

Counties still challenged in recession's recovery

Financial recovery from the recession of 2007 continues to confound nearly half of the nation's counties, according to a just-released NACo report, *The State of County Finances*, which examines the effect of the recession on counties and the fiscal recovery of county governments.

Building upon the foundation laid by NACo's Counting Money study on county financial reporting, this analysis, released Oct. 11, sheds light on trends in annual county revenues and expenses between 2007 and 2013, the latest year available for the majority of audited county financial statements. The report is accompanied by data in NACo's interac-

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LOWLAND N.C. COUNTIES SURPRISED BY MATTHEW'S NORTHWARD TURN

Swift water rescue teams, working for local emergency services, evacuate victims of the flooding caused by Hurricane Matthew in Fayetteville (Cumberland County), N.C., Oct. 8. Heavy rains caused by Hurricane Matthew led to flooding as high as five feet in some areas.

Photo courtesy of the North Carolina National Guard

"We've had three beautiful days in a row, and it's hard to convince people to evacuate when the wind isn't blowing 70 miles per hour and rain isn't falling."

-Pitt County Commissioner Glen Webb

By Charlie Ban
senior staff writer

Hurricane Matthew's northward turn relieved Florida but surprised North Carolina, where thousands have been displaced by flooding and almost two dozen have died. The flooding has prompted President Obama to declare a state of emergency in 31 counties.

The lowlands of the eastern part of the state had been hit the hardest. Robeson County, on the South Carolina border, is one of the largest in the state and has seen thousands of residents displaced and untold

damage done as the Lumber River floods.

"We're going to have a lot of work ahead of us," said County Commission Chairman Jerry Stephens. "It's going to be a long time until we figure out how much water damage we have."

Stephens' district includes the county seat of Lumberton, where 1,500 people were evacuated at the beginning of the week.

"People thought it was going to rain and they'd wake

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Counties put telephone companies on the hook for under-billed 911 fees

By Charles Taylor
senior staff writer

In the early 2000s, a telephone company representative reached out to Roger Schneider and offered him a deal. His internet company could pay less in 911 fees on his multiple telephone lines. A lot less. What the salesperson didn't know was that Schneider served on the county's 911 Board.

His internet firm was paying 911 charges for 23 lines; a salesperson from a competing company said if he switched, he'd only have to pay for five lines.

That would have saved him

money, but not the county. The less businesses paid in 911 fees, the less money would come back to the county to fund its emergency call and dispatch center.

Schneider took the information back to the 911 Board, telling them, "We need to look into this."

They looked ... they analyzed ... and then they sued the company, BellSouth Telecommunications LLC, a unit of AT&T operating in the South. The lawsuit was resolved by a settlement for an undisclosed amount of money and a promise by the phone company, as

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Delayed Hurricane Matthew flooding complicates responses



North Carolina Army National Guardsmen assist with evacuation efforts in Fayetteville, Cumberland County on Oct. 8. Photo by U.S. Army National Guard Staff Sgt. Jonathan Shaw, 382nd Public Affairs

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up in the morning and their backyard would be flooded,” he said. “Instead, it was the water that woke them up in the middle of the night. They never thought they’d be evacuating, and when you have to leave in the middle of the night it’s that much worse.”

Local roads, and I-95, have been flooded, bisecting the county and adding detour traffic to the mayhem.

Stephens has been hauling potable water across town in his pickup truck, and as of Oct. 12 wasn’t seeing water receding the way he had hoped.

“I’m still seeing a lot of boats,” he said. “We thought the water was going to be going down, but Monday it kept rising.”

The county has seven shel-

ters operating, and Stephens has instructed the county’s mental health director to send service providers in.

“It’s going to be like people coming back from the military,” he said. “They’re okay, and people aren’t as grouchy as they normally would be to be put out like this, but that might change when they realize their houses and belongings could be gone.”

Rain or no rain, the general election is coming up on Nov. 8. Stephens was thankful that the state Supreme Court struck down the recently passed voter ID law.

“Could you imagine having to show ID to vote when your house was flooded and you haven’t been allowed to go back in yet,” he said. “If you’re leaving your house in the middle of the

night because it’s flooded, taking your ID so you can vote in a month isn’t something you’re going to be worried about.”

Stephanie Chavis leads a five-person emergency services department, and as of Oct. 12, she had spent six straight days in the emergency operations center, sleeping and showering in built-in quarters.

“All I’ve seen is what’s outside of my window,” she said. “Things look nice from here, but I know it’s not like that all over the county.”

She said they had no reasonable estimate of how much rain they should expect, but the extent of the flooding was apparent Oct. 8.

The state and federal assistance for her small staff has been crucial, she said, given the size of her county — 951

square miles, the sixth largest in the state and within reach of fourth place.

Moore County, to the northwest of Robeson County, braced for a the failure of the Woodlake Dam before it was stabilized Oct. 13, but residents are still discouraged from returning.

Closer to the coast, in Pitt County, the water at 25 feet, up with the normal 13 feet, and Commissioner Glen Webb said National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration estimates pegged a 30-foot crest in the coming days as the Tar River flowed and the Neuse River starts to back up from Lenoir County.

“It’s been gradual and that’s the tough part for us,” he said. “We’ve had three beautiful days in a row, and it’s hard to convince people to evacuate when

the wind isn’t blowing 70 miles per hour and rain isn’t falling.”

In addition to roads washing out, Webb expects several bridges to be destroyed.

For residents who lived through Hurricane Floyd in 1999, warnings have been enough.

“If they remember Floyd, they know how bad it can get,” he said. “Generally, people are listening. The big thing is telling them if there’s water over the roads, there’s water under it, and you don’t want to be the one to break through because the sand has washed out.”

To the northwest of Pitt County, in Edgecombe County, Commission Chairman Leonard Wiggins said that beyond flooding in Princeville and Tarboro, which were evacuated, things have generally been better than during Floyd.

He’s flown over the county a few times to inspect the extent of the flooding.

“There’s a lot of water,” he said. “A lot of roads are impassible, and we don’t know what we’re going to see once the water is gone.”

“We’re not expecting much more water, but we’re not sure how fast it will go down.”

In Florida, coastal Flagler County has totaled its individual damage estimate at \$72 million, which did not include public infrastructure.

County boards of elections were closed for two days, but a federal judge extended the voter registration deadline by a week until Oct. 18. The Broward County Board of Elections is extending working hours to make up for the lost two days, in the face of increase voter registrations. **CN**

At the Agencies



EPA announces \$7 million now available for cutting school bus diesel emissions

EPA has announced that \$7 million is available in rebates to public school bus fleet owners for the replacement or retrofit of older school bus diesel engines in order to reduce diesel emissions and improve air quality.

This is the fourth rebate program to fund cleaner school buses offered under the 2011 Diesel Emission Reduction Act (DERA) reauthorization. Nearly 25,000 buses across the country have already been made cleaner as a result of DERA funding.

The new EPA standards for diesel engines makes them more than 90 percent cleaner than older ones. Older diesel engines emit large quantities of pollutants such as particulate matter and nitrogen oxide, which have been linked to serious health problems. Modernizing school bus fleets with retrofits, replacements and reduction practices is aimed at reducing children's exposure to air pollutants.

EPA will accept applications for this funding until Nov. 1, 2016. This is a resource that could be available to counties that operate their local school bus systems.

To learn more about the rebate program, applicant eligibility, selection process and informational webinar dates, visit www.epa.gov/cleandiesel/clean-diesel-rebates. For FAQs, you can email CleanDieselRebate@epa.gov.

NACo comments on proposal to regulate county websites

NACo submitted comments to the Department of Justice (DOJ) on its Supplemental Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (SANPRM) on the potential application of technical requirements to make state and local government websites accessible as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

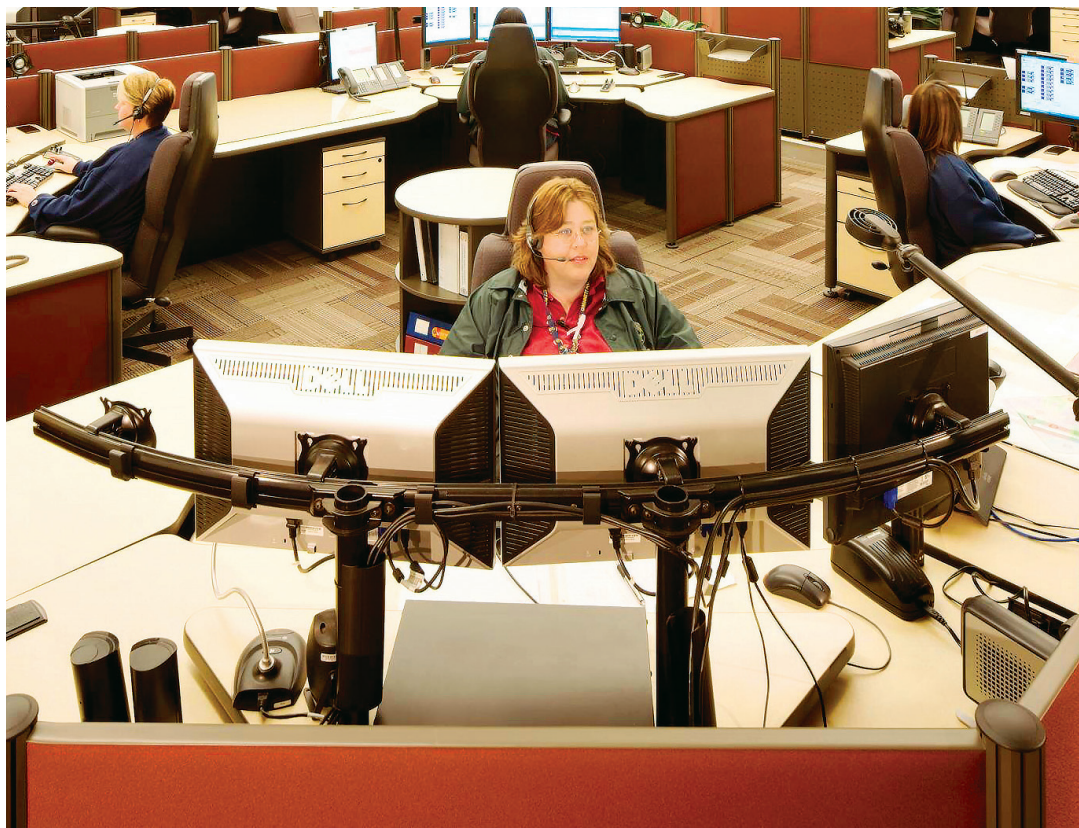
The SANPRM, which was first released by DOJ May 9 to solicit public comment on the proposal, included more than 100 questions related to how county governments use, pay-for and maintain their websites.

NACo's comments highlighted the voluntary work county governments have done to provide information, services and promote government transparency using the Internet. NACo also emphasized that the resources available to each county vary widely and that broadband deployment, particularly in rural and low-income areas of the country, should precede applying new accessibility standards.

