

# CN

## CountyNews



RWJF COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS HIT THE STREET **PG. 3**

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COUNTIES SEARCH FOR DEALS AT NETWORKING EVENT **PG. 9**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

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# Big-box assessments leave counties in the dark

Photo Illustration by Leon Lawrence III

**By Charles Taylor**  
senior staff writer

Counties stand to lose millions of dollars if the “dark-store” method of assessing big-box stores continues to spread.

Chains such as Lowe’s, Target and Home Depot are challenging their tax assessments — and winning — resulting in a loss of revenue to counties.

The dark-store method values big stores that are open for business as though they were vacant and closed. Big retail chains argue that their stores should be assessed based on comparable sales. They say their stores were built for a specific purpose and, once closed, are difficult to sell for anything near what it cost to build them, diminishing their value. In addition, big-box stores often have deed restrictions on their properties that prevent them from being used by another retailer.

“I see it as really having a contagion factor,” said Brad Slagh, Ottawa County, Mich. treasurer and current president of the Michigan Association of County Treasurers (MACT).

What began with big-box stores is spreading to “medium-box” retailers such as drugstore chain properties, he added.

In 2014, Meijer — a regional chain with stores in Marion County, Ind. — appealed a local store’s assessments covering a 10-year period. The state’s tax review board ordered the county to refund \$2.4 million.

Michigan, Indiana and Alabama are among states on the front lines of the issue. In Michigan, big box retailers have been appealing their tax assessments to the state’s tax tribunal, appointed by the governor, which has been siding with the stores’ owners. Since 2013, stores assessments have been reduced by \$75 million due to tribunal decisions, according to MACT.

Why these states? It’s not just them, according to Tim Wilmath, director of valuation

*See DARK STORE page 2*

## Senators propose help for hacking the hackers

**By Jacob Terrell**  
associate legislative director

New proposed legislation in the Senate would provide federal resources to state and local governments to combat cyber-attacks.

The State and Local Cyber Protection Act, introduced March 10 by Sens. Gary Peters (D-Mich.) and David Perdue (R-Ga.), would direct the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center (NCCIC) to coordinate with state and local governments on securing their information systems.

The bill would also provide state and local governments with access to up-to-date re-

sources on information security resources developed by the NCCIC. In addition the bill would institute training on cybersecurity, privacy and civil liberties; technical assistance to deploy technology that diagnoses and mitigates cyber threats; and access to DHS resources and other federal tools to ensure the security and resiliency of state and local civilian information systems.

“We applaud the introduction of the State and Local Cyber Protection Act by Senators. Peters and Perdue. In partnership with states, counties are often responsible for managing critical information that needs to be safeguarded for

*See CYBER page 2*

## House version of bill passed in December 2015

From CYBER page 1

privacy and personal protection. Counties work to ensure the security of information that travels through our nation's cyber systems," NACo Executive Director Matt Chase said.

"We look forward to continuing to work with Congress on legislation that provides counties with the tools necessary to mitigate the risk of cyber-attacks."

An identical version of the State and Local Cyber Protection Act (H.R. 3869) introduced by the House Information Technology Subcommittee Chair Rep. Will Hurd (R-Texas), passed the House by a voice vote, Dec. 14, 2015. **CN**



**SNAP/STATS**

**BEST COUNTIES FOR BANKERS**

St. Louis County, Mo.  
Somerset County, N.J.  
Johnson County, Kan.  
New Castle County, Del.  
Hennepin County, Minn.

\* based on most increases in deposits over past three years

Source: American Banker, March 7, 2016

# Counties seek legislative fixes for dark stores

From DARK STORE page 1

for Hillsborough County, Fla.'s property appraiser's office; these assessment challenges are occurring daily, including in his county. But he said the big-box stores may be targeting smaller jurisdictions with part-time assessors who have less experience with the issue. Willmath recently co-authored an extensive article for the International Association of Assessing Officers' magazine, *Fair & Equitable*.

Marquette County Board Chairman Gerald Corkin said that Marquette Township, city and county have been "hit hard" by the dark store issue.

Over the past two years, they've lost "approaching \$1 million" that's had to be returned to Home Depot and a number of other big-box stores within the county after their tax bills were reduced.

"For example, the Home Depot gets built for \$10 million, and the tax tribunal compared it to a blighted store that's out of business in Detroit," he said. "The assessment went from \$65 per square foot to \$25 per



"Auto dealerships have tried it and they've gotten some reductions."

— S. Erbisch

square foot," he explained. "The national average for these stores is \$65 per square foot, so they reduced the valuation here in our county by 50 to 60 percent.

"It's a serious issue here in Marquette County. We had a youth home that we had for decades to work with troubled children which we had to close, basically because of the loss of revenue from the big box stores," Corkin said.

A trio of Upper Peninsula

counties — Marquette, Delta and Dickinson — has been advocating "strongly" for a legislative fix, he added. His county has retained a private attorney, Jack Van Coevering, who formerly headed the tax tribunal, to seek legislation from the state's General Assembly. A bill passed in 2015 fell short of the mark.

Scott Erbisch, Marquette's county manager, called dark-store valuation an "emerging issue" for other states, and it's being applied to additional types of structures. "They've gone to commercial-residential," he said. "Auto dealerships have tried it and they've gotten some reductions."

As in Michigan, counties in Alabama are also looking for legislative help, according to Sonny Brasfield, executive director of Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA), who called dark store-based assessments a "scary concept in ad valorem tax."

"One of the Lowe's under litigation cost almost \$9.5 million to construct; it's being insured for more than \$10 million, and Lowe's argues that it's worth

about \$2.5 million."

Lowe's is challenging the assessments of 31 of its stores spread throughout the state's 67 counties, he added. "We're very, very uneasy in Alabama about what happens if we lose this case to Lowe's."

Prior to the state association's stepping in to play a coordinating role, individual counties were taking differing approaches to their dark-store assessment appeals.

Brasfield said that when the issue came to ACCA's attention last August, one county was preparing to go to trial in about three weeks. "He was going to go to trial by himself; [Lowe's] would have had a dozen attorneys."

Under current law, county district attorneys are required to defend all tax assessment challenges — not a field in which they specialize.

ACCA is currently supporting a bill at the Legislature that would allow counties to hire outside lawyers in tax dispute cases — and expert witnesses. The state Senate passed the measure on March 3; it's now being considered by the House. **CN**

## NACo, NTIA launch Internet connectivity initiative

A new initiative recently launched by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) intends to motivate and support communities that develop and implement community-based broadband plans, which align with the goals of cities and counties across the nation.

The project, dubbed the Community Connectivity Initiative, will include four major program elements: a self-assessment

tool, a report with recommendations, planning and implementation support, and a National Community of Practice that builds on best practices, documents success and provides multiple forums for collaboration.

NACo's partnership with NTIA on the Community Connectivity Initiative will focus on engaging county leaders to help identify a community's overall accessibility to broadband ser-

vices and best practices in overcoming obstacles in the pursuit of expanding broadband access. In the coming weeks, NACo will work with NTIA on developing a webinar for county leaders to become familiar with the initiative, and opportunities to interact with NTIA directly.

The Community Connectivity Initiative is part of a broader effort announced by the White House March 9, to connect 20 million more Americans to the

Internet by the year 2020. The White House's announcement focused on the Administration's new ConnectAll Initiative.

NTIA serves as the Executive Branch agency responsible for advising the president on telecommunication and information policy. NTIA was tapped to spearhead the Community Connectivity Initiative as part of a recommendation by the Administration's Broadband Opportunity Council Report. **CN**

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# County Health Rankings offer new comparisons, data on premature deaths

By Charles Taylor  
senior staff writer

For the first time, counties will be able to use the 2016 County Health Rankings to learn how they stack up against similar counties in other states.

The data are being provided in response to counties' requests, according to Julie Willems van Dijk, co-director of the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program — and can be accessed through the Compare Counties tool on the health rankings website [www.countyhealthrankings.org](http://www.countyhealthrankings.org).

"We heard from lots of people that they want to be able to compare their county to similar places not just within their own state but across the nation," she said. "So this year on the website you are able to pick any county in the nation and compare your county to that county." This could be especially useful for border counties with neighboring counties in a different state,

program officials said.

