NACo National Association of Counties

County News

The Voice of America's Counties

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Major victory for NACo: 3 percent withholding mandate repealed

By Mike Belarmino
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

In a major victory for NACo lobbying efforts, President Obama is expected to sign a bill repealing the onerous 3 percent withholding mandate. The withholding requirement was enacted when the Tax Increase Prevention and Reconciliation Act was passed in 2005. NACo has strongly opposed the requirement ever since.

The final version of H.R. 674, which fully repealed the withholding requirement, passed the House 422–0 Nov. 16, clearing the way for a presidential signature.

"This is a big win for local governments. The costs to comply would have been enormous," NACo Executive Director Larry Naake said. "It would have required our nation's larger counties to reprogram or purchase new accounts payable systems, hire additional staff and essentially turn county accounting offices into IRS district offices."

NACo moved one step closer to having the 3 percent withholding mandate fully repealed when the Senate, by a 95–0 vote on Nov. 10, approved H.R. 674, a bill that would fully repeal the withholding requirement. The House had already passed H.R. 674 Oct. 27 by a similarly large margin, 405–16.

The Senate version included an amendment, initially offered by Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.), which provides tax credits to businesses for hiring veterans.

The VOW to Hire Heroes Act amendment would provide up to $9,600 in tax credits to businesses who hire unemployed veterans with a service-connected disability who have been actively searching for employment for at least six months. It also strengthens employment counseling and training programs for veterans and troops about to leave the military.

The tax credits are offset by an extension of current fees on Veterans Affairs home loans and a reduction of payments to some VA service providers.

In conjunction, the Obama administration has announced plans to set up an online jobs bank for veterans seeking employment, and will provide access to six months of personalized case management and employment counseling for unemployed veterans.

(Associate Legislative Director Deseree Gardner also contributed to this report.)

QuickTakes

States with the Most Millionaires

Maryland	7.22%
Hawaii	7.21%
New Jersey	7.19%
Connecticut	7.13%
Massachusetts	6.41%

Source: Phoenix Marketing International, 2011

County News Features

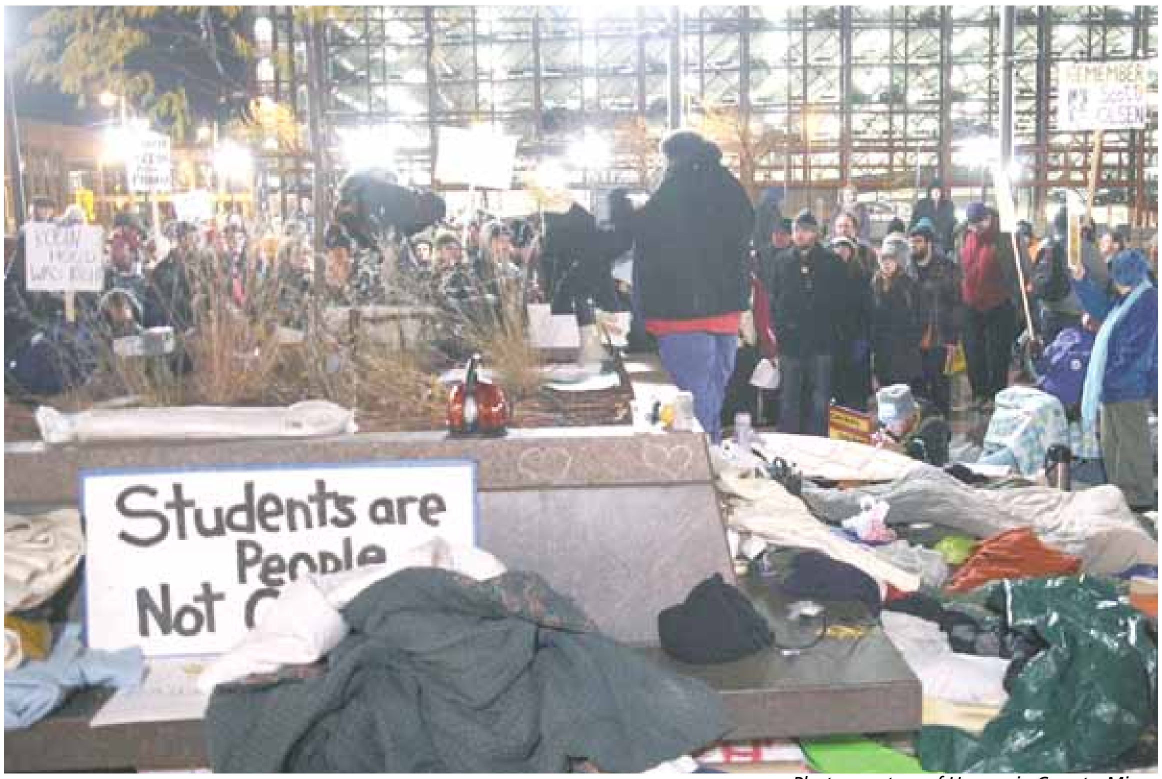

Photo courtesy of Hennepin County, Minn.