DOJ has not announced its timeframe for reviewing the submitted comments or its next steps in developing its proposed rule. Each of the comments filed to this SANPRM can be reviewed at www.regulations.gov RIN: 1190-AA65.

Jacob Terrell, associate legislative director, and Eryn Hurley, legislative assistant, contributed to this report.

Dozens of Pa. counties suing telcos



The 911 fees added to residential and commercial phone lines help to fund emergency call and dispatch centers like this one in Gwinnett County, Ga. Photo courtesy of Gwinnett County, Ga.

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Schneider put it, "to go forth and sin no more." Through this and legal action against other phone companies, the county has recovered about \$2 million, he said.

Nationwide, 911 system operators are being shorted about \$600 million a year in fee payments, Schneider said. He now runs a company, Phone Recovery Services, which is working with several counties including in Pennsylvania.

Madison County, Ala. was in the vanguard among U.S. counties that are going after telecommunications companies for underpaying 911 fees. Today, counties in several states, including Georgia and Michigan, are suing on the same grounds.

The lawsuits come at a time when counties are strapped for funding to keep up with new technologies such as Next Generation 911 and the increasing use of voice over internet protocol (VOIP) telephony. "If you're talking about residential telephone service, all of that's pretty much billed correctly, and a lot of the basic cell stuff," said Timothy Carlson of the Philadelphia-based

Dilworth Paxson law firm, which is representing several counties in the Keystone State. It's these commercial accounts where they've just gone crazy."

In Pennsylvania, Delaware County is suing 19 phone service providers, alleging the county is owed \$41 million dollars in 911 fees. Phone Recovery Services estimates 811,698 active phone lines in Delaware County, but telecommunications companies remit 911 fees on only 230,881 lines. That leaves the county with a funding gap of \$6.9 million, according to county officials.

County Council Chairman Mario Civera has said the companies are shirking their fiduciary duties under Pennsylvania law to accurately bill, collect and remit 911 assessments. "We believe, based on the evidence we have received, that responsibility has not been met," he said in a statement.

More recently, Dauphin County, home to the state capital, sued 22 phone companies for \$29.6 million for uncollected 911 fees over a six-year period. Both lawsuits are still making their way through the court system.

Cobb and Gwinnett counties are also going after telecommunications companies — both phone and internet. They filed suits in state and federal courts last December, claiming they are owed \$50 million in 911 fees from BellSouth, Earthlink and Verizon, and other phone services providers. BellSouth Telecommu-

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SNAP/STATS "OLDEST" U.S. COUNTIES

COUNTY	MEDIAN AGE
Sumter, Fla.	66.6
Catron, N.M.	60.1
Charlotte, Fla.	58.4
Alcona, Mich.	57.9
Ontonagon, Mich.	57.3

SLLC brief defends local gov’t right to sue banks

By Lisa Soronen
executive director
State & Local Legal Center

In its Supreme Court amicus brief for *Wells Fargo v. City of Miami* and *Bank of America v. City of Miami*, the State and Local Legal Center argues that Miami, and other local governments across the country, should have “standing” or be able to sue banks, under the Fair Housing Act (FHA) for economic harm caused to them by discriminatory lending practices.

The brief argues local gov-

ernments should have standing to sue banks for two reasons. First, discriminatory lending diminishes a local government’s tax base. Specifically, foreclosures deprive local governments of revenue.

When foreclosed properties sell, their prices are discounted by about 30 percent, reducing a local government’s tax base. Foreclosed properties also diminish the value of neighboring properties.

Second, foreclosed properties are expensive. Local gov-

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WORD
SEARCH

KING WILLIAM COUNTY, VA.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS FEATURED COUNTY IN 'BEHIND THE SEAL'

Created By: Charles Taylor

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- AYLETT** Unincorporated community
- CAROLINE** County to the northwest
- COURTHOUSE** County’s oldest public building, built about 1725
- HORN QUARTER** Home on National Register of Historic Places
- KING AND QUEEN** County from which King William was carved out
- KING WILLIAM** County seat
- KING WILLIAM III** King of England for whom county is named
- MANQUIN** Unincorporated community

- MATTAPONI RIVER** Comprises county’s northern border
- NEW KENT** County to the south
- PAMUNKEY RIVER** County’s southern boundary
- POWHATAN CONFEDERACY** Native American inhabitants
- TIDEWATER** Geographic area in state
- WEST POINT** Most populous town (3,300)
- YORK RIVER** fed by Mattaponi and Pamunkey rivers tributaries

Congress confronts wildfire budgeting battle as year ends

By Eryn Hurley
legislative assistant

As Congress looks ahead to a post-election, lame-duck session, one major priority remaining for lawmakers is fixing the federal government’s budgeting process for fighting wildfire.

Both the Senate and House are considering bipartisan bills crafted to fix the wildfire-borrowing problem. This year, fire suppression costs for the Forest Service climbed above \$1.7 billion as the agency battled wildfires that burned more than 9.8 million acres of land.

The size and scale of recent fire years, as well as a disturbing upward trend in both burned acres and suppression costs, has resulted in bipartisan calls for legislation to address the effects of wildfires and the health of federal lands.

At this point, House and Senate negotiators are working to settle differences between the chambers’ versions of comprehensive energy legislation,

which could include some forestry issues, including wildfire management.

On the Senate side, Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Steve Daines (R-Mont.) sent a letter to energy bill conferees urging them to support S. 2012 and find a solution to the Forest Service’s “fire borrowing” problem. The letter encourages conferees to include reforms in the final energy bill that would allow the Forest Service to pay for fighting wildfires through funding that is unconstrained by spending caps, similar to how other agencies pay for disaster responses.

House Natural Resources Chairman Rob Bishop (R-Utah) is pursuing a different approach. The House-passed version of the energy bill (H.R. 8) included provisions to streamline environmental reviews of logging and forest-thinning projects, which he says slows the agencies’ fire prevention efforts. Daines and Feinstein acknowledge forest management

plays a role in reducing the frequency of wildfires, but focused their request on funding.

In order to secure funding and pass a final bill, conferees must reach an agreement before the end of this session.

Nearly 1,900 counties nationwide contain federal forests and other federally managed public lands. NACo continues to encourage Congress to work to reverse declines in active forest management and forest revenue sharing with counties by enacting meaningful federal forest management reforms that improve forest health (and therefore lower the risk of wildfires).

NACo policy supports comprehensive legislation that would allow active forest management, promote proactive fuel-reduction activities on federal lands and end the budget practice known as “fire borrowing” where funds from other U.S. Forest Service accounts are taken to pay for combating catastrophic wildfires. [CN](#)

Wildfire Suppression Costs Over Past 10 years

YEAR	FIRES	ACRES	FOREST SERVICE SHARE	DOI AGENCIES SHARE	TOTAL
2006	96,385	9,873,745			\$1.7 B
2007	85,705	9,328,045			\$1.6 B
2008	78,979	5,292,468			\$1.6 B
2009	78,792	5,921,786			\$920 M
2010	71,971	3,422,724			\$809 M
2011	74,126	8,711,367			\$1.4 B
2012	67,774	9,326,238			\$1.9 B
2013	47,579	4,319,546			\$1.7 B
2014	63,212	3,595,613			\$1.5 B
2015	68,151	10,125,149			\$2.1 B

The Department of Interior agencies are: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management; National Park Service; and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
Annual fires and total acres include all private, state and federal lands.
Source: National Interagency Fire Center

LEADERSHIP EDGE

By Jack Dangermond
Esri President

The current trends in population and urbanization will increasingly challenge our ability to effectively manage counties and cities, and their relationship with the natural environment. Already, over 54 percent of the world's population lives in urban areas. By 2050, this is projected to grow by an additional 12 percent. During this same time, the population is expected to increase from 7.3 billion to 9.7 billion, which means that urban areas will house more than two-thirds of the people in the world.

These trends will strain our housing, transportation, infrastructure, public safety, and other fundamental systems and services on which modern society depends. On the environmental side, these trends also mean that communities will struggle to address climate change and ways to create sustainable and resilient development.

While these issues will continue to pose great challenges to local governments, the new innovations in information technology are creating "smart" approaches and solutions that will help address many of these problems. In particular, geographic information system (GIS) and related geospatial technologies are rapidly advancing and emerging as a platform to help communities better plan and manage the complexity of the urban environment.

My sense is that this technology will emerge as a transformational platform that not only improves understanding, but also provides a knowledge foundation for better designing and managing our future. In particular, I am excited by the emerging integration of GIS with web services and the internet.

This web GIS platform is a major leap forward and already

Population, Urbanization Drives Growing Importance of GIS



Jack Dangermond

being acknowledged as a central concept for smart communities. It integrates real-time data from a host of sources into the GIS, including sensing devices that measure transportation flows and energy consumption. This platform is creating what some are calling an "urban nervous system."

This system immediately informs planners, decision-makers and citizens about the health of their community visually and analytically, indicating where action must be taken.

Web GIS is also being used as a platform for smarter planning; wherein geographic information of many types and from many sources can be integrated, analyzed and used to quickly design and evaluate alternative scenarios as part of

the decision-making process. This prompts planners and decision-makers who use GIS to consider all aspects including people, infrastructure, land use and the natural environment. This approach promises the creation of thoughtful plans that will lead to more attractive, livable and sustainable urbanization.

Another emerging vision for the application of GIS involves the ability to dynamically interrelate and integrate all types of data using geographic location as a common framework. For example, by using street addresses, x,y locations, ZIP codes or other geo-referencing, almost any kind of data can be integrated and easily analyzed and visualized.

This kind of geospatial capa-

bility will unlock the how and why cities function in particular ways. One can imagine the ability to study relationships between crime patterns, demographics, education, homelessness and human health. Equipping urban officials and managers with these kinds of insights will not only create better understanding but also provide a whole new foundation for this understanding and communicating through the language of maps.

Beyond managing communities more efficiently, GIS is engaging them. Emerging cloud technologies are allowing GIS to be applied to a whole new class of applications that provide open data, transparency and better citizen engagement.