Willems van Dijk was quick to add, however, that this new functionality comes with a caveat: You can compare individual measures across state lines, but not rankings, since the latter are based on how counties compare with counties within their states.

Now in their seventh year, the rankings are a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI). The rankings are based on 30 health factors and five health outcomes, enabling counties within a state to assess their performance relative to each other. Among the measures rated are physical inactivity, access to health care, household income, educational attainment and children in poverty.

This year's key findings from the rankings show that follow-

ing a few years of improvement in premature death rates (deaths before age 75), rural counties lag "far behind" urban and suburban counties. And the rural rates are worsening. Nearly 1 in 5 rural counties saw increases in early deaths over the past decade. Large urban

counties have seen the greatest declines in premature death rates since the late 1990s, according to the findings.

A number of new indicators have been highlighted in this year's rankings, Willems van Dijk added, including frequent physical and mental distress, residential segregation, insufficient sleep and drug-overdose deaths. These data do not figure into the rankings but can be

used to provide a county with additional context.

Drug overdose deaths are up 79 percent since 2002. Rates are highest in northern Appalachia and in parts of the West and Southwest, and lowest in the Northeast, she said, adding that this is the first time the rankings have included these measures. "One of the reasons we featured it this year is we have a new data source that has been able to provide modeled data for smaller rural communities. Prior to this, we reported on overdose deaths," she explained, "but if there weren't at least 20 deaths in the community, the data was suppressed."

For all counties, the average drug overdose rate is 13 per 100,000 population. Sixteen percent of counties have rates of 20 per 100,000. In some counties, it's as high as 85 per 100,000.

The new residential segrega-

tion data show that the segregation of whites and blacks is greatest in the Northeast and Great Lakes regions, and lowest along the coastal southeastern United States.

"The reason we've included it is because there is evidence emerging that says communities that are highly segregated have poorer health outcomes, not simply for the minority population, certainly that's true," Willems van Dijk said, "but the whole population in very, very segregated communities does not perform as well."

Conversely, residential segregation can be a plus in certain immigrant communities. "There's a significant amount of evidence which shows that — especially for new immigrants — living together in communities with other new immigrants actually builds social cohesion and can be very, very positive for people in reducing stress," she said. **CN**

## County Health Rankings & Roadmaps

Building a Culture of Health, County by County

A Robert Wood Johnson Foundation program

# Senate committee preps aviation bill for debate

Members of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee introduced on March 9 a two-year, \$33.1 billion aviation reauthorization bill, barely ahead of the March 31 expiration date for current FAA authorization.

The Senate bill differs with the House's six-year authorization bill most dramatically by not proposing to remove air traffic control responsibilities from the FAA — one of the most controversial proposals included in the bill advanced by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee last month. Instead, the Senate bill proposes improvements to the current air traffic control system and the implementation of so-called NextGen technology.

Key programs for counties

addressed in the bill include:

- Funding for the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) would be increased by \$400 million to an annual amount of \$3.75 billion, which exceeds the average annual amount provided by the House bill of \$3.6 billion. AIP provides grants to public agencies for the planning and development of public-use airports.

- The Essential Air Service (EAS) program would be reauthorized for FY16 and FY17 at current funding levels. While the House bill authorized increasing levels of funding for EAS over the lifetime of the bill, reforms to the Airport and Airway Trust Fund tied to the privatization of the air traffic control system would make the program completely depen-

dent on discretionary appropriations.

Currently, Congress funds the EAS program through a combination of discretionary appropriations and overflight fees, providing in \$155 million in FY15 in discretionary funding and \$108 million in overflight fees. The Senate's bill would continue this approach for FY16 and FY17.

EAS provides subsidies for air service to small and remote airports.

- The Senate bill would provide \$10 million for the Small Community Air Service Development Program (SCASDP) annually, a significant increase from \$6 million authorized by Congress through the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 and the \$5 million an-

nual authorization proposed in the House bill.

SCASDP is a grant program designed to help small communities such as small rural counties address air service and airfare issues. While seemingly similar in mission, the SCASDP and EAS programs are separate and unique.

SCASDP's eligibility criteria are broader and provide a grant applicant the opportunity to self-identify its air service deficiencies and propose an appropriate solution, while EAS is a direct subsidy to air carriers and serves a limited universe of eligible applicants.

The Senate bill also provides robust reforms for the use and regulation of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), including a directive to the Government

Accountability Office (GAO) to study current legal remedies at the federal, state and local level that address concerns associated with UAS operations, and identify any remaining gaps for further consideration by Congress when the authorization would expire at the end of FY17.

Additionally, the bill would codify existing authority to authorize public aircraft operations (i.e. governmental), which could further support the increasing use of UAS by counties for various applications such as law enforcement and search and rescue activities. **CN**

(Jessica Monahan, associate legislative director, contributed to this report.)

# Ramsey County college students ease their ways into full-time workforce

By **Charlie Ban**  
senior staff writer

In their first economics classes, college students learn about opportunity cost and how doing one thing means missing out on something else. If they aren't financially secure, they're already well aware of that, especially if it has meant balancing a job and a full course load, often putting their education at risk.

Ramsey County, Minn. was aware of that. With an eye toward helping local college students succeed, the county manager's office is awarding paid internships, spanning two academic years, to local college

students at two-year Saint Paul College and four-year Metropolitan State University-Twin Cities.

"A lot of students just drop out of school because they can't afford it," said Carol Zierman, a senior analyst in the county's policy and planning department. "That's common among first-generation students, and the finances of a college education make it even harder for them to succeed."

But a 20-hour work week, nine months of the school year, at \$15 an hour takes a bite out of that challenge. The Progressive Student Internship Program gives them increasing responsibilities

"By the time the student completes their undergraduate degree, they've gained two years of professional experience and three serious professional references"

— C. Zierman

and challenges, and builds their resumes in the process.

"By the time the student completes their undergraduate degree, they've gained two years

of professional experience and three serious professional references," she said. "They're in a whole different position when they apply for jobs."

Though the program isn't specifically aimed at recruiting students to come work for the county, Zierman said the increased familiarity they gain isn't a bad thing.

"It certainly gives them exposure to all the things the county does," she said. "They also might not be ready to take on their internship jobs full time when they graduate, but their experience will certainly put them ahead of the curve."

The current interns, one a 22-year-old accounting student and the other a 38-year-old former YWCA manager, are spending their first year in the finance and parks and recreation departments, respectively. The next cohort will be assigned to human services and property assessing and tax departments.

Khalid Dayib is a fourth-year student at Metropolitan State, working on a double major in accounting and management information systems. He heard about the program from an email sent to all accounting majors, but was already familiar with local government after spending the summer of 2015 working for Minneapolis' finance department.

So far, he's enjoying the experience.

"I've had internships before where they give you something to do and you end up having a lot of free time," he said. "I enjoy staying busy, which I do here, having substantial work to do I can transfer my skills into the next position."

He's coming back for the next academic year while he finishes his second major, but over the summer, he'll be working in the state's department of revenue, in large part because of the strength of his progressive internship with Ramsey County.

Much of Dayib's work recent-

ly has been on credit card payment security standard compliance throughout the county, which has prompted work with 24 different departments. He will present his findings to the county audit committee in April.

His experience in city administration helped him adjust quickly, but not all interns will have his background.

"The county manager's office contributes the salaries but the departments that take the interns make major investments in terms of time and supervision for each of the roles," Zierman said, pointing out that the responsibilities each intern takes on is on par with that of a full-time staff member.

She said the ideal schedule will have students taking on the internships during their sophomore and junior years.

"It's to make sure we as an employer are really providing the opportunity for our community to get experience, and our young leaders to get experience to reach their greatest potential."

The program's position offerings are based on the opportunities available to intern-level staffers in the county's four different divisions: health and wellness, public safety and justice, economic growth and community investment, and public information and records.

"We're trying to make sure every service team has an opportunity to have an intern," Zierman said.

In May, the program will expand to a post-bachelor's degree graduate fellows finance track, a field that has proven hard for recruiting because of the competitive disadvantage inherent in public sector salaries.

Dayib has been tapped to help plan that finance track.