Protesters at Hennepin County, Minn.'s Government Center plaza brought bedding to the square Nov. 17, in defiance of a policy change by commissioners earlier in the week that banned sleeping there.

County says no sleepovers anymore for 'Occupy' group

By Charlie Ban
STAFF WRITER

After a few weeks as a patient host, Hennepin County set ground rules for protesters who have occupied the Government Center's outdoor plaza for more than a month. The group, Occupy Minneapolis, has been demonstrating since Oct. 7 in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street Movement.

The Board of Commissioners changed the use policy for the area around the Government Center, effective Nov. 14. It cited health and safety concerns, noting the encampment's duration and falling regional temperatures as among the reasons for instituting the new policy.

"It's the public square, and (pro-

See **OCCUPY** *page 7*

Bankruptcy, a new beginning for Alabama's largest county

By Charles Taylor
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Jefferson County, Ala.'s recent filing for Chapter 9 bankruptcy only served to confirm its de facto status, according to some.

"I've said frequently that when I was sworn into office on November 10 of last year, we were bankrupt, we just weren't in bankruptcy," said David Carrington, president of the Jefferson County Commission. He is one of four new commissioners elected last year to replace their predecessors on whose watch the county's mounting debt topped $4 billion, largely due to a sewer system financing debacle, which accounted for about $3 billion.

It is the largest municipal bankruptcy declaration in U.S. history, eclipsing the previous record holder, Orange County, Calif., which was $1.7 billion in the red when it filed in 1994.

This week, hearings begin to resolve a series of issues — first, whether to retain a receiver who was appointed to run the sewer system. In

See **JEFFERSON** *page 8*

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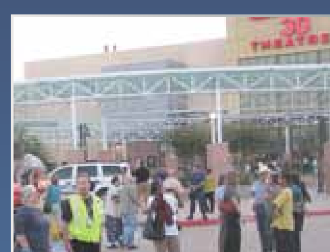

Congress makes way for 'minibus' funding bill

By Marilina Sanz
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Update: Just as *County News* went to press, Congress approved the first minibus-spending bill for FY12. The total appropriations for the three bills came in at $128.1 billion. Among the highlights: Congress extended the Continuing Resolution that keeps the federal government running until Dec. 16. Funding had been slated to end Nov. 18. For an analysis by NACo's Legislative Affairs Department, visit the latest online edition of County News available Nov. 21 at *www.naco.org/countynews*.

No more "omnibus" appropriations bills in this politics-on-steroids season. The best Congress can do now is FY12 "minibus" appropriations bills, the first of which cleared the Senate Nov. 1.

H.R. 2112 consolidates three 2012 appropriations bills: Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA and Related Agencies; Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies; and Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies.

House and Senate conferees did not reach an agreement on the $128 billion spending measure prior to a scheduled House recess, but they continue to meet and are expected to take a vote on passage the week of Nov. 14. Final passage is likely, but House GOP leadership may need Democratic votes as some Republican members are likely to demand deeper discretionary spending cuts.

Meanwhile, conferees might change continuing resolution language in H.R. 2112 that would keep the federal government running through the end of the year. The current continuing resolution (P.L. 112-36) would have expired Nov. 18, the day that Congress planned to go on Thanksgiving recess.

The Senate was also considering a second minibus Nov. 10 that contained appropriations for Energy-Water (H.R. 2354), Financial Services (S. 1573) and State-Foreign Operations (S. 1601). The House version of the Financial Services bill contains language prohibiting the Internal Revenue Service from implementing the Affordable Care Act, which the president has threatened to veto.

NACo has written a letter to the conferees detailing recommendations on the first minibus that is available. The letter can be found at *www.naco.org/legislation/Documents/budget%20ltr%201.pdf*.

Below is a comparison of the House and Senate versions of H.R. 2112:

■ Agriculture Appropriations: Senate Proposes Modest Cuts Compared to House

The Senate version of H.R. 2112 would provide 16 percent more in discretionary spending for agriculture programs than the House bill that passed in June. The bill would provide $19.7 billion in discretionary spending authority for the Agriculture Department and related agencies, a roughly $138 million, or 0.7 percent, cut

from current spending. The House-passed version of the legislation would provide only $17.2 billion in discretionary spending.