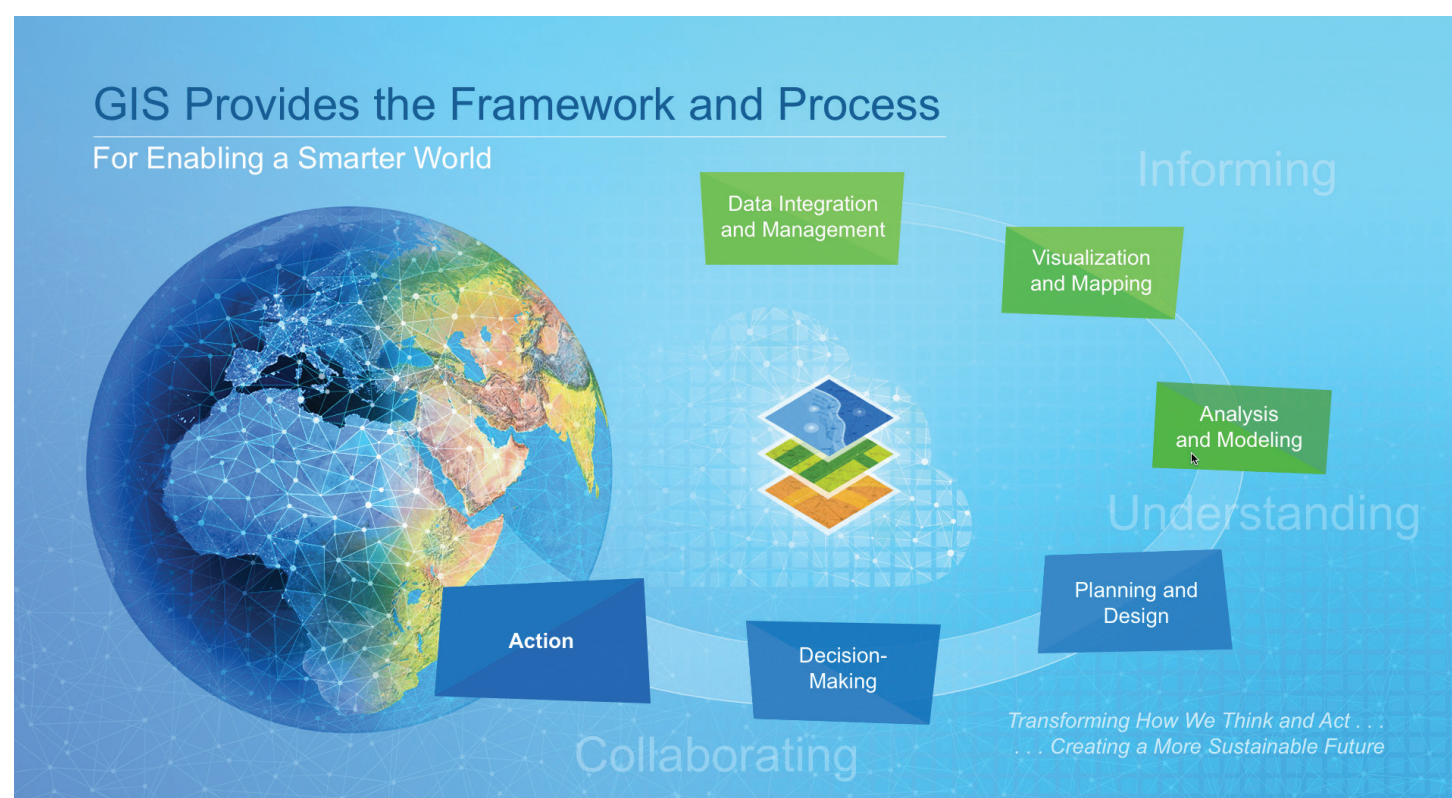
A new "community GIS" called a GeoHub is emerging that provides citizens, non-governmental organizations (NGO), schools, civic startups and other agencies with access to not only open data from government but also a variety of mapping, analytic tools and apps that can be used for public-government initiatives and collaborations.

It is my sense that, in a few years, the GeoHub platform will become commonplace and

enable governments to easily share and involve with their entire community. This will involve story maps and apps that are built around local initiatives such as fighting crime, reducing traffic accidents, trash clean up, addressing the need for low-cost housing and improving public services.

Current initiatives that illustrate how this new kind of community GIS will transform urban areas around the world include GeoHub implementations in Pinellas County, Fla. and Los Angeles. These initiatives are promoting better decision-making and transparency leveraging a more engaged community. Also, GIS with 3D modeling software is revitalizing an aging industrial district in Cologne, Germany. And research using GIS technology in London, England is being used to determine what will make communities safer and more livable.

As GIS technology continues to evolve as an integrative platform, I believe its powerful analytical and visualization capabilities will provide the necessary insight to better understand and resolve the challenges facing our urban environment. **CN**



Counties in Pa., N.Y. look to changes in states' support for indigent defense

By Charlie Ban
senior staff writer

A Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision has made it possible for indigent defendants to sue their counties for adequate legal representation.

Counties receive no state funding for indigent legal counsel in Pennsylvania, forcing each to budget for their own lawyers, and in Luzerne County, chronic underfunding and budget cuts prompted then-Chief Public Defender Al Flora to sue the county in 2012.

The American Civil Liberties Union took up the case after Flora was fired, and it became *Kuren v. Luzerne County*.

In his majority opinion, Pennsylvania Justice David N. Wecht wrote: "We recognize for the first time in Pennsylvania a prospective cause of action enabling indigent criminal defendants to prove that the level of funding provided by a county to operate a public defender's office has left that office incapable of complying with Gideon (*Gideon v. Wainwright*, the 1932 U.S. Supreme Court decision determining state responsibility for indigent defense), creating the likelihood of a systematic, widespread constructive denial of counsel in contravention of the Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution."

Pennsylvania is the only state to provide no state funding for indigent defense to counties, though counties in Utah, Nevada, Arizona, Nebraska and Washington shoulder more than 95 percent of the burden. The Washington State Association of Counties plans to make indigent defense reform a priority in the next legislative session.

Doug Hill, executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, said *Kuren's* effect would not be dramatic.

"There's no immediate consequence, all the Supreme Court did was open the door so the

defendant could raise that issue at trial and yield the possibility that the county could be found to be making insufficient appropriation for defense," he said. "The hard part is, how do you claim a bad defense if you haven't had your trial yet?"

Flora, now in private practice, was pleased with the ruling.

"The decision will have substantial impact on reforming the indigent defense system as it exists in Pennsylvania," he said. "It now empowers chief public defenders throughout the state, as well as clients of public defenders' offices, to bring lawsuits against counties where there is this systemic failure of public defenders' offices due to the inadequate funding."

He sees a way forward for im-

"The decision will have substantial impact on reforming the indigent defense system as it exists in Pennsylvania"

—Al Flora

provement, hoping the decision would lead to the Legislature funding indigent defense.

Hill said the state association is in the preliminary stages of determining the support for the state contributing to defense.

"To them, that's a decision that affects us," he said of the Legislature. "We haven't posed it as a yes-or-no question yet."

He said the state's second round of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative could include discussions about who should be paying for indigent defense.

Though Luzerne County has, since Flora first sued, increased the public defender's office budget and hired additional attorneys, the funding situation in Pennsylvania counties continues to be uneven.

"The budget for the public defender's office has tripled since the time the lawsuit was filed,"



said David Pedri, the county manager since May 2016. "Our county saw a need for this, and we are addressing all the needs for defense here in Luzerne county. We have more attorneys, more investigators, more social workers more support staff than ever has been seen in Luzerne County."

While Luzerne County has been able to make that happen, that may not go for the rest of the Commonwealth.

"Our biggest concern is that when you have a system relying on each of 67 counties in different fiscal capacities, their inference is you can't have equal access to justice," Hill said. "That's how the system is currently arrayed, and that's why they opened the door with the suit against the county."

The ACLU had sued two other Pennsylvania counties in the

last 20 years because of inadequate indigent defense funding: Allegheny County in 1996 and Venango County in 2001. Both increased funding afterward.

North of the state line, there's a chance for New York to see some dramatic changes in indigent defense funding in the next year. The Legislature has passed a bill to fully take over indigent defense services over the course of seven years. Most New York counties provide more than 60 percent of the funding for indigent defense services.

"This would be the most significant mandate relief counties have seen in a decade," said Steve Aquario, executive director of the New York State Association of Counties. "This could be hundreds of millions of dollars off of local taxpayers."

The state began covering five counties' public defense ser-

vices as part of a 2014 settlement, but in doing so left the other 52 counties exposed to future litigation. The bill mirrors the terms of that settlement for the other counties.

It also includes plans for a regional training center, particularly for counties in the Adirondack Mountains.

While the bill awaits Gov. Andrew Cuomo's signature, the state Office of Indigent Legal Services has a survey on case-load caps due Nov. 15, and the state is also studying the recent increase in eligibility to 250 percent of the poverty level.

Those will determine the extent of the fiscal impact from this bill," Aquario said. "We're hopeful the governor will take this up; it's been five months and we're concerned (the legislation will go unsigned). Hopefully these reports will have some sway." **CN**

Crisis in West Virginia's Coal Counties

By Calvin A. Kent Ph.D.
Marshall University

The collapse of coal usage and prices has created financial crisis for West Virginia coal counties. The 38 percent decline in West Virginia coal production coupled with a 71 percent decline in prices since 2008 has emptied the coffers of counties who have for decades relied on income from coal taxes. The same forces have left state government with its own crisis and unable to aid the counties' distress.

Following Wyoming, West Virginia is the nation's second largest producer of coal. Most of that coal has fed the boilers of electric power plants. From 166 million tons in 2008, production fell to 102 tons in 2015. Projections show a further decline in 2016 to 95 million, which would push the decline to 42 percent. Since 2011, prices for West Virginia coal fell from \$139 a ton to \$40. Direct employment in the mines has declined by 35 percent.

This double disaster for coal has produced devastating effects on coal counties particularly in those counties where coal accounted for over 30 percent of the counties' total income. Coal is produced in two distinct fields in West Virginia: north and south. A recent study looked at the 10 largest coal producing counties, five in southern and four in the northern region (see map).

The impact among West Virginia coal counties has been uneven with the southern coalfields seeing the greatest declines in production. Boone County, which until a couple of years ago was the state's largest producer, saw a production decline of 67 percent, Logan 50 percent, and Mingo of almost 40 percent between 2011-2015.

The decline in coal production and prices has significantly reduced the personal income received by those living in the West Virginia southern coal counties with a lesser im-

SPEEDREAD

NACo continues to provide technical assistance to counties impacted by the coal industry downturn with economic diversification strategies.

For more information, visit DiversifyEconomies.org or contact Jack Morgan at JMorgan@naco.org.

pact in the north. For Boone County total personal income has fallen to less than 70 percent of its 2011 level in Boone, with Mingo at 67 and Logan at 85 percent of 2011 levels.

Due to state constitutional and statutory provisions, county governments are highly dependent on revenues directly related to coal property and severance taxes. Revenue from real property taxes has fallen in all coal counties by an average of 35 percent with more dramatic declines anticipated. Coal counties are at the maximum rates allowed under the state constitution, so raising revenue by levy increases is not available to them.

As coal production and prices have decreased, so has the severance tax to both the state and the counties. The state levies a 5 percent severance tax on the gross value of coal extracted. This is split with 93 percent going to the state's general

fund and 7 percent distributed to the counties. Of the county share, 75 percent returns to the county government where the coal was produced, and 25 percent is distributed to the all municipalities based on population.

In 2012, a Reallocation Severance Tax was enacted allocating a small portion of the state tax to counties to partially offset the loss in their portion of the severance tax. But a \$20 million cap has proved insufficient to replace the lost county revenues.

Exacerbating the situation is the bankruptcy of all the major coal producers. While in bankruptcy, these firms have not paid the property taxes due. Often these amount to millions of collections. As these companies emerge, there may be at least some partial payment of these past-due accounts.