"I know what will appeal to people my age, how the county can attract applicants," he said, though he admitted he had his eye on one of the six spots after he finishes his undergraduate degrees. **CN**



NEW IN MARCH FROM NACo's

## COUNTY EXPLORER

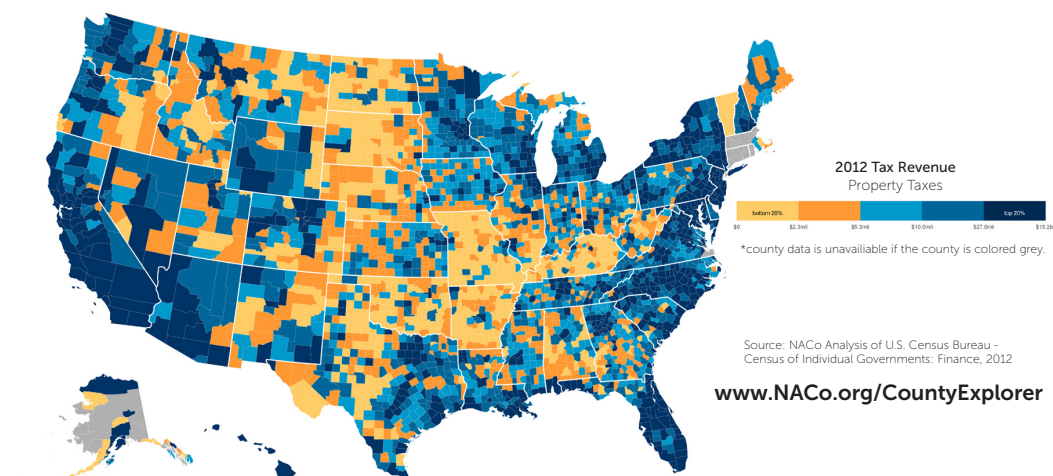
**63%** of counties have property and sales taxes accounting for a larger share of their revenue than state and federal dollars.

**335** counties invest more than half of their budget in health and human services.

**\$812** Million in Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) funding money goes directly to counties in 2016.

**47%** of county jails operate near or over capacity.

**91%** of all local jails are operated by counties.



[www.NACo.org/CountyExplorer](http://www.NACo.org/CountyExplorer)



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# Smart Transportation Planning at Work: Proven Safety Countermeasures

By **Diego Saltes Lowenthal**  
Federal Highway Administration

*Note: As part of NACo President Sallie Clark's presidential initiative, Safe and Secure Counties, NACo is partnering with the FHWA Office of Safety to offer a series of County News articles highlighting steps counties can take to promote transportation safety. Join NACo and FHWA for a webinar on April 6 to learn more about Enhancing Road Safety through the Improvement of Unsignalized Intersections.*

Road safety can be significantly improved and fatalities kept at bay by implementing what the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) calls Proven Safety Countermeasures — evidence-based roadway engineering measures that have not seen widespread implementation nationally.

From the Safety Edge<sup>SM</sup> to Road Diets, FHWA believes that widespread implementation of these countermeasures can have a big impact on safety.

In 2012, FHWA identified nine such countermeasures and has been promoting them since then. The countermeasures and their associated safety benefits are described below.

## The Safety Edge

Preventing vehicles from departing the roadway is a major safety goal. The Safety Edge is a proven technology that shapes the edge of a paved roadway at approximately 30 degrees from the pavement cross-slope during the paving process. The angled edge can help a vehicle safely return to its lane if one or more tires inadvertently leave the pavement. Safety Edge became a standard practice for most state DOTs and studies show that the application of the Safety Edge leads to an estimated reduction of 6 percent in total crashes on two-lane highways.



**Paved and sloped safety edges can make it easier for a vehicle that has left the roadway to return to the pavement.** All photos courtesy of FHWA

## Roundabouts

The modern roundabout is a type of circular intersection. Traffic entering the roundabout yields to vehicles already in the circle. Roundabouts improve intersection operations by reducing both delays and conflicts among all roadway users.

A roundabout provides channelization at its entrance and deflection around a center island designed to be effective in reducing conflict since vehicles are physically routed towards a safer path than would be the case in the absence of the roundabout.

Thus, roundabouts provide robust safety benefits. In particular, converting an intersection from a two-way stop controlled intersection to a roundabout can generally reduce 82 percent of severe injury or fatal crashes and 44 percent of total crashes.

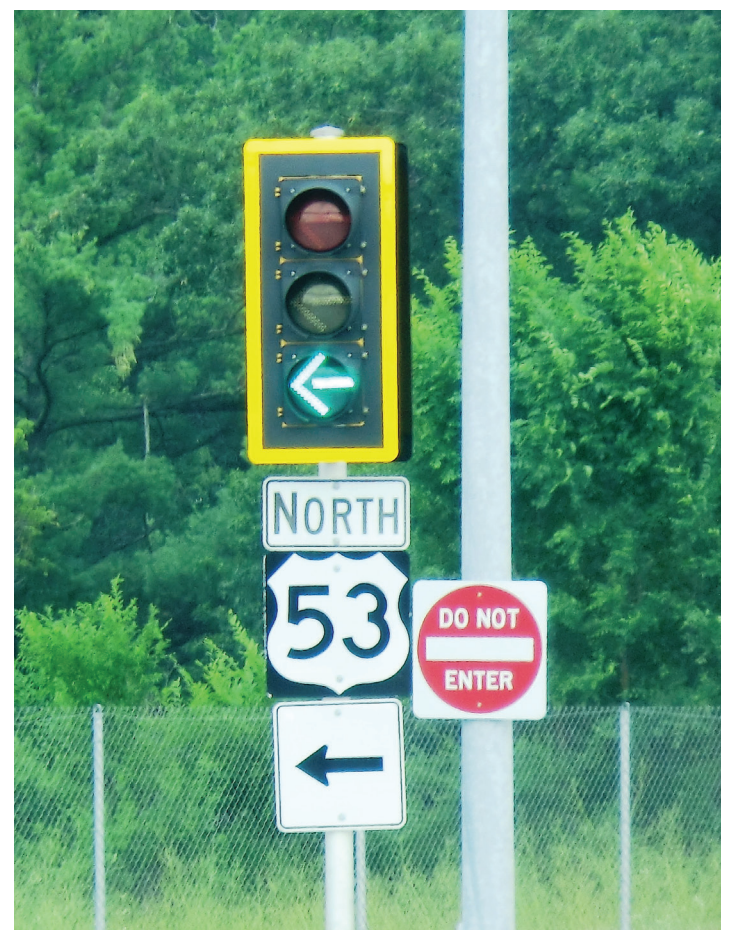
## Corridor Access Management

Access management refers

to the design, implementation and control of entry and exit points along a roadway. This includes intersections with other roads and driveways that serve adjacent properties. Areas where effective access management has been implemented have experienced a 5 percent to 23 percent reduction in all crashes along two-lane rural highways, and a reduction in severe crashes of 25 percent to 31 percent along urban and suburban arterials.

## Back plates with Retro-reflective Borders

Back plates are added to a traffic signal in order to improve the visibility of the illuminated face of the signal. The improved visibility is made more effective by framing the back plate with a retro-reflective border, which is made to



Traffic signals are easier to see, especially in bright sunlight, if they have back plates. At night, headlights cause the yellow border reflect light back to the driver.

See **SAFE ROADS** page 7



Centerline rumble strips on rural two-lane roads can reduce head-on or fatal-injury crashes by up to 44 percent.

From SAFE ROADS page 6

shine in the dark by vehicle headlights. The use of back plates with retro-reflective borders may result in a 15 percent reduction in all crashes at urban, signalized intersections.

### Longitudinal Rumble Strips and Stripes on Two-Lane Roads

Many drivers have at some point felt a strong vibration when they accidentally moved away from the center of the road. This vibration may be caused by a countermeasure called longitudinal rumble strips, which are milled or raised elements on the pavement intended to alert inattentive drivers through vibration and sound that their vehicles are about to leave the travel lane.

Rumble strips can either be located on the road shoulder, the edge line (placed at the edge of the travel lane), or center line (installed at or near the center line of an undivided roadway).

