR

with Philpot
& Winkeler

It's become a common refrain: Politics is more divisive these days, more personal. Whether or not that is true for the collective, certainly individuals may relate to that feeling as they see political commercials on television, scroll through their Facebook newsfeed and speak with friends and family. It has also become more apparent that politics occupies more spaces than some of us realized. The WNBA and NBA's support of the Black Lives Matter movement, through dedicating the 2020 season to social justice and protesting the shooting of Jacob Blake by canceling games, shows that sports are no longer an "escape" from the weight of politics. Seemingly non-political agencies like the U.S. Postal Service are no longer free from political debate.

The expansion of politics into these areas limits topics of conversation that may have been "safe" office banter or non-political water cooler talk previously. And while conversations regarding social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion are important workplace conversations, political discussions are rife with pitfalls. As supervisors and department directors for county governments, we must still try to keep the political out of the work-space particularly as the November elections approach.

There are several reasons the public workplace cannot be opened to political discussions. First, employees engaging in such discussions are failing to devote their work time to their county work. Certainly, there are county employees engaging in policy work who must study and discuss policy to be able to make recommendations to their directors or to the Board. But it is the Board, the elected officials, who set that policy.

The employees' personal political opinions are not the subject of the discussion. Thus,

even among employees considering county policy, engaging in discussion of personal politics is a failure to work efficiently.

Secondly, as we are all too familiar, political discussions can get heated and personal. There are all kinds of disagreements that can occur in the workplace creating conflict; no one needs to throw politics into that fire. This is especially true as heated political discussions can lead to offensive or derogatory language and offensive generalizations about those with differing opinions.

While from one perspective, political discussions may just be another HR issue to manage akin to personality conflicts, it becomes another matter entirely when those discussions or other political comments are made in front of members of the public or made by supervisors in front of employees. Statements or even political stickers, cartoons or other expressions of personal political opinion can lead to the appearance that employees may not be wholly objective when performing their duties.

Members of the public may begin to believe they will not get the same level of service as others. And our own employees may get the idea that they will not be treated fairly at evaluation time or when they seek

a promotion or just in regular interactions, if they hold different opinions than those expressed by their supervisors.

Adjacent to political discussions in the workplace is actual campaigning. It is no surprise that those in public service may be drawn to work on a political campaign or run for public office themselves. They may seek the elected official position within the department they already work or maybe they want to be a member of their town's council or school district governing board.

Such a situation amplifies the challenges described above. The political issues involved are local, more personal and have a more observable impact. Additionally, an employee campaigning in the office is both failing to focus on work and distracting others from their work. If multiple members of the office are running for the same elected position, the chance for conflict is even higher. Additionally, such a situation may cause members of an office to feel they have to choose sides or be completely neutral as they work within a divided team.

Your county likely already has policies prohibiting campaigning in the workplace. As always, it is worthwhile to review those policies to ensure they are sufficiently broad and


applicable to all employees. Your county or state may also have policies or laws requiring public employees who run for office to resign or take a leave of absence. The policy should clearly state when an employee shall take a leave of absence or resign, such as when they submit necessary documentation to be placed on the ballot.

Department directors and elected officials may want to review the policy with colleagues and teams as we approach this election season. New employees who may have not yet experienced an election season in the county's employment and employees who feel this fall brings new challenges may have questions about the policy and its implementation.

These policies can be a double-edged sword as they protect the workplace from campaigning and conflict, while also discouraging public employees who may be well-suited for an elected position but are not financially capable of stepping away from their work to run a campaign. Review your policy for language that includes those activities that are prohibited as well as those activities which are permissible, including voting and taking part in political activities while not engaged in their official duties.

This year, we may find our-

selves in conversations that turn political. We should consider how to end those conversations gently or acknowledge that the conversation may no longer be appropriate for the county workplace and be taken up at a more appropriate time and place. While our team members feel like work family, political conversations are not appropriate at the office "dinner table."

Public servants are attuned to the importance of voting, ballot initiatives and campaigns. We have the honor of working alongside those whose names are listed on the ballot, who have the courage and conviction to throw their hat into the ring because they want to contribute to their community. Such commitment to public service is not limited to a particular political view. Diversity of perspective and experience, rather than the appearance of bias or favoritism, enhances our ability to focus on our mission — to responsibly and effectively serve all members of the public. 

From Coconino County, Ariz., HR gurus and contributors, Erika Philpot, human resources director and Rose Winkeler, deputy county attorney, address common and critical HR questions from their "boots on the ground" perspective.