How have the counties responded to these significant reductions in their fiscal capacity? For some, county services have either been eliminated or reduced. Reduction in staffing and cuts in working hours are a result. As positions come

vacant they are not being filled. Others have raised fees for service like trash removal. Some have dramatically cut services in volunteer fire departments, for fairs, libraries, parks, animal control or reduced landfill and trash compactor hours.

Other counties have been able to continue funding their programs using reserve funds accumulated during the boom years, but all acknowledge that solution is temporary. One county put special levies on the ballot to support county functions that otherwise would have been eliminated or reduced. Five of the six passed.

In this picture there is one bright spot. Forty percent of West Virginia's production is metallurgical coal. This coal is the choice for steel manufacturing. As the worldwide recession lessens, demand for "met" coal will increase.

What has not been quantified are all of the indirect effects of the collapse. Residential and commercial property values have declined in most counties as mines have closed and unemployment rises. Retail sales are down. Trucking and the railroads have seen the volume of their traffic reduced

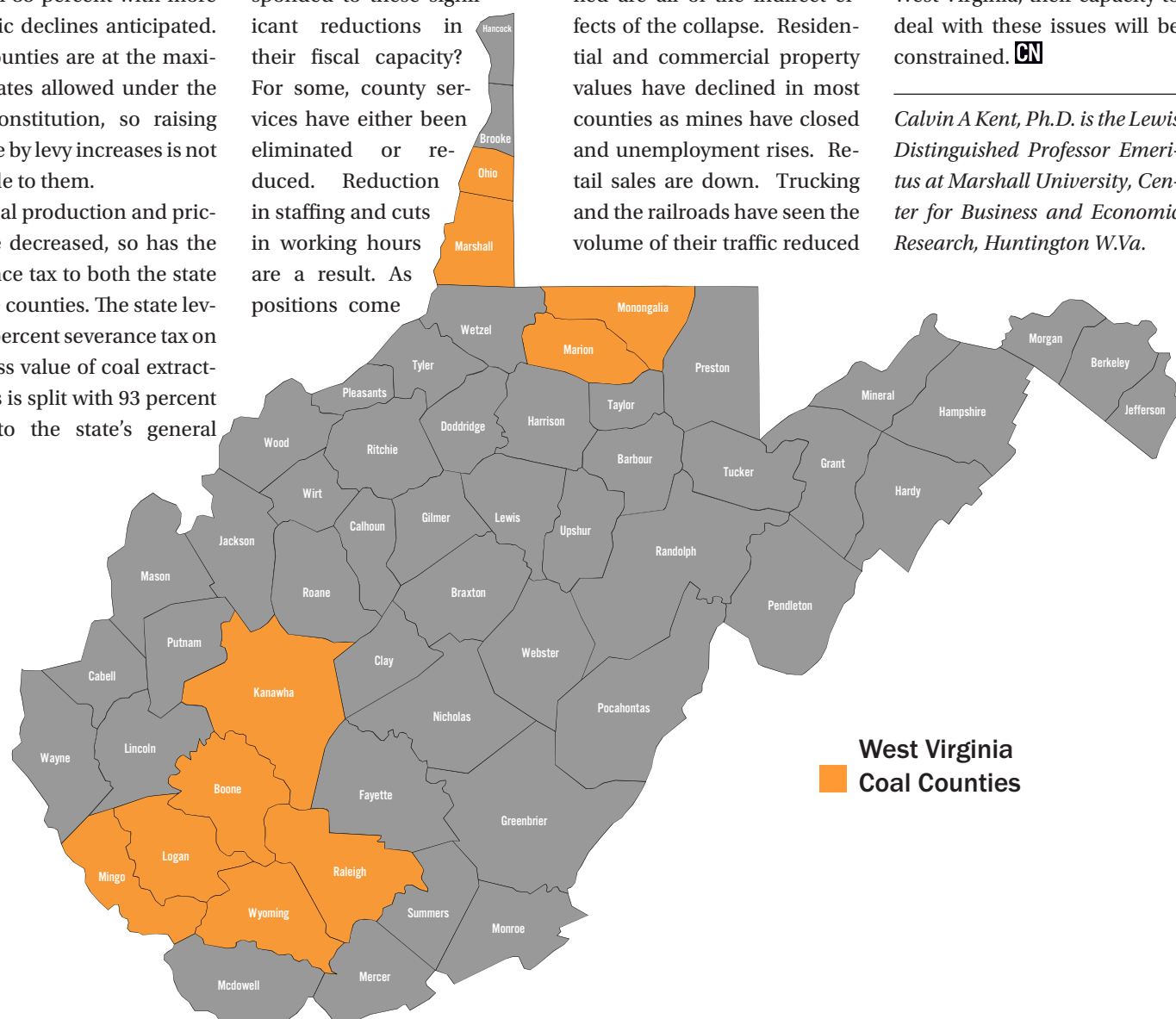
leading to elimination of terminals and employees.

West Virginia coal counties, particularly southern ones, are already struggling with unemployment rates and poverty rates well above the national average.

Those counties are being challenged to overcome other issues including: lack of economic diversification, isolation from adequate transportation, little flat land for industrial development, drug-related crime, limited supply of quality housing, absence of amenities and a workforce with low educational achievement. While these problems are being addressed, the solutions are long term.

The decline in property and severance tax revenues makes the solutions more difficult to attain. Unless there are new sources of revenue found for coal-county governments in West Virginia, their capacity to deal with these issues will be constrained. **CN**

Calvin A Kent, Ph.D. is the Lewis Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Marshall University, Center for Business and Economic Research, Huntington W.Va.



Revenue recovery slow; impact remains uneven

SPEEDREAD

General revenue recovery has been slow and uneven across counties

The recovery has been uneven

Counties are struggling with the costs of mandated services rising faster than inflation

From NEW REPORT page 1

tive County Explorer for each of the 2,112 county governments reporting their financials in the same format.

General revenue recovery has been slow, uneven

General revenues are the backbone of county funding, because they are not restricted to a particular activity and provide flexibility to county boards in allocating funds to needed services. By 2013, general revenues had not recovered to 2007 levels in nearly half of counties (46 percent), when adjusted for inflation.

The recovery has been uneven

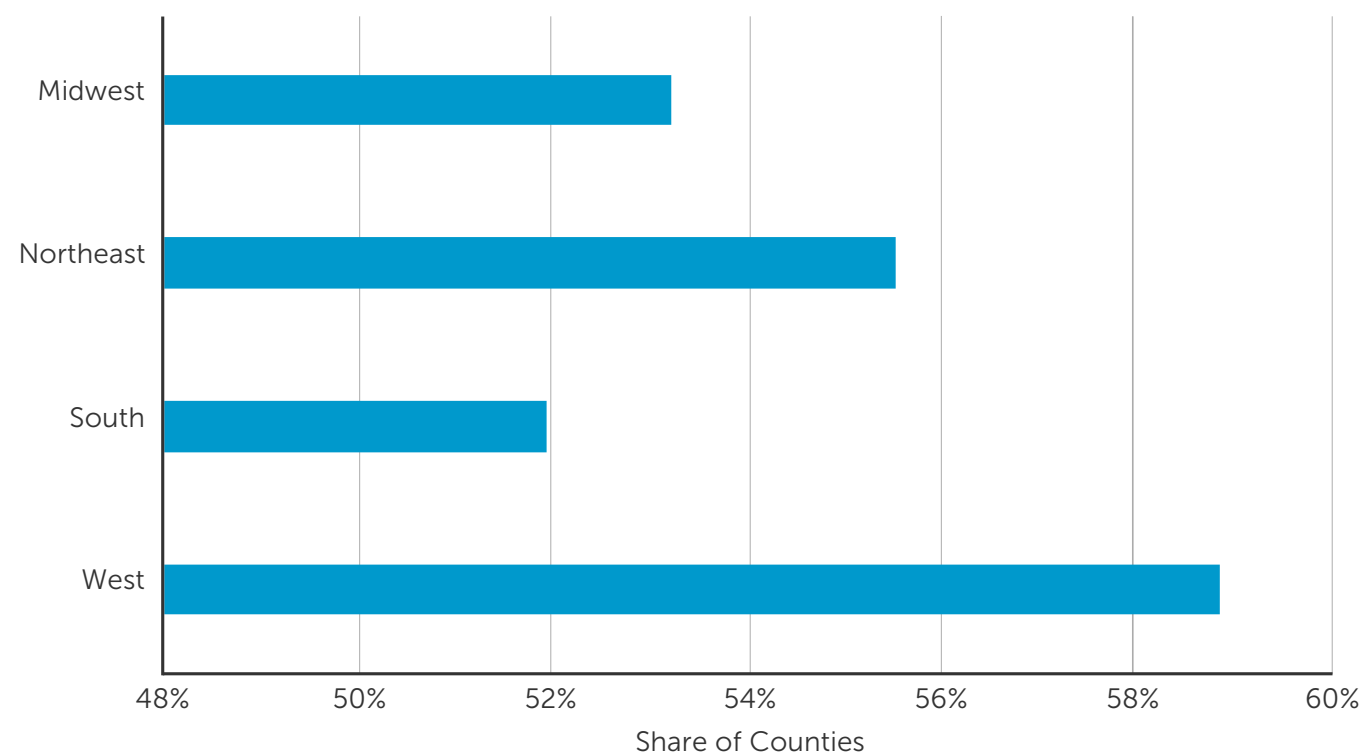
In the West, counties recorded the most improvement, with 59 percent of them bouncing back to pre-recession levels. Energy economy counties in North Dakota, South Dakota and Texas recorded higher general revenues in 2013 compared to six years before. The story is different in other parts of the country. Almost half of Southern counties remained below 2007 levels. For example, 2013 general revenues in 62 of the 67 Florida counties were still lower than six years before, showing the depth of the recession that hit the southern state.

Costs of mandated services rising faster than inflation

Almost half (48 percent) of counties recorded overall 2013 expenses above 2007 levels, even when taking into account

FIGURE 1: THE RECOVERY HAS BEEN UNEVEN ACROSS COUNTIES

Share of Counties with 2013 General Revenues Above 2007 Level, Inflation-Adjusted



Source: NACo analysis of data from the statement of activities in 2007 and 2013 audited county financial statements

inflation. In many cases, justice and public safety costs led the way, with two-thirds of counties (65 percent) witnessing increases in these costs above overall inflation. Alaska boroughs and counties in North Dakota and West Virginia had the highest surges of justice and public safety costs between 2007 and 2013. Other mandated services saw rapid increase in costs. For example, the majority of counties witnessed transportation expenses rising faster than inflation between 2007 and 2013.

State and federal funding is increasingly insufficient to cover mandated county services. Most often, about 93 percent of the state and federal funding used by a county is restricted to a specific function (capital and operational grants and contributions, called “dedicated grants” in this study). Fifty-nine (59) percent of counties recorded dedicated grants covering a smaller percent of county expenses between 2007 and 2013.

For example, a majority of counties in Virginia experienced declines in dedicated grants for justice and public

safety relative to their restricted expenses between 2007 and 2013. Counties have to fund mandated services more and more with general revenues and charges.

By 2013, 55 percent of counties use more general revenue to cover for a larger share of expenses. Service charges are also used more. Between 2007 and 2013, revenues from charges funded a higher proportion of county expenses in 45 percent of counties.