A variation of this countermeasure, rumble stripes are either edge-line or center-line rumble strips where the pavement marking is placed over the rumble strip, as shown in the accompanying picture.

Several safety benefits are associated with rumble strips. For instance, centerline rumble strips on rural two-lane roads have been shown to yield a 44 percent reduction in head on or fatal and injury crashes on rural two-lane roads.

### Delineation and Friction for Horizontal Curves

When a straight road shifts

into a horizontal curve, it creates a more demanding environment for the driver, vehicle and pavement.

Safety challenges are compounded with nighttime driving or inclement weather. Recent studies show that 28 percent of all fatal crashes occur on horizontal curves. The image below shows a horizontal curve delineated with chevron signs.

The safety benefits from this countermeasure are promising: installing chevron signs on horizontal curves on rural two-lane undivided roads can produce a 25 percent reduction in nighttime, non-intersection crashes of all severity types.

Increasing the friction on the road surface can also greatly improve safety on horizontal curves. For a pilot by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation in District 5 along Route 611 in Northampton County, the district agreed to have a contractor apply a

high-friction surface product on about 500 feet of roadway at the curve. The district saw wet-pavement-related crashes at the spot drop from 20 in the 10 years prior to the treatment to zero in seven years after it was installed in 2007.

### Medians and Pedestrian Crossing Islands in Urban and Suburban Areas

A median is an area between opposing lanes of traffic, excluding turn lanes. Medians and pedestrian crossing islands offer safe crossing opportunities for pedestrians that do not cross at the intersection and may reduce pedestrian crashes by up to 46 percent and motor vehicle crashes by up to 39 percent in urban and suburban areas.

### Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon

Pedestrian hybrid beacons serve as a conspicuous vi-

sual alert for vehicle drivers at pedestrian crossings. The beacon is “dark” until a pedestrian pushes a button to activate it. After displaying brief flashing and steady yellow intervals, the device displays a steady red indication to drivers and a “walk” indication to pedestrians, allowing them to cross a major roadway while traffic is stopped. After the pedestrian phase ends, the walk sign changes to a flashing orange hand to notify pedestrians that their clearance time is ending.

The hybrid beacon displays alternating flashing red lights to drivers while pedestrians finish their crossings before once again going dark at the conclusion of the cycle. Installation of the pedestrian hybrid beacon has been shown to

provide up to a 69 percent reduction in pedestrian crashes and up to a 29 percent reduction in total roadway crashes.

### Road Diet

A Road Diet generally involves converting a road with only vehicle through lanes into a mixture of through lanes, two-way left turn lanes, bicycle lanes, parking, pedestrian refuge islands and transit stops. By reducing speeds and improving mobility for all users, Road Diets can reduce crashes by up to 70 percent in some cases. **CN**

For more information, please visit: <http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/provencountermeasures/>

<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/everydaycounts/edc-3/roaddiets.cfm>

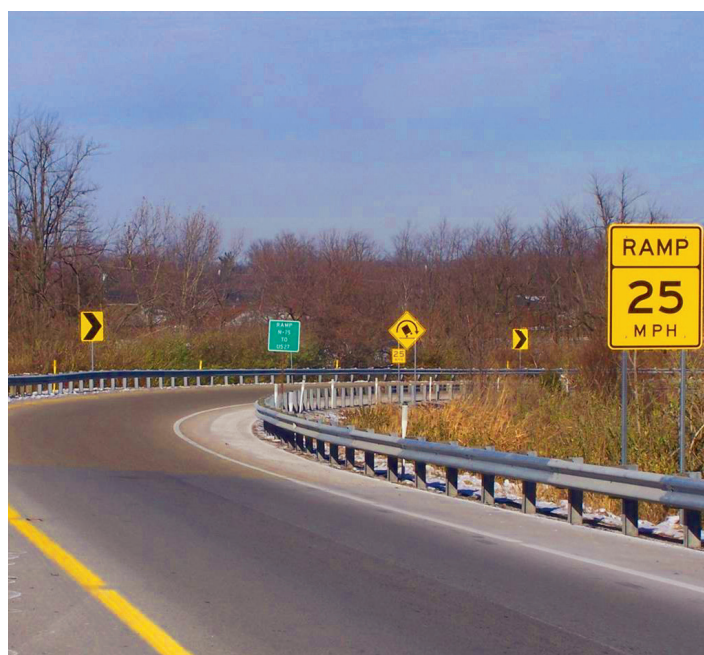
## WORD SEARCH

### MARIPOSA COUNTY, CALIF.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS FEATURED COUNTY IN 'WHAT'S IN A SEAL?'

Created By: Charles Taylor

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



Twenty-eight percent of all fatal crashes occur on horizontal curves. Chevron signs send a strong visual cue to slow down.

- AGUA FRIA** Ghost town in the county
- BUTTERFLY** Meaning of Mariposa in Spanish
- BUTTERFLY DAYS** Annual celebration of Monarch Butterflies
- FRESNO AND INYO** Offspring counties carved out of Mariposa
- GOLD RUSH** Drove prospectors' migration to the area
- JOHN C FREMONT** 19th century explorer of the region
- LIMESTONE SALAMANDER** Species found only along Merced River in county
- MADERA** Neighboring county to the south

- MARIPOSA CREEK** Site of several mining camps during Gold Rush
- MERCED RIVER** Flows through the county
- MOTHER LODE** Gold-rich area of California
- MOTHER OF COUNTIES** County's nickname, having "birthed" all or parts of 11 counties
- ONE-FIFTH** Fraction of California Mariposa County once comprised
- SIERRA NEVADA** County lies in foothills of this mountain range
- YOSEMITE** National park, part of which lies in county

## BRIGHT IDEAS | CLARK COUNTY, NEV.

# Kiosks Print Marriage Certificates for Las Vegas Wedding Couples

**PROBLEM:** Couples who are getting married while on vacation in Clark County, Nev. need documentation before they leave town for home.

**SOLUTION:** The county has developed several self-service kiosks that can produce certificates, freeing county clerk's staff.

By **Charlie Ban**  
senior staff writer

Hidden behind the flowers, dancing music, surf and turf and sometimes underneath a table centerpiece, the marriage license is the part of the

ceremony that can't be cut out, even if the couple elopes. Or gets married in Las Vegas.

Clark County, Nev., issued 80,738 marriage licenses in 2014, more than twice as many as second-place Cook County, Ill., which means a lot of work for the county recorder's staff, who would be responsible for not just processing but producing certificates for the couples.

Budget cuts to the recorder's office made the task even tougher, because a 22 percent cut to funding forced a 20 percent cut in staff. But people kept getting married, particularly from outside of Clark County, and needed copies of their marriage certificates immediately.

But perhaps the staff did not need to be a third wheel for the couples.

While they couldn't make their own certificates, couples could do the next best thing — enter the identifying data, pay

with their credit card and get their certificate.

"It's as easy as going to the DMV and getting your car registered," said Maurice Reid a senior business systems analyst for the county, in no way implying that the same romantic feelings necessarily applied to automobile registration.

There wasn't a mad rush for certificates at one particular time to prompt the county to move this function to a machine.

"This was a way to streamline the process," Reid said. "Now people aren't waiting in line to get their marriage certificate, and they don't have to come all the way to the government center to get it."

The county also has a marriage certificate kiosk in its remote government center office.

The kiosks contain digitized certificates back to 2002, for a total of more than 1.3 million. Couples who married before 2002 will have to continue to request certificates in person at the clerk's office.

In-house development of the software through the county recorder's office, plus the equipment to build the kiosks, totaled \$60,000. The county projects that the kiosks save \$20,000 a year in overtime costs. The kiosks print out a monthly average of 200 certificates.

The program's success has prompted the county to develop kiosks to assist the recorder's office staff, which are scheduled to debut in early 2017.

"The marriage certificate kiosks have been a way to improve customer service and we see some opportunities to expand that," Reid said. **CN**

*Bright Ideas features noteworthy and award-winning programs.*



## ON THE MOVE

### NACO OFFICERS, COUNTY OFFICIALS

NACo President **Sallie Clark** and Women of NACo (WON) President **Mary Ann Borgeson** attended a White

House event celebrating Women's History Month, March 16.

Greg Gianforte, the Republican candidate in Montana's gubernatorial race, has tapped Phillips County Commissioner **Lesley Robinson** as his running mate. Robinson, 49, is Western Region

representative on NACo's Executive Committee and past Western Interstate Region

(WIR) president. Gianforte, a wealthy tech entrepreneur, has cast Robinson as the voice of the state's agricultural and rural communities.

President Clark and Central Region Representative **Cindy Bobbitt** represented NACo at the Iowa State Association of Counties Spring School, March 10.



**Robinson**



**Bobbitt**

### NACO STAFF

**Alex Koroknay-Palicz**, membership coordinator, will be in Cleveland County, Okla. for the Association of County Commissioners of Oklahoma Spring Conference March 30-31.



## MARIPOSA COUNTY, CALIF.

INTRODUCED IN 1883

**W**hen California became a state in 1850, one-fifth of that territory was Mariposa County — the largest of 27 original counties. But between 1851 and 1893, parts went to become six entire counties and add to five others, giving it the nickname "mother of counties."

Some of Mariposa's territory added to Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Mono, Inyo

and San Benito counties, and the entirety of Tulare, Merced, Fresno, Kern, Kings and Madera counties.

*(If you would like your county's seal featured in "Behind the Seal," contact Charlie Ban, senior staff writer: 202.942.4249 or cban@naco.org.)*

*Renee LaRoche, clerk of the board, assisted.*

The county courthouse, featured on the seal, was built in 1954 is the **oldest functioning courthouse in California.**





# Trading places: counties search for the best deal

By Daniel Brookmyer  
research associate

Forging international connections is a vital step for counties to promote their exports and attract foreign direct investment (FDI).

The United States is the second largest exporting country in the world, with more than 11 million American jobs supported by U.S. exports in 2013. It also receives the largest amount of FDI in the world, accounting for an additional 5 million jobs for American workers employed by U.S. subsidiaries of global companies. To introduce, counties to the

relationships at NACo. "With the exchange of business cards, officials can take contact information home to their counties and connect with economic development offices to nurture those relationships," he added.

The mix of countries from both the developed world and emerging markets at the event emphasized the key players in today's global economy. The trade and investment professionals speaking at the networking event represented the Indian Embassy, the Brazilian Embassy, Germany Trade and Invest, the Confederation of Indian Industry, the Brazilian

national investment professionals described several case studies of international investment in the United States. For example, Brazilian aerospace companies operate in Arizona, Florida and Tennessee.

Texas is the largest beneficiary of Indian investment in the United States, valued at \$3.85 billion. German investment is highest in Calif. and Texas, but German businesses also employ over 25,000 people in each of the following states; Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania, with almost half of those jobs in the manufacturing sector. The geographic spread of FDI across state lines provides yet another reason why FDI should be on every county's radar.

Attracting investment directly at the local level has been explored less than at the state or regional level, according to Johnson.

Attendees discussed ways to involve counties more in the process. Local governments often do not have the resources of state and regional development boards, but they still have several tools at their disposal.

Foreign Direct Investment strategies at the local level can begin matching local assets to global needs through regional industry clusters — interconnected sets of businesses and suppliers in a common geographic area. Then, local officials can work to spread awareness of county offerings to international firms in the targeted industry clusters.

The next IED Task Force member meeting in Long Beach, Calif., will visit the fifth largest port in the United States. For more information about the International Economic Development Task Force, contact Jonathan Harris: [JHarris@naco.org](mailto:JHarris@naco.org) or 202.942.4247. **CN**



NACo members meet with Germany's Trade and Invest group during the International Economic Development Task Force's networking event at the Legislative Conference. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

global world of trade, NACo's International Economic Development Task Force hosted an international networking event at the recent legislative conference.

With a diverse group of international trade and investment professionals from three major trading partners, county leaders discussed the steps local governments can take to attract FDI to their counties and promote the exports of their local businesses abroad.

Larry Johnson, chairman of the IED Task Force and a DeKalb County, Ga. commissioner, said the meeting showed how county officials can build direct investment re-

Industries Coalition and the Representative of German Industry and Trade. The Commerce Department identifies Germany as the third largest source of FDI into the United States, while Brazil and India represent the third and fourth fastest growing sources of FDI, respectively. In 2015, these three countries were in the top 20 U.S. export markets.

When looking to invest in the United States, foreign companies usually begin their search at the state or regional level, and counties can advocate for their region by promoting and marketing its business strengths in the global marketplace. The inter-

## PROFILES IN SERVICE

**LARRY JOHNSON**  
Board of Directors  
County Commissioner  
DeKalb, Ga.



**Number of years active in NACo:** 11 years

**Years in public service:** 14 years

**Occupation:** Public Health Educator

**Education:** Ph.D. in public health

**The hardest thing I've ever done:** going to grad school full-time and working up to six jobs to support my family

**Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner:** President Obama, President Theodore Roosevelt, Harriet Tubman

**You'd be surprised to learn that I:** love reality shows.

**The most adventurous thing I've ever done is:** fly a plane at 16 years of age.

**My favorite way to relax is:** watching sports.

**I'm most proud of:** of being a husband and a father.

**Every morning I read:** my Bible.

**My favorite meal is:** fried chicken.

**My pet peeve is:** people who waste their human potential.

**My motto is:** seek first to understand before being understood (Covey).

**The last book I read was:** *Pursuit of Purpose* by Dr. Myles Munroe.

**My favorite movie is:** *The Shawshank Redemption*.

**My favorite music is:** all types.

**My favorite president is:** a toss-up between Teddy Roosevelt and Barack Obama.

**My county is a NACo member because:** of resources we receive; partnerships that are developed; and friendships that are maintained.

**A dream I have is to:** to travel the United States in a Winnebago.



## CN SPOTLIGHT



### POTUS SIGHTING

NACo President Sallie Clark visited with U.S. President Barack Obama March 16 for an event celebrating Women's National History Month. With them is National League of Cities President Melodee Colbert-Kean. Photo courtesy of Valerie Jarrett

# MONEY MATTERS

## Minimum Wage Hikes: the Case for Caution

By Joel Griffith  
FSC program manager

Across the nation, demands for a dramatically higher federal and local minimum wages continue. Forty hours per week at just \$7.25 comes out to under \$1,300 monthly before tax. The difficulty of getting by on such minimal income has inspired many to call for either an increase in the federal minimum or a living wage based on locality. After all, even \$10 per hour in an urban area such as Chicago or New York City might barely cover essentials such as food and shelter.

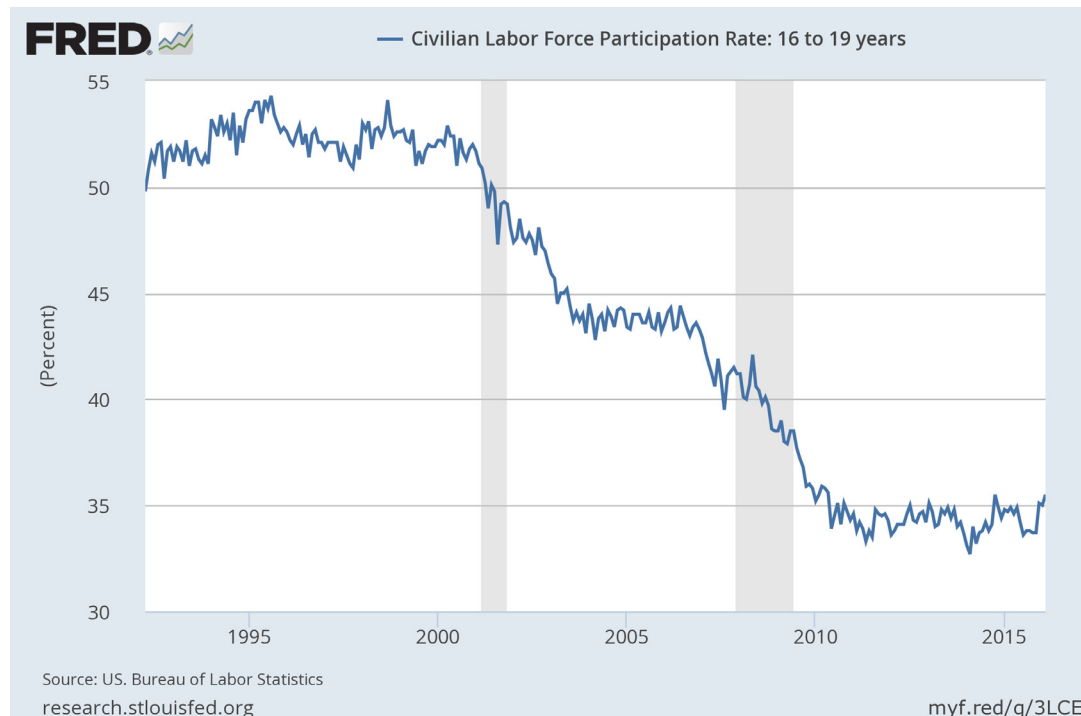
Although the federal wage has remained at \$7.25 per hour since July 2009, some municipalities have enacted local minimum wages far in excess. For instance, Chicago passed an ordinance in December 2014 hiking the minimum wage to \$14 per hour by 2019.