The recession and slow recovery affected counties’ bottom line

Fewer counties could cover all their expenses in 2013 unlike their pre-recession experience. In 2007, 82 percent of counties achieved an annual surplus (positive change in net position), but by 2013 only 71 percent did so. The ending balances were also lower in 2013. Forty (40) percent of counties had lower ending balances in 2013 compared to 2007, with the largest concentration in the Northeast.

“The recession and slow recovery continues to affect counties’ bottom line,” said report author Emilia Istrate, director of research and outreach at NACo. “Unfortunately, state and federal service mandates on counties increase without significant additional financial support. And in many cases, states limit counties’ ability to raise revenue from other sources.”

“Even if the fiscal situation might have improved in some parts of the country or deteriorated in the energy intensive counties over the last few years, onerous regulations and state limitations continue to have lasting effects,” she added.

Though economic realities remain difficult, counties have addressed challenges by maximizing efficiencies and securing more diverse investments in services that impact residents’ quality of life.

“Counties strive to achieve more with less,” said NACo Executive Director Matt Chase. “Counties deliver essential services like transportation, infrastructure, justice, public

LEARN MORE

You can find the analysis at www.naco.org/CountyFinance. To access the companion interactive maps and the individualized county profiles, go to NACo’s County Explorer interactive map www.naco.org/countyexplorer. The October update of NACo’s interactive tool features fiscal data from the *State of County Finances* analysis.

health and public safety. We’re continually finding new ways to serve our communities more efficiently.”

In a follow-up study to be released this November, NACo will explore the constrained fiscal environment many counties face due to the proliferation of state and federal mandates, coupled with state limitations on counties’ abilities to raise revenues. The study will also provide insight into the solutions and innovations that help counties to maintain quality services for residents. **CN**

DHS offers resources to protect election systems

October 7, 2016

Matthew D. Chase
Executive Director

National Association of Counties
25 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20001

Office of the Under Secretary
National Protection and Programs Directorate
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Executive Director Chase:

It was a pleasure to speak with the National Association of Counties (NACo) members earlier today. I know from our discussion that the cybersecurity of our elections systems is something that we all take very seriously. As we discussed, we live in a world where we must protect our nation's information technology against increasingly sophisticated and creative cyber attacks from a range of bad actors that include criminals, nation-state actors and others. As it has now been widely reported in the press, the prospect of cyber attacks on our nation's election systems must be taken seriously, and we must do our best to stay one step ahead of potential bad actors. As discussed on our call, I am writing to describe the services that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is offering to assist with protecting your members' election systems and reducing vulnerabilities.

DHS is here to support election officials in protecting against a cyber attack on their election systems. We recognize that State and local election officials administer and oversee the election process. The Federal government, to include DHS, the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, the Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the Department of Justice, has no intention of over-seeing or regulating your election process. Our role is limited and is to support you. We are offering counties several voluntary no-cost services and products that can be leveraged before the election, described below.

Cyber Hygiene scans of election systems, which are voluntary assessments of internet-accessible systems for known vulnerabilities and configuration errors. If county governments request this service, we will provide a report to them, which includes remediation and mitigation recommendations to address identified vulnerabilities that can be used to improve their cybersecurity posture. Several States and counties are currently employing DHS Cyber Hygiene scans on parts of their networks, and I want to remind your NACo membership that this service is available to them and can be applicable for internet-facing election systems, such as online voter registration databases. If interested, we can start the Cyber Hygiene scanning within a week of receiving the necessary information from counties.

Direct points of contact for field-based Cyber Security Advisors and Protective Security Advisors who can provide actionable information and connect county governments to a range of tools and resources available to improve the cybersecurity preparedness of election systems and the physical site security of voting machine storage and polling places. These advisors are also available to assist with planning and incident management assistance for both cyber and physical incidents.

(See www.naco.org/DHSadvisors)

Physical and protective security tools, training and resources that can help prepare election polling sites. The Department encourages you to connect, plan, train, and report through guidance which can be found at DHS.gov/hometown-security. Applying these practices intends to assist stakeholders train administrative and volunteer staff on identifying and reporting suspicious activities, active shooter scenarios, and what to do if they suspect an improvised explosive device. These resources ensure a foundation of security basics, emergency response, continuity plans, and increased awareness of potential threats. Contact the local DHS Protective Security Advisor for access to DHS resources at NICC@hq.dhs.gov.

Cybersecurity alerts and bulletins through DHS's National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center (NCCIC) and the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center (MS ISAC). I recommend that interested parties sign up for cybersecurity alerts from the NCCIC, the Federal government's primary hub for cybersecurity information sharing, and the MS-ISAC, the DRS-funded focal point for cyber threat prevention, protection, response and recovery for the State, local, tribal and territorial governments. NACo members can then leverage this information to improve the cybersecurity of your election systems. (See www.naco.org/sample-alert)

For more information on, or to request any of these services, please contact SLTTcyber@hq.dhs.gov, information is also available online at US-CERT.gov/ccubedvp/slitt.

I want to thank NACo and its membership for your continued leadership in the safeguarding of elections and assure you all that the Department of Homeland Security will do all it can to help in this mission.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Spaulding
Under Secretary

WE'RE MOVING.

Our new headquarters,
co-located with the
National League of Cities,
features a state-of-the-art
conference center and
provides many opportunities
to collaborate on local
government solutions.
Our move-in date is Nov. 1.



660 N. Capitol Street, NW | Suite 400
Washington DC 20001



Tioga County, Pa. Commission Chair Erick J. Coolidge (second from right), discusses the quality of rural life as a panelist at the White House Rural Forum, held Oct. 5 at Penn State University, Centre County, Pa. Coolidge is a member of NACo’s Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee and the Rural Action Caucus. Photo courtesy of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

NACo OFFICERS, COUNTY OFFICIALS

- NACo First Vice President **Roy Charles Brooks** represented NACo at the Council of State Governments’ Justice Board meeting in Cook County, Oct. 5–7
- NACo Immediate Past President **Sallie Clark** spoke at the North Dakota Association of Counties An-

nual Conference held in Bismarck, N.D. Oct. 9–11.

NACo STAFF

- **Emilia Istrate**, research director, spoke about county priorities at the annual conference of the National Recreation and Park Association in St. Louis, Mo. Oct. 5–8.
- **Linda Langston**, di-

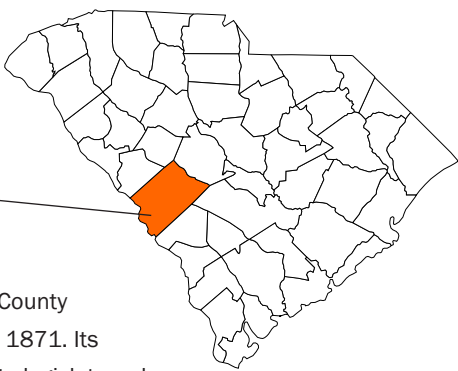
rector of strategic relations, represented NACo at the Rural Policy and Research Institute Summit in Iowa City, Iowa Oct. 12–14.

- **Brian Namey**, NACo public affairs director, discussed why counties matter at the National Tax Lien Association fall symposium in Washington, D.C. on Oct. 15.

New NACo★
Member

GET TO
KNOW...

Aiken
County, S.C.



Welcome, Aiken County, S.C.

Sitting along the Savannah River bordering Georgia, Aiken County was organized in the Reconstruction Era after the Civil War in 1871. Its boundaries were drawn by Prince Rivers, a freedman and state legislator, who headed the commission charged with establishing the new county. It included parts of four neighboring counties Barnwell, Edgefield, Lexington and Orangeburg, and was the only new county formed in the state during this era.

Until 1971, it was governed by “the Delegation,” a group of locally elected members of the South Carolina General Assembly. Strapped for time by the two jobs, the Delegation initiated

successful legislation to change the county’s governing structure to a seven-member County Commission. The new commissioners took office after their election in November 1972. Later in the decade, county voters adopted an eight-member commission, council-administrator form of government.

The Savannah River Site (SRS), a major Department of Energy facility, built in the 1950s to refine nuclear material to deploy in nuclear weapons, sits partially in Aiken County. **SRS covers 310 square miles located in three counties and includes a major research facility, the Savannah River National Laboratory.**



PROFILES IN
SERVICE

RENEE ANN PRICE
Chair
Community, Economic and
Workforce Development
Steering Committee
Commissioner
Orange County, N.C.



Number of years active in NACo: 4

Years in public service: 4

Occupation: Project director for Free Spirit Freedom, a cultural arts initiative

Education: Master of Regional Planning, Cornell University; B.A., Tufts University; M.A. program at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Campaign for myself for elected office

One person (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: Michael Carmichael, my partner

A dream I have is to: Travel the world, starting with South Africa.

You’d be surprised to learn that I: Have studied French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic and speak only English today.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done is: Walk across a swinging bridge that was suspended high above a river.

I’m most proud of: My parents, Charles and Pauline Price.

Every morning I read: Emails.

My favorite food is: Extreme dark chocolate.

My favorite quotation is:

“In this denial of the right [of woman] to participate in government, not merely the degradation of woman and the perpetuation of a great injustice happens, but the maiming and repudiation of one-half of the moral and intellectual power of the government of the world.”

- Frederick Douglass

The last book I read was: About shamanism.

My favorite movies are: *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Avatar*.

My favorite music is: Jazz.

My favorite president is: Barack Obama.

My county is a NACo member because: NACo provides access to resources and opportunities that have the potential to enhance the social, economic and environmental well-being of the people of Orange County, our nation and the global community.



My favorite way to relax is: Gardening.

BRIGHT IDEAS | VALLEY COUNTY, IDAHO

County's 'Firewise' Solution Reduces Wildfire Risk

PROBLEM: Valley County is heavily forested with a seasonal threat of wildfires.

SOLUTION: A free program that allows residents to dispose of woody debris at fire stations, lowering their fire risk.

By Charles Taylor
senior staff writer

When Stephanie Nelson started doing fire-wise education and outreach for Valley County, Idaho 10 years ago, she described it as the “worst cold-calling in the world” — reaching out to targeted landowners “to let me spend public money on their property” to reduce their wildfire risk. There wasn’t much interest.

“And now I just take phone calls: ‘Am I eligible? Would you come look at my property? ... What are the programs that are available? ... Can you just share with us what we should be doing?’

The county’s Bring It! Don’t Burn It! program, which Nelson leads, encourages homeowners to become active partners in the disposal of brush and woody debris in the wildland-urban interface — the zone where wilderness and development meet. It’s an outgrowth of the county’s Fire Working Group.

The developed areas of Valley County are surrounded by the Payette and Boise national forests. The county is also something of a recreational mecca for Boise, the state capital, 100 miles to the south. About 60 percent of residences in the county are vacationers’ second homes, according to County Board Chairman Gordon Cruickshank. The county’s population of about 10,000 can grow to 60,000 when big events take place.