This represents a nearly 40 percent increase from the current \$10.50 per hour. And on March 2, Oregon enacted legislation dramatically hiking the state's minimum wage in increments through 2022. The wage varies based on the degree of urbanization, but Portland will top out at \$14.75 per hour. Perhaps most notably, Seattle enacted a \$15 per hour minimum wage in April of last year.

Before jumping to such government-directed solutions to the plight of those struggling near the bottom of the economic ladder, possible unintended consequences should be considered.

Let's first take a look at the extent of the population impacted by minimum wages.

It's a misconception to conclude that a significant portion of the population is working for minimum wages. In fact, according to an April 2015 study by Bureau of Labor Sta-



According to the latest BLS data, although 9.5 percent of hourly part-time workers earn at or below the federal minimum wage, only 1.8 percent of full-time workers do so.

tistics (BLS), 3.9 percent of hourly paid workers earned at or below the federal minimum wage in 2014. Considering that more than 60 percent of workers are salaried rather than hourly, the actual percentage of all workers earning at or below the wage is under 2 percent.

In addition, a 2013 analysis of data from BLS and the Census Bureau conducted by labor economist James Sherk shows that the average family income of those earning minimum wage jobs is over \$53,000 per year. As it turns out, many minimum-wage workers are merely supplementing their family's existing income. In fact, according to the latest BLS data, although 9.5 percent of hourly part-time workers earn at or below the federal minimum wage, only 1.8 percent of full-time workers do so.

Within this segment of min-

imum-wage workers, it should be noted that those most dramatically impacted include the young and the under-educated:

■ A teenage worker is five times more likely to be in a minimum-wage job than someone 25 or older (15 percent vs. 3 percent). Additionally, only about one in five workers is under the age of 25; yet nearly one in two minimum-wage workers have yet to reach this milestone.

■ Those without a high school diploma are more than three times as likely to earn the federal minimum wage or less (7 percent vs. 2 percent).

Of course, that only a small percentage of the population is earning just the minimum wage is small consolation to those actually employed in those jobs. For them, a raise of 30, 40 or 50 percent would surely be welcomed. However,

the unintended consequences of a legislatively mandated raise should be considered.

What could go wrong?

In short, an employer hopes that the value generated by a worker exceeds the costs of employing him. Correspondingly, as the cost of a unit of labor increases, the profit to the employer declines. Increasing the minimum wage artificially increases this cost for labor.

Some employees earning the minimum may possess the capacity to remain profitable even with the higher wage mandate; these employees may benefit personally from a minimum-wage increase. However, those unable to provide sufficient value commensurate with the higher wages will find themselves inadvertently priced out of a job.

Ironically, the very people intended to be helped by increases in the minimum wage are the ones most prone to be negatively impacted — the young, the less-educated and the less-experienced. It's these individuals who are most in need of the income and the experience that a low-paying job can provide. After all, a work ethic developed as a young

adult in a minimum-wage job can prove vital towards obtaining more income and responsibility later. Unfortunately, the number of teenagers, in particular, participating in the workforce remains stuck at near a historically low one in three.

To further exacerbate the problem, economists David Neumark, University of California, and William Wascher, Federal Reserve Board, concluded in their well-known 1995 paper that "such increases raise the probability that more-skilled teenagers leave school and displace lower-skilled workers from their jobs. We find that the displaced lower-skilled workers are more likely to end up non-enrolled and non-employed."

In their book published by MIT 13 years later, they similarly concluded, "Our conclusions imply that a higher minimum wage will impose costs on low-skill workers and low-income families without delivering benefits that offset those costs. Conversely, of course, our results indicate that reductions in minimum wages would yield net benefits."

Commendably, community leaders and politicians often seek to improve the lives of others. However, good intentions must be based in sound economics; otherwise, the proverbial cure may prove to be worse than the disease. **CN**

*(The view reflected here does not represent NACo policy. If you have an alternative viewpoint on increasing the minimum wage, County News invites your opinion. Please email your submission to bschlott@naco.org. Subject Line: Money Matters. Note: County News will publish the case for raising the minimum wage in a future edition.)*

# CountyNews **HOT TOPICS** Erie County, N.Y. teaches residents to reverse opioid overdoses, provides means to do it

By Charles Taylor  
senior staff writer

Between Jan. 29 and the first week of February, 23 people died from heroin overdoses in Erie County, N.Y. Authorities say a bad batch of the drug was to blame. The victims ranged in age from 20 to 60.

As in many areas of the United States, the county that surrounds Buffalo has an opioid-abuse problem — involving street drugs or prescription medicines, and sometimes a combination of the two.

County public health officials believe the recent fatal doses may have been heroin mixed with fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opiate pain killer, according to Dr. Gale Burstein, the county's health commissioner.

Erie County, like a number of counties nationwide, is attacking

the problem through education and advocacy. The health department offers frequent, free trainings for professionals and the lay public in opioid overdose recognition and how to use naloxone (also known by its brand name, Narcan) to reverse an overdose.

Nine are scheduled throughout the community through the end of April — at churches, community centers, fire stations and schools.

Burstein added that the outreach is an outgrowth of training for first responders.

"We were very aggressive about training first responders, and then we realized that opioid addiction is so widespread that we really needed to reach out to Erie county residents," she said, "so we've opened up our training to both first responders and ... county residents."

The health department posts

its training schedule on its website, and the sessions are held during daytime and evening hours, and some Saturdays. Instruction includes how to use naloxone nasal spray to reverse an overdose. Upon completion, participants can receive a kit with two doses of Narcan.

After one or both are used, the person must complete an Overdose Reporting Form, which is submitted to the health department, before they can receive a replacement Narcan kit. It asks questions such as where the overdose occurred, how many doses were used, was 911 called and was rescue breathing performed?

"We're really trying to empower Erie County residents — either for their professional work, or because their lives are affected by loved ones who are using or addicted — to help them be em-

powered to resuscitate a victim if they're encountered," Burstein added.

Since 2014, she estimates that more than 1,000 people have been trained, including "train the trainers," who can then act as force multipliers and reach even more people. Classes are usually a mixture of first responders and residents, some of whom work in health-related fields or come in contact with narcotics in their jobs, Burstein said.

"We're also trying to reach out to schools to train staff in schools to be able to recognize a drug overdose and use naloxone," she added. "There are many areas where people need to be trained."

The county's outreach doesn't stop with training. On April 12, the health department will hold a daylong "free drive-through disposal for all types of prescrip-

tion and all types of over-the-counter ... medications and all types of needles — no questions asked."

Burstein said the object is to save lives — people who may eventually be able to benefit from treatment programs and other interventions.

Data from the county medical examiner's office for 2015 show a higher number of overdoses in suburban and rural areas compared to the city of Buffalo, she said.

"Many of these misuses and addiction problems stem from originally receiving legitimate pain medication prescriptions," she said. "You can imagine this would touch many people, different socioeconomic statuses, in different living environments, suburban, rural and urban areas. This is really a problem throughout our community." **CN**

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## the HR DOCTOR

With Phil Rosenberg



# Waiting in Line While Your Blood Pressure Increases



In two recent encounters with government service, The HR Doctor was reminded that in bureaucracies well-meaning policies can lead to annoyance and frustration.