Under Bring It! Don’t Burn It! homeowners can clear woody debris from their properties



Residents of rural Valley County, Idaho can discard brush and woody debris at three fire stations throughout the county under the Bring It! Don’t Burn It! program. Clearing their properties of such debris gives them more “defensible space” to stop wildfires from spreading. Photo courtesy of Ada County, Idaho

and drop it off at roll-off bins at fire stations in the county at no charge. The wood waste is subsequently taken to the county’s transfer station, where it can be safely burned under supervision.

One of the goals is to discourage homeowners from burning the debris near their homes, risking property damage and the spread of wildfires. Burn permits are required between May and October, the dry season.

Cruickshank said the county’s “fire-wise” fuels-reduction initiative served as something of a demonstration project, which eased residents’ concerns that reducing their fire-risk meant “removing all the trees.” County projects near a state highway showed the opposite. It was more about eliminating underbrush, leaving the wooded area with a more “parklike” appearance, he said.

One of the goals is to discourage homeowners from burning the debris near their homes, risking property damage and the spread of wildfires.

“Once people started seeing that and what that meant and what it would look like, some people started doing more around their own homes.”

Bring It! Don’t Burn It! has brought neighbors together in the cause of creating “defensible space,” in fire lingo, around their homes. That means clearing the area of any wood or brush that could fuel a wildfire, he added.

“We started seeing neighbors helping neighbors. And now it’s progressed to where subdivi-

sions are creating workdays or work weekends and having the roll-off containers brought into their subdivisions and loading them directly,” he said.

Participation has increased over the past couple of years, Nelson said. During a five-week period last summer, the county saw a 32 percent increase in volume over 2015. This year, the County Board doubled its allocation to the program to \$20,000.

Cruickshank said the program has “substantially” reduced the number of burn permits requested by property owners. “So by spending a little more money here to help with this program, it’s reduced the costs of our fire departments” in areas where they previously responded to woody debris fires.

Mark Billmire is fire chief in McCall, the county’s most populous city. Before Bring It! Don’t Burn It, his fire district av-

eraged about 118 burn permits per month. Last year, it issued only 28 per month, he said. The debris collection program has seen “exponential” increases in volume each year. “It’s pretty it’s pretty much almost doubled every year as far as the of number of loads that we’ve had to haul away each year,” he added.

The county is now doing a feasibility study to find new uses for woody debris that is collected, Cruickshank said, rather than burn it. Potential uses include fuel pellets, firewood and posts and poles for fences.

“If we can find a suitable site and it looks like it’s feasible to do, we could create a place that people could bring this stuff to and we could figure out a market for that to be used in the future,” he said. **CN**

Bright Ideas features noteworthy and award-winning county programs.

CAPITAL LOOP

Department of Homeland Security engages with NACo on elections cybersecurity

● On Oct. 7, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) held a national conference call with NACo and state associations of counties to discuss elections cybersecurity and the resources the agency is making available to counties to help protect voting systems. (See this issue, page 9).

WIR Board adopts 2017 key issues

● The Western Interstate Region (WIR) Board of Directors met Oct. 5 to 7 in Jackson County (Ashland), Ore. to conduct strategic planning for the organization, including setting their key policy issues for 2017. The board adopted the following key policy issues: strengthen local infrastructure; maintain access to Western lands and responsible development of Western resources; ensure certainty in federal county payments; promote safe and healthy communities; advocate for local control and strengthen

the federal partnership.

Contact: Chris Marklund, cmarklund@naco.org

NACo Submits Comments on DOJ Proposal to Regulate County Websites

● On Oct. 7, NACo submitted comments to the Department of Justice on its Supplemental Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on possible technical requirements to make state and local government websites accessible as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. (See page 3)

U.S. House passes bill to delay overtime pay rule

● The bill would delay for six months the U.S. Department of Labor's overtime pay regulation that would make 4.2 million Americans newly eligible for overtime pay. The bill was passed Sept. 28.

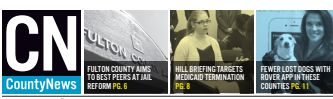
U.S. House passes WRDA bill

● On Sept. 28, the House passed its version of the Water Resources Development Act of 2016 (WRDA) (H.R. 5303) by a

vote of 399–25. The Senate bill was passed Sept. 15.

Child welfare bill stalls as Congress breaks for elections

● Congress was unable to finalize H.R. 5456, the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) — a bill that would significantly reshape child welfare nationwide — before recessing until after the November elections.



Wheels are in motion for autonomous car policies, pilot project

The bill would delay for six months the U.S. Department of Labor's overtime pay regulation that would make 4.2 million Americans newly eligible for overtime pay. The bill was passed Sept. 28.

Concerns over election hacking misplaced but it's not impossible

The bill would delay for six months the U.S. Department of Labor's overtime pay regulation that would make 4.2 million Americans newly eligible for overtime pay. The bill was passed Sept. 28.

Congress averts shutdown, passes bill to fund the government through December 9

● See *County News*, Oct. 3, "Congress Averts Shutdown."

Banks appealing decision

From *HOUSING* page 4

ernments "must provide substantially more public services — and expend far more public funds — to maintain these abandoned homes."

The city of Miami claims that Wells Fargo and Bank of America targeted black and Latino customers in the city for predatory loans that carried more risk, steeper fees, and higher costs than those offered to identically-situated white customers. The city further claims the banks' lending policies caused minority-owned property to fall into unnecessary or premature foreclosure.

The FHA makes it unlawful for banks to discriminate

against mortgage recipients on the basis of race. To bring a lawsuit under the FHA the City of Miami must have "statutory standing," in other words, "a cause of action under the statute."

The Eleventh Circuit concluded Miami does have statutory standing. The banks are appealing that decision.

At least 12 other cities and counties have brought similar lawsuits against banks. **CN**

NACo is a founder, a funder and a board member of the State and Local Legal Center, headquartered in Washington, D.C. The center extends NACo's advocacy on behalf of counties to the highest court in the land.



KING WILLIAM COUNTY, VA.
Adopted in: 1977

The colors green and blue throughout the King William County seal represent the county's agricultural history and its extensive waterways on Virginia's middle peninsula. Agriculture is also reflected in the tobacco leaves, held by the planter on the right, and the Native American on the left, who is holding pieces of oak and pine, which represent forestry. Both men symbolize the county's residents.

The native Mattaponi and Pamunkey tribes operated shad hatcheries, which are represented on the shield, along with the crown, for King William III, the cross for religion, and gold droplets — wealth from working the land.

The King William County Courthouse, at the top, was built in 1725 and is thought to be the oldest public build-

ing in use in Virginia and the oldest courthouse of English foundation in continuous use in the United States. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1969 and though a new courthouse has been built nearby, hearings are still held in the original courthouse.



The county's motto, "Under God, the People Rule," frames the bottom of the seal.

Bobbi Langston, deputy clerk to the Board, assisted.

Would you like to see your county's seal featured?
Contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org.

IN SEARCH of CIVILITY

"County innovations would be all but impossible without a fundamental value that enables us to govern well: civility." } ...NACo PRESIDENT BRYAN DESLOGE

Civility is much more than just behaving politely. Civil behavior shows that we have respect for others and their opinions, especially when we disagree.

Go to www.NACo.org/Civility for a brief assessment of civility today, a guide to civil engagement, a few examples and other resources.



Hurricanes & Gratitude

I dictate this article as Hurricane Matthew makes landfall around Central Florida. I live inland in Central Florida but well within the reach of the monster. In fact, as I look out my office window I see that heavy rains have begun.

At times like these, my thoughts return to the repeated times during my several decades as a local government executive when I would kiss my beautiful wife and daughters and bring my backpack to the Emergency Operations Center to be locked up or is it locked down? The lockdown would last until either an all-clear announcement was made, or beyond that, until immediate storm follow-up actions were put into place.

So many times during Florida tropical storms, hurricanes, California earthquakes, huge brushfires and practice exercises, I was shoulder to shoulder with law enforcement and fire rescue command staff:

National Guard, health department, public works, utilities and many other agents of local government.

We gathered as much information as we could and made as many decisions as we could. I knew full well that some of the decisions we made, including those for which I was directly responsible — as not only a county and city human resources director but as a county chief administrative officer — would result in my colleagues being dispatched into risky circumstances.

In a time of increasing mistrust of what public safety and public service really involves, the arrival of a major hurricane — the first Category Four hurricane to approach Florida in about a dozen years — should give us great pause and great opportunity to begin practicing the use of words such as “gratitude,” “thank you,” “I’m glad you’re here” and “be safe.”

It is easy to recognize public safety professionals on the street. You can tell by the marked vehicles or the uniforms. Sometimes you can tell by the K9 officers standing

next to their handlers. Sometimes you can tell by the public works crews out restoring safe passage on highways or the utility crews working on downed power lines as they work to restore power to thousands of homes.

Many other times, however, you can’t know what really goes into overcoming a monster storm like Hurricane Matthew. That’s because many

circumstances could happen to us.

Complacency is as great a danger to the community as is a monster hurricane. The arrogance to think that we are immune from dangers and catastrophic events leads to failures to act in advance to reduce risks. It leads to the attack of the budget cutters — or at least those among them who will act with overzealous

role in the failures.

As I hunker down, making sure batteries and generators are ready to go if needed, I think of how important it will be in the future to buy lunch for firefighters, police and sheriff’s deputies when I see them at a restaurant, to help them with training or consulting on their behalf, likely leaving behind any HR Doctor’s consulting fees. I will be treating them with a respect and well wishes that should be normal instead of unusual.

These colleagues have a duty to respond to emergencies with efficiency and humanity. They also have a duty to do their jobs with respect and propriety. The huge majority of these public servants do just that even though, as in any profession, there are those who lose brain cells in the face of stress and do the wrong thing. I know from considerable experience that often at the core of such poor behavior is the failure of a dilapidated human resources system.

Nonetheless at the moment the power goes out in my area, which it is quite likely to do, I will make sure that my own personal preparation (including chocolate and wine) and support for my neighbors and family members prevails over villains like Hurricane Matthew.

Please join me in spreading the awareness that none of us stands alone in keeping a society safe, civil and thriving. It is local government that glues these elements together. When we need local government the most, it must be at its best. **CN**

When we need local government the most, it must be at its best.

of the people that make the command decisions or keep the system running don’t wear identifiable uniforms. They include the staff of local government departments such as procurement, human resources, accounting, mental health, building safety and many others.

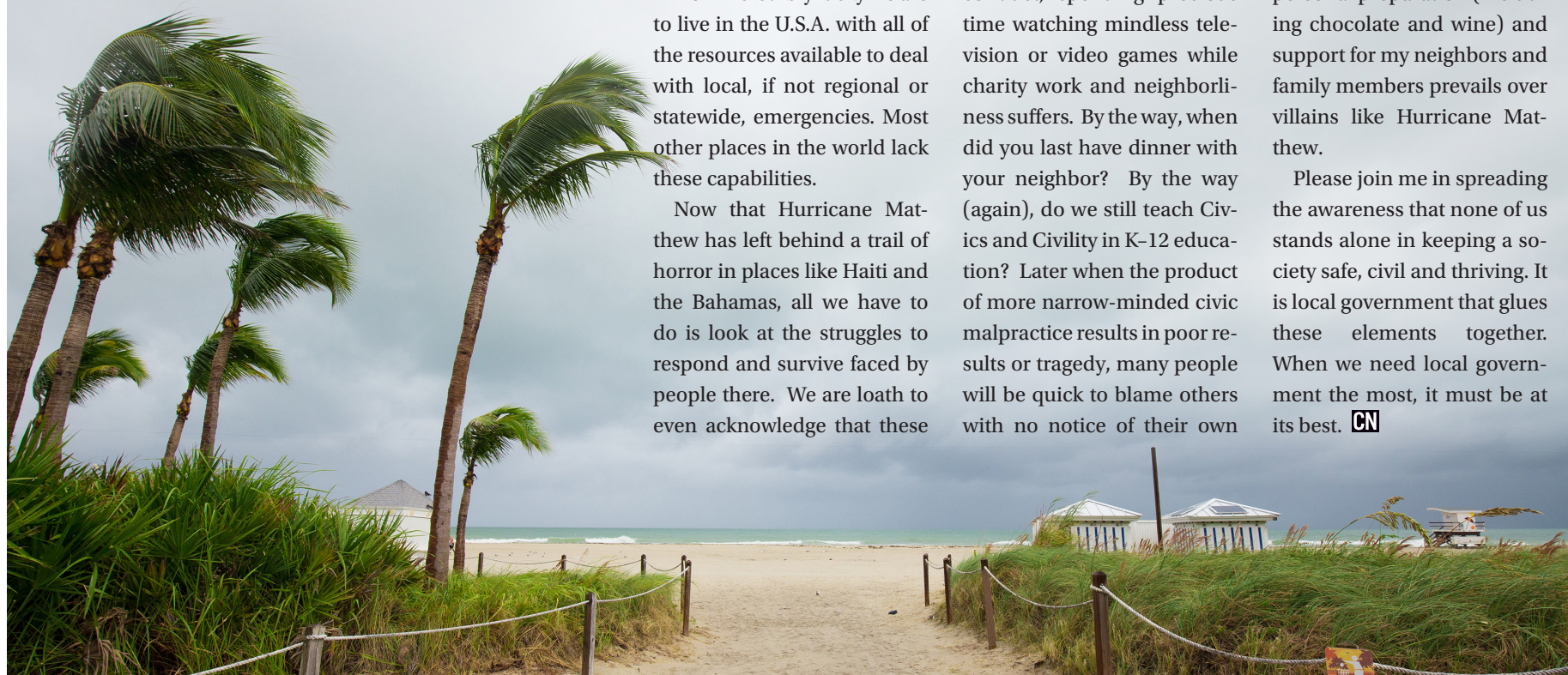
It is hard to say thank you to unmarked people whose work may save a life or save property or even reduce threats and risks. However, their work nonetheless deserves huge thanks and a much more positive attitude about the importance of local government.

How incredibly lucky we are to live in the U.S.A. with all of the resources available to deal with local, if not regional or statewide, emergencies. Most other places in the world lack these capabilities.

Now that Hurricane Matthew has left behind a trail of horror in places like Haiti and the Bahamas, all we have to do is look at the struggles to respond and survive faced by people there. We are loath to even acknowledge that these

disregard for long-term capacity building. Their attention may be focused on being able to brag about cutting taxes or cutting the number of staff members as they campaign for re-election.

The reality may be, however, that what is really being cut is not the budget but the strategic capability it takes to respond and rebuild. Such short-range thinking — all too prevalent in our world — leads to many other things. It brings about an infrastructure being allowed to slowly erode and rot away, a loss of personal responsibility for personal conduct, spending precious time watching mindless television or video games while charity work and neighborliness suffers. By the way, when did you last have dinner with your neighbor? By the way (again), do we still teach Civics and Civility in K-12 education? Later when the product of more narrow-minded civic malpractice results in poor results or tragedy, many people will be quick to blame others with no notice of their own



NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ARIZONA

MARICOPA COUNTY has levied a record **\$1.5 million fine** on a solar power plant, ironically, because of air pollution.

From June 2014 to January 2016, the county's Air Quality Department cited "clean-energy" producer Arizona Solar One LLC for 21 violations including failure to conduct the performance tests required by their permit, removal of emissions control systems without approval and exceeding permitted emissions limits.

Although it's a solar plant, some of its processes to create steam to run turbines, which involves nitrogen oxide. Leaks of the chemical and fumes can combine to form ozone pollution, the *New Times* reported.

The air quality department will use the fines to fund research projects related to air quality, community outreach campaigns and community programs, among other uses.

CALIFORNIA

Hospitals in **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** will soon be required to report when patients are infected with a certain **potentially lethal "superbug"** — bacteria can't be killed by antibiotics.

About two dozen states require hospitals to report when patients are sickened with CRE (carbapenem-resistant enterobacteriaceae), but California does not.

Dawn Terashita of the county's acute communicable disease control program said health officials will use the data to "look for clusters of infections and prevent outbreaks."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 75,000 Americans with hospital-acquired infections die during their hospitalizations each year.

FLORIDA

Using its zoning code, **MIAMI DADE COUNTY** has proposed a **ban on fracking** for oil and gas. "This is about our water supply," said Commissioner Daniella Levine Cava, according to the *New Times*.

Fracking in South Florida would require drilling through the aquifer, which is protected by a thin layer of porous limestone. The consensus among independent experts who have studied the area is that if the aquifer were polluted by fracking chemicals, it would likely remain that way permanently, the newspaper reported.

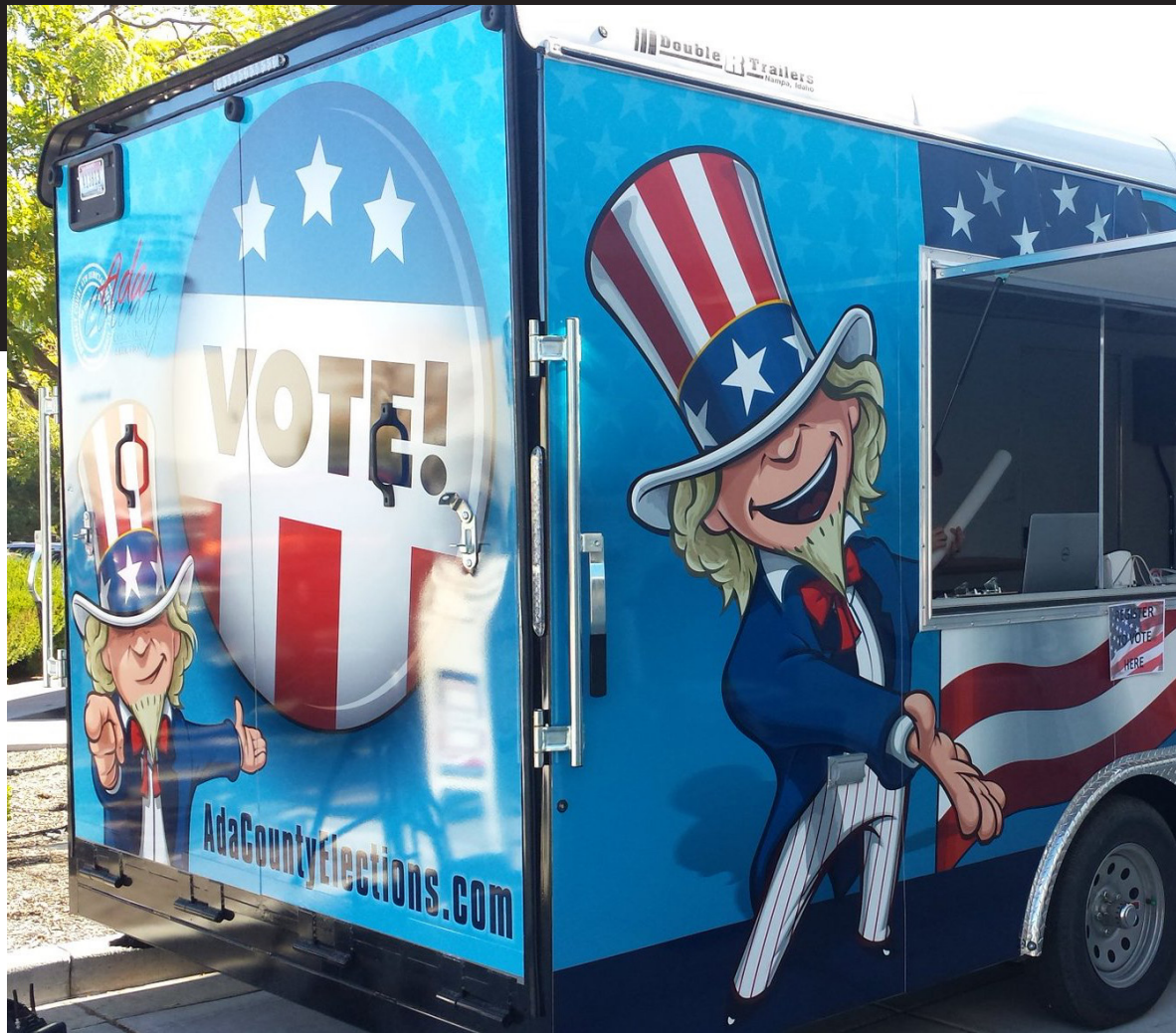
Neighboring **BROWARD COUNTY** passed a fracking ban earlier this year.



ILLINOIS

Running for office in suburban **COOK COUNTY** just became a little easier. County Clerk David Orr's office has created a free **Running for Office Starter Kit**. By using the kit, residents can find out which positions they're eligible to run for and also receive the information and documentation needed to complete the process of running for office.

An interested resident can enter information online such as name, date of birth and address, and the kit will generate a candidate packet complete with the statement of candidacy, loyalty oath and petition-for-nomination forms filled in with the user's information. Orr's office said the kit can help prospective candidates save time — and avoid mistakes that might disqualify them.



Food trucks were Chief Deputy Clerk Phil McGrane's inspiration for Ada County's mobile polling station. It handles early voting and backs up permanent polling places. Photo courtesy of Ada County, Idaho

INDIANA

ALLEN COUNTY is the latest county where the state has declared a public health emergency, allowing officials to create a **needle-exchange program** to combat the spread of hepatitis C and HIV among drug users. County commissioners had previously approved the needle exchange but needed the state's okay, the Associated Press reported.

The Indiana Department of Health has already declared similar public health emergencies in seven other Indiana counties, mostly in the southern part of the state.

MARYLAND

MONTGOMERY COUNTY's library system has launched a **Career Online High School (COHS)** program — designed to bring adults back into the classroom, if virtually — and prepare them for post-secondary education or jobs.

Coursework focuses on one of eight high-growth, high-demand career fields before moving on to core academic subjects. COHS pairs each en-

rolled student with an academic coach, who provides him or her with an individual career path, offers ongoing guidance, evaluates performance and connects the student with the resources needed to master the courses. Students are given up to 18 months to complete the program.