In the first of these encounters, I was engaged to conduct a consulting review of a less than favorable report from a local inspector general. The review concerned a local government not adhering to its own procurement rules. It spent nearly \$1 million in the process for temporary help.

When I arrived at the agency, I dutifully got into line to go through the security-screening procedures. These procedures are the same basic ones which many local governments now have in place. This included waiting in line to see a somewhat less than enthusiastic security guard who made a copy of my driver's license and issued a paper printed badge, which supposedly demonstrated that I had gone through the screening process.

Since I arrived early in the morning, prior to the opening of the majority of offices, I noted that most of the people in line in front of me were contractors or trades professionals.

They needed to go visit the Building Department to get a permit to do whatever work they were hired to do. The department was kind enough to open early to ease the burden on these customers. Every hour spent waiting in line reduces their potential income.

So it was that some of my new construction worker friends and I completed the screening process and moved to the elevator to get up to our respective floors. My destination was the fourth floor where distin-

guished Americans such as elected commissioners and department heads hung out. The floor below was home to the Building Department.

As the elevator doors opened onto the third floor, I got a splendid view of people waiting in line out in the hall to get to see the single person at the Building Department counter to deal with the clients' needs.

Some of the same people that spent a long time driving to the Building Department, followed by a long time waiting in line for security screening, and waiting for the slow elevator now "graduated" to a line crawling along through the open corridor toward the single available window.

The closer people got to the end of the line, the more fidgety and visibly annoyed they were with their early-morning encounter with the government. It was very clear that the process produced not necessarily a building permit but an irate citizenry — likely a very unintended consequence.

After this trip to a government full of extremely nice and competent people needing some consulting help, I spent a lovely weekend organizing and preparing the information necessary to complete not one but two income tax returns — a business return for my consulting practice and the personal return.

During the year, I try to organize files in a semi-coherent manner, knowing full well that sooner rather than later the drudgery of trying to figure out federal income tax forms would face me. However, it took essentially a full day out of my life to complete the process.

By the time I finished the long process of sorting through information, I realized that I had become sufficiently an-

noyed that even my dogs got up and left my home office to go to another room. I had to apologize to both of them and offer them multiple dog treats to get them to like me again.

More than three centuries ago a much simpler form of taxation aroused the ire of the citizens of the British colonies in North America and contributed to a growing resentment. That, in turn, culminated in the probable loss of many pounds of Earl Grey tea, not to mention helping foment the American Revolution.

I imagined how one of those fine colonists would feel if he or she could be transplanted to the current year and compelled to deal with the complicated process of trying hard to comply with income tax filing requirements. They might consider the entire experience revolting.

Three things stand out for me in considering both of these government encounters occurring so close together. The first is that the noble objective of ensuring the public safety from

shoddy and dangerous building practices and the very legitimate need to raise funds to support a civil society through its government can become lost in a process which over time morphs almost out of control.

The process itself "shape shifts" into exasperation and citizen annoyance. On the other hand, it leads to business opportunities for process-improvement consultants. Apparently, many of these government organizations appear unable to improve their own processes without pressure or help from outside.

The second commonality is to imagine that you are simply a homeowner who would like a dream kitchen remodel to be completed in a rather timely fashion. You have no knowledge of how the processes of permitting unfold. You just want a shiny new kitchen.

As soon as you find out about the complexity, you decide to add to your own costs by hiring a contractor who, in turn, may hire "permit runners" to suffer

through the process on their behalf.

This is really not very much different than the practice made famous during the Civil War of buying your way out of the military draft.

You simply hired a substitute to relieve you of the burden of defending your country. In the case of the complexity of income taxes, the need to raise money combined with the years of built up sludge and barnacles on the hull of the ship of state has created a monster system, which can only be fathomed by tax professionals and lawyers — not just any lawyers, mind you, but lawyers who become specialists at taxation.

In our frustration and complexity we create armies of third-party interveners to relieve us of the problems of dealing with our own government. Something doesn't quite sound right in terms of the basic value of positive interactions with those who represent us.

The third observation I made in comparing these two encounters was one of the same ones that drove me decades ago to choose a career in local government, rather than at a "higher level" government such as the state or the federal system.

Standing in line in the Building Department may be very annoying at times, but at least the citizen gets to drive a relatively short distance and go in and meet face-to-face with an official "government human" who may be in charge of a process.

When I compare that to my experience in disaster and emergency management dealing with an organization such as FEMA, I come away every time with a renewed appreciation for the importance of local government in our lives every day. **CN**

**GET TO KNOW...**



**San Benito County, Calif.**

**Welcome to NACo, San Benito County, Calif.**

If on a visit to San Benito you happen to look up and see a bird with an incredible wingspan – it's likely to be a California condor. San Benito County – in the Coast Range Mountains of California – is home to **Pinnacles National Park**, the only National Park Service release site for the captive-bred and endangered birds. **California condors have wingspans of up to 9.5 feet and can weigh between 15–22 pounds.**

**Get to know another new NACo member in the next issue of County News.**



# 75% OF U.S. COUNTIES NOW NACo MEMBERS

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- Finney County, Kan.
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- Smith County, Kan.



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Governor,  
State of Wyoming

# CN ACROSS THE NATION

## ALABAMA

The **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** Commission unanimously approved a minority- and women-owned business initiative. Its goal is to achieve at least 30 percent participation by minority- and women-owned firms in the county's bidding process, the *Montgomery Advertiser* reported.

"Montgomery County spends a lot of money on construction projects, and minorities have not had a piece of the pie in being able to receive these contracts," commission Chairman Elton Dean said.

Under the initiative, the County Commission is not required to award a bid or contract to anyone other than to the lowest responsible bidder.

## ARKANSAS

The **PULASKI COUNTY** Quorum Court is considering amending the county's personnel policy so that **employees can't receive their higher salaries** if they are required to transfer to a lower-paying job.

Recently, a former Pulaski County attorney kept her annual salary of \$98,000 after being reassigned to a job in the county assessor's office that typically pays between \$52,000 and \$55,000 per year, according to ArkansasOnline.

## COLORADO

Get caught smoking once on

**BOULDER COUNTY's** park or open space lands, and you'll face a \$75 fine. Do it again, that'll be \$150, according to the *Times-Call*. A third offense will carry a \$300 fine under regulations revised by the Board of County Commissioners.

Meanwhile, the board also **banned the smoking of marijuana** — and the consumption of cannabis-containing edibles — in county parks and open spaces. It's already illegal, under state law, to use or consume pot in public places.

But according to parks officials, the local law will make it possible for park rangers to deal with violations more quickly, without having to call — and wait — for sheriff's deputies to respond.

## INDIANA

With the recent inclusion of **RANDOLPH COUNTY**, all 92 of Indiana's counties are now eligible to fast-track requests for **Foreign Trade Zone designation**.

A Foreign-Trade Zone allows foreign and domestic merchandise to be admitted to the U.S. for operations "such as storage, exhibition, assembly, manufacture and processing, without being subject to formal customs entry procedures, the payment of customs duties or the payment of federal excise taxes until the finished goods leave the zone and enter the



## OHIO

A local business, Window Creations, LLC, recently created and donated a piece of **stained-glass artwork** to the **VAN WERT COUNTY** Board of Elections. Reggie Buehrer and company, created the window, which shows a copy of the U.S. Constitution, a quill pen and ink-bottle and a portion of the American flag, to display in the front window of the Van Wert County Board of Elections. Shown here after the installation are (l-r): Commissioner Thad Lichtensteiger; Reggie Buehrer, Window Creations, LLC; and Commissioner Todd Wolfrum.

Photo courtesy of Van Wert County, Ohio

U.S. for domestic consumption," according to Ports of Indiana.

Indiana is only the second state in the nation, after Delaware — which has three counties — to establish an accelerated application process for Foreign-Trade Zones (FTZ) in all of its counties.

## MARYLAND

**HOWARD COUNTY's storm water remediation fee** isn't going away, at least not before 2018. County councilmembers

rejected a proposal that would cut the fee in half by FY17 and eliminate it by FY18, *The Baltimore Sun* reported. County Executive Allan Kittleman and Councilman Greg Fox introduced the measure to slash the fee. It currently brings in about \$10 million each year.

The council majority cited concerns about how storm water remediation projects would be paid for absent a dedicated source of revenue.

Expressing his disappointment, Kittleman said, "We'll find out what the next council will do in 2018."

## NEBRASKA

While waiting for a bill to pass the Legislature that would change the requirements for county board sizes, **LANCASTER COUNTY** has become the target of a lawsuit seeking the **addition of two more commissioners**.

State law currently requires counties with populations topping 300,000 to have seven

commissioners; the bill would raise that threshold to 400,000, the *Lincoln Journal Star* reported. The suit cites the U.S. Census Bureau's estimates that the county passed that point in December 2014.

The bill would also base those requirements on decennial census numbers. If passed, the legislation would only affect Lancaster County — **DOUGLAS COUNTY** weighs in above 500,000 residents and **SARPY COUNTY** is well under 200,000.

■ **BUFFALO** and **YORK counties** are near the top of a list of creditors that have been stiffed by the U.S. bankruptcies of Spanish energy giant Abengoa SA. According to Omaha.com, the two counties are among the 11 largest creditors in the state who stand to lose a total \$20 million. Buffalo County (pop. 48,000) is owed a little more than half of the

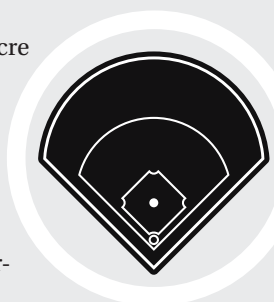
## FLORIDA

**SARASOTA COUNTY** commissioners voted to pursue negotiations with the **Atlanta Braves** in the baseball team's search for a new spring-training home. Two other localities in the state are also in the running, Palm Beach County and St. Petersburg.

The Braves and Sarasota County officials are discussing a 100- to 150-acre site in a master-planned community in the southern part of the county.

County commissioners voted 5-0 at a recent board meeting to authorize the county administrator to continue negotiating the funding, design and construction details.

The concept being considered calls for the planned community's developer to donate land for the stadium complex; money from local tourism taxes and the state would help pay for construction.



From NEWS FROM page 14

\$909,000 listed in bankruptcy documents. Losses for York County (pop. 14,000) had not yet been calculated. The U.S. branch of the Spanish company, Abegona Bioenergy U.S. Holding, operated ethanol plants in the two counties, one of which is now shuttered. Abengoa owes \$10 billion worldwide.

**NEW YORK**

■ **DELAWARE COUNTY** is hoping to supplement fire departments and emergency medical personnel with a team of emergency services **volunteers**.

Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) would not replace the services provided by police or volunteer fire and emergency medical departments, but would provide less-skilled services. A CERT in neighboring **BROOME COUNTY**, for example, is often called upon for traffic control and search-and-rescue operations. Local professionals who work in those fields have endorsed the plan.

Volunteers, recruited from across the county, would receive basic training and meet monthly, the *Watershed Post* reported.

■ **ERIE COUNTY** Executive Mark Poloncarz wants to replace the county's 27-year-old **ethics law** with one that would threaten violators with misdemeanor charges and higher civil penalties.

The law would also require more financial disclosure and clarify gifts to public employees and prohibit county officials and employees from working for other municipalities, among other steps.

The *Buffalo News* reported the law would also create a full-time, salaried executive director position for the Ethics Board, who would be appointed by the county executive and subject to confirmation by the County Legislature.

**NORTH CAROLINA**

■ Now that holders of **con-**



**SOUTH DAKOTA**

■ Buying a round in the Mount Rushmore state will really go around if Gov. Dennis Daugaard (R) signs a bill passed by the Legislature that would redistribute the state's **alcoholic beverage fund**.

The bill would give counties and municipalities 25 percent each of the fund's proceeds, with the other half going to the state. The state currently takes 75 percent of the fund.

The tax on alcohol manufacturers and wholesalers brought in more than \$14 million in 2015, and the *Argus Leader* reports county officials feel the fund should help offset jail and court costs that results from problems with alcohol consumption.

**cealed carry permits** are allowed to bring their weapons into **ROCKINGHAM COUNTY** buildings, the county will have to start working on office policies for workers who want to bring their guns to the office and a strategy for accidental discharges.

The County Commission had been looking at ordinances that applied to the public and county employees for a year, according to My Fox 8.

■ **Property assessors** in **WAKE COUNTY** may end up being a lot more alert.

Though state law requires an eight-year cycle for property appraisals, the members of Board of Commissioners said they want to double that speed in the county to make the process more predictable, to accommodate accelerated real estate trends and reduce significant deviations in property values. If the measure passes, the next appraisal will happen in 2020.

Forty-three North Carolina counties appraise property more frequently than Wake, but some of the state's largest counties — **CUMBERLAND, DURHAM** and **MECKLENBURG** — remain on the eight-year schedule, according to *The News & Observer*.

**NORTH DAKOTA**

There will be no **borehole testing** in **PIERCE COUNTY**. The Board of County Commissioners said "no" to a Department of Energy project that involved drilling an 8.5-inch hole 16,000 feet deep into crystalline basement rock, and potentially drilling an additional 17-inch hole. DOE was hoping to find out if borehole testing could lead to a way to

store nuclear waste.

The Board originally passed a moratorium on deep drilling, with the exception of water wells and a public meeting in February drew a lot of public derision, the *Pierce County Tribune* reported.

**PENNSYLVANIA**

■ The answer to a November referendum could mean bad news for two daily newspapers.

Voters will decide whether **NORTHAMPTON COUNTY** should **advertise job openings online**, rather than in print, for all appropriate county business. In 2015, the county paid more than \$200,000 to place ads in *The Express-Times* and *Morning Call*.

The vote would be whether to change the Home Rule Charter, which currently gives the county no choice, requiring the purchase of advertising space, WFMZ News reported.

■ Pennsylvania's **budget stalemate** is nearly the age

of a full-term baby, and for counties, that's far too old. As of March 17, 41 counties had passed resolutions calling on Gov. Tom Wolf (D) and the General Assembly to end the budget impasse and put safeguards in place so that future impasses do not negatively affect the providing of human services.

**SOUTH DAKOTA**

■ **DAVISON COUNTY** commissioners may reschedule and consolidate meetings, going to **two monthly meetings** from the current weekly schedule.

The change could promote efficiency and improve time management on the part of county officials and staff, but also give residents more opportunities to attend meetings by holding one morning meeting and one evening meeting, the *Mitchell Republic* reported.

**WASHINGTON**

The U.S. Supreme Court will not hear a challenge to **KING**

**COUNTY** Metro Transit's rejection of an **anti-Muslim bus advertisement**.

The court declined a petition by the American Freedom Defense Initiative, which sponsored an ad headlined "Faces of Global Terrorism," which displayed 16 photographs of wanted terrorism suspects. The ad offered a \$25 million reward to help capture the suspects.

The *Seattle Times* noted that the ad resembled one from 2013 by the U.S. State Department and FBI, which was removed after complaints. King County accepted the federal government's ad but concluded that the similar-seeming, privately funded ads demeaned minorities "by equating their dress and skin color with terrorists." **CN**

*(News From the Nation's Counties 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.)*

**IDAHO**

The **ADA COUNTY** Jail has gone to the dogs... in a good way. Each week, for about 30 minutes, female inmates get a visit from **therapy dogs** like Winnie (pictured).

Jail officials say the lockup has been calmer — and the inmates happier — since the program began a few months ago, KTVB.com reported.

Inmate Jackie Pippin summed up Winnie's value in a letter to jail administrators: "We have a lot of stress in here, more stress than comfort, so when she comes it just cheers up the whole day and the whole dorm gets happy."

Shanna Pickren, a psychiatric social



worker at the jail, said that therapy dogs "have been proven to increase oxytocin levels within the brain that actually have a calming effect for the inmates, naturally decreasing anxiety, depression."



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### QUESTIONS?

Contact Brittany Raymond  
202.661.8824  
braymond@naco.org



## IMPORTANT DATES:

**Submissions Close:**  
April 1, 2016, at 11:59 p.m. EDT  
**Notifications of Decisions:**  
First week in June 2016