Library officials said the program is free for a limited number of participants.

MICHIGAN

● The ball is in the state's court now that **WAYNE COUNTY** has asked the state to **release the county from its consent agreement** that declared a financial emergency in 2015.

County Executive Warren Evans made the request, touting the county's "improved financial picture" less than 18 after asking the state for the declaration, the *Detroit Free Press* reported.

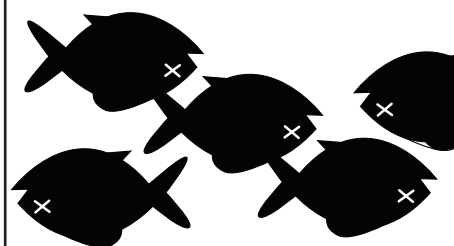
In a statement, Evans wrote, "We've stuck to our 'Recovery Plan' and come very far in a short period of time. There's much more work to do, but we're on a sustainable path..." A spokeswoman for the state

treasurer promised a prompt response, noting that the county has made "significant financial progress."

● In a sign of the times, the **OTTAWA COUNTY** Sheriff's Office is offering training to the public on what to do in case of an active shooter.

The class will offer "strategies, guidance, and a proven plan" for surviving an **active shooter event**. The class is free with registration required and participants must be at least 18 years old.

The Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE) course was developed by ALERTT (Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training).



MONTANA

PARK COUNTY lost hundreds of thousands of dollars after the state closed the Yel-



IDAHO

There may not be a taco truck on every corner, but **ADA COUNTY's food-truck-inspired polling station** will feed a need for some voters: a place to cast their votes early to avoid the Election Day rush.

Chief Deputy Clerk Phil McGrane came up with the idea. In the run-up to Nov. 8, the \$50,000 vehicle will be hauled to various locations throughout the county.

Poll workers are using previous voting data to figure out the best places to park to attract the most voters. That includes spots near major employers and hospitals. On Election Day, the trailer will serve as a backup polling place, if needed.

employees who adopt, foster or take responsibility for a child under the age of 5, the *News and Observer* reported.

OHIO

A \$2.9 million grant will pay for **SUMMIT COUNTY** to **remove lead from 160 homes**.

Money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grant will go to help the county's public health department target homes built before 1978 occupied by low-to-moderate-income residents, the *Akron Beacon Journal* reported.

OREGON

● **BENTON COUNTY** and the city of Corvallis may combine to fund a **homeless czar position**.

The administrator for the Housing Opportunities Action Council would be an employee of the United Way of Benton and Lincoln counties and will start work on Nov. 1 if the county agrees to contribute \$20,000, according to the *Corvallis Gazette-Times*. The council oversees implementation of a 10-year plan to eliminate homelessness in Benton County.

● An initiative proposed for the November ballot will let **COOS COUNTY** voters decide on a property tax increase that will **make eight museums free**.

The tax would be the first of its kind in Oregon, KCBY News reported.

SOUTH CAROLINA

The state election commission has told **GREENVILLE COUNTY's** elections commission to stop sending an 11-question form to **students who want to register to vote** using their college addresses.

The state commission called it a violation of its policy and state law.

Three Furman University students sued the county to use their college addresses to register, a policy the *Greenville News* said is allowed in every other South Carolina county.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Clerk magistrates in 14 counties now have a little less happiness in their work days, now that they may no longer **perform marriage ceremonies**.

Third Judicial Circuit Presiding Judge Gregory J. Stoltenburg cited the significant time commitment — at least 30 minutes per ceremony — in his rationale, the *Watertown Public Opinion* reported.

The Third Circuit includes **HAND, JERAULD, BEADLE, SANBORN, MINER, LAKE, MOODY, BROOKINGS, KINGSBURG, CLARK, HAMLIN, CODINGTON, DEUEL** and **GRANT counties**.



TENNESSEE

Grants totaling \$2.4 million will help bring **high-speed broadband internet** to parts of four counties.

MARION, MORGAN, GRUNDY and **TROUSDALE counties** will benefit from three U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development grants, the *Times Free Press* reported.

UTAH

After three years of planning, including a year of training, **SEVIER COUNTY** Emergency Medical Services now offers **paramedic services** in its ambulances.

The department will sport 11 paramedics who did training for three days a week for a year, including 12-hour shifts in a hospital's emergency room, according to the *Richfield Reporter*. **CN**

News From Across the Nation is compiled by Charles Taylor and Charlie Ban, senior staff writers. If you have an item for News From, please email ctaylor@naco.org or cban@naco.org.

Technology drives 911 call center needs

From FEES page 3

communications accounts for most of the money being sought, \$37.8 million.

In their lawsuit, the counties said, "By not billing and collecting all the required 911 charges, BellSouth is able to provide telecommunication services at prices that are cheaper than its competitors, particularly to its business customers." Cobb and Gwinnett are also suing Comcast Business Communications LLC for allegedly under-billed 911 fees.

Carlson said there's no one-size-fits-all approach. "It has to be done on a state-by-state basis," he said, "because while a number of the states have very similar 911 statutes, they're all different to some degree."

Debra Nesbit is a lobbyist for ACCG, Georgia's state association of counties. ACCG isn't a party to the lawsuits in that state, however, she explained that legislation to address 911 fee issues has been introduced at the General Assembly. It would allow for auditing phone service providers "to make sure they're paying all the fees." The legislation would also clarify the definition of telephone service, she said. "Is it an active line or is it a number that has been reserved for your use?"

"It does not impact in any way fees that they courts may rule were due and owing" under existing law, she added.

Counties' 911 districts are doing the best they can with what they have, Schneider concluded, but "there is a funding crisis for 911."

"I think sometimes the counties and the 911 districts perhaps get the blame for these issues, because people don't understand that they're being shortchanged financially so badly. It's sort of a heroic effort on the part of the counties and the 911 districts to make it work as well as it does." **CN**

lowstone River because of a **massive fish kill**. That's the finding of a report from the University of Montana; the closure cost the county between \$360,000 and \$524,000 in tourism revenue.

The report says that about 31 percent of jobs in Park County depend on tourism, a large portion related to the Yellowstone River, according to the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*.

Thousands of whitefish succumbed to a parasite in the water, according to State Fish, Wildlife and Parks officials, who closed the river on Aug. 19, as water temperatures hovered near 70 degrees and flows neared historic lows.

The river has since been reopened.

NEW YORK

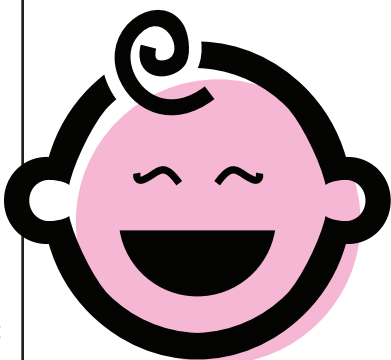
● The State Department has told **MONROE COUNTY** that its practice of waiving the \$25 **local share of passport fees** is a violation of federal law.

County Clerk Adam Bello said as many as 668 people have been given waivers on passport or pistol fees since 2008, the *Democrat and Chron-*

icle reported.

● Northern **WARREN COUNTY** residents will soon have access to a **mobile satellite Department of Motor Vehicles office** that will operate a few times a month.

County Clerk Pam Vogel told *The Post Star* that offering the service would also help the county capture 12.7 percent of fees that go entirely to the state when transactions are done online. The idea was modeled off of **WASHINGTON COUNTY's** mobile clerk's office.



NORTH CAROLINA

New fathers who work for **DURHAM COUNTY** will get 12 weeks of paid leave under a **new parental leave policy** that took effect Oct. 1.

The policy is also open to

MONEYMATTERS%

Poll: Living Longer, Women Retirees Could Spend 70 Percent of their Social Security Benefit Paying for Health Care Costs

On average, women live longer, meaning they spend more time in retirement and often do so with less savings. Due to these factors, women retirees could spend on average 170 percent of their Social Security benefit on health care costs.

According to a Nationwide Retirement Institute survey conducted by the Harris Poll, women count on Social Security or will count on it to pay, on average, 56 percent of all their expenses in retirement. However, 80 percent of retired women currently collecting Social Security benefits took those benefits early, locking in a lifetime of lower income.

The online survey included 465 women over age 50 who are retired or plan to be in the next

10 years. It found that of women currently collecting Social Security, only 17 (5 percent) maximized their monthly check by waiting to claim at age 70 or later.

"Too many women retirees have no retirement income outside of Social Security," said Roberta Eckert, vice president of the Nationwide Retirement Institute. "And even for women that do, the fact that they live longer makes maximizing Social Security benefits extremely important."

More than a third of women (35 percent) were kept from doing the things they wanted in retirement. Health care expenses in particular keep nearly one in four (24 percent) from the retirement they desired.

Looking back, 17 percent of

Making matters worse, a new survey finds four out of five women take Social Security early, locking in a lifetime of lower retirement income

women who are currently drawing Social Security wish they could change their decision and file later. Of those who would not change their filing decision, 39 percent say an unforeseen life event compelled them to take it early, including unplanned health problems (17 percent).

Women Want Help with Social Security Filing Options

More than one in four women

currently drawing Social Security (30 percent) say their Social Security payment is less than they expected.

Women who have yet to collect Social Security can expect to receive an average \$1,527 in monthly benefits. On average, women retirees are currently collecting \$1,153 and those who started taking Social Security early report receiving just \$1,084.

Only 13 percent of women say they received advice on Social Security from a financial advisor. However, nearly nine in 10 women surveyed who work with an advisor (86 percent) say their Social Security payment was as expected or more than they expected.

"There are a variety of efficient

filing strategies open to women — but too few seek professional advice to take advantage of them," said Kevin McGarry, director of the Nationwide Retirement Institute. **CN**

To help you plan for Social Security filing options, contact your Nationwide representative at 866.975.6363.

See how to make the most of your Social Security benefits at <http://www.nationwide.com/socialsecurity>.

Women can also visit: <http://www.nationwide.com/women-and-investing-social-security>.

Nationwide Investment Service Corporation (NISC), member FINRA. Nationwide Retirement Institute is a division of NISC.

2017 ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

NACo
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Does your county have an innovative program that improves county government and enhances services for county residents? Apply for the 2017 Achievement Awards! There are 18 categories ranging from information technology, health, criminal justice, human services and many more.

By applying for the 2017 Achievement Awards, entries will be in the running for the Counties Matter Challenge: Brilliant Ideas at Work, NACo President Bryan Desloge's presidential initiative.

To begin your application visit: www.naco.org/achievementawards

QUESTIONS?

Contact awards@naco.org

IMPORTANT DATES:

- SUBMISSIONS DEADLINE:
MARCH 27, 2017
AT 11:59 P.M. EDT
- NOTIFICATIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:
WEEK OF APRIL 24, 2017
- NOTIFICATIONS OF COUNTIES MATTER CHALLENGE:
WEEK OF MAY 29, 2017
- NACo ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXPOSITION:
JULY 21 – 24, 2017

COUNTIES MATTER CHALLENGE:

1

2016-2017

BRILLIANT IDEAS AT WORK