Funding for Extension Service and food safety fared very well under the Senate bill. The Smith-Lever extension formula funds would weigh in at $296 million, which is an increase of $2 million above FY11 and $39 million above the House level. The bill provides $2.5 billion for the Food and Drug Administration, as compared to $2.4 billion in FY11. FDA received increased funding in order to begin implementation of the recently passed Food Safety Modernization Act. However, this modest increase is insufficient for even partial implementation of the new law.

Several controversial amendments were voted on prior to Senate passage. NACo successfully rallied its members and a coalition of rural interests to defeat Amendment No. 800, sponsored by Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) that would have reduced federal rural development spending by $1 billion or about 40 percent. The amendment was defeated by a very strong vote of 85–13.

A dozen, mostly non-controversial, amendments were added to the Senate bill during floor debate. However, a successful amendment by Coburn drew attention because it would end farm subsidies to farmers with adjusted gross incomes of more than $1 million. In addition, the administration was unsuccessful in preventing Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), from inserting a provision that prevents USDA from implementing a rule that would limit servings of white potatoes, green peas, lima beans and corn in the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs.

NACo advocacy efforts will focus on urging conferees to maintain the higher Senate funding levels for USDA Rural Development, which provides direct funding to rural counties for broadband, community facilities, water and wastewater infrastructure, housing and business development projects. The Senate provides $2.2 billion overall for rural development, which is a 7 percent cut from the FY11 level of $2.4 billion. However, the Senate level is $182 million above the House level of $2.1 billion.

A summary of funding levels for the major county-supported Rural Development programs is found below.

• Rural Water and Waste Disposal Programs: The bill provides $509.3 million in budget authority to support both grants and subsidized loans. The House provided $500 million and the FY11 level was $527.9 million.

See **APPROPS** *page 4*

Bipartisan support marks new bill to collect Internet sales taxes

By Mike Belarmino
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Another volley has been fired in the battle to require Internet vendors to charge and collect taxes on online sales.

On Nov. 9, Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) and Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) formally introduced the Marketplace Fairness Act, S. 1832. The bill closely resembles the Main Street Fairness Act, introduced earlier this year by Durbin. Unlike Durbin's previous effort however, the Marketplace Fairness Act enjoys bipartisan support with five Republicans and five Democrats as original cosponsors.

There are a few other differences between Marketplace Fairness and Main Street worth mentioning.

First, Marketplace Fairness creates two systems for states to collect sales and use taxes whereas Main Street's only option is through the Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement (SSTA). Not unsurprisingly, one of the two systems is the SSTA. The second system, referred to as the "alternative," would allow states to collect after adopting a minimum set of simplification requirements. Among those requirements are a single state-level agency to administer all sales and use tax laws, the provision of a uniform sales and use tax base within a state, and requiring remote sellers and providers to collect sales and use taxes pursuant to the applicable destination rate, which is the sum of the state rate and any applicable local jurisdiction rate.

Second, Marketplace Fairness exempts small sellers with less than $500,000 in gross annual remote sales from collection requirements, while Main Street did not specify a small-seller exception. Finally, Marketplace Fairness does not include vendor compensation while Main Street would compensate retailers for expenses directly incurred in administrating, collecting and remitting sales and use taxes to a state.

As with any just-introduced legislation, it is hard to determine how quickly the measure may progress. However, there are some encouraging factors for Marketplace Fairness given that not only is there bipartisan support in Congress, but there is growing support from industry stakeholders as well. Among the supporters are Simon Property, Amazon, Wal-Mart and the National Retail Federation.

For years, NACo has advocated that Internet vendors charge and collect state and local taxes already due on their remote sales, emphasizing that the taxes are not new and that the same rules should apply to retailers whether they conduct business completely online or in a brick-and-mortar setting.

In Case You Missed It …

News to Use from Past County News

▶ Carlson, Clift to speak at NACo Legislative Conference in March

Fox News' Tucker Carlson and *Newsweek*'s Eleanor Clift will provide their "inside the Beltway" insights at NACo's 2012 Legislative Conference March 5 in Washington, D.C.

Appearing jointly, Carlson and Clift will share their expertise and political perspective to analyze what lessons President Barack Obama and the newly empowered Republicans have learned and how both sides are gearing up for the 2012 presidential election.

Registration for the conference opens Tuesday, Nov. 29.

For more information, visit *www.naco.org* ▶Meetings & Education ▶Attend a Conference.

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Committee submits report on health shortage areas

By Paul Beddoe
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

The Negotiated Rulemaking Committee charged with creating a new system for designating Health Professional Shortage Areas, Medically Underserved Areas (MUA) and Medically Underserved Populations (MUP) submitted its final report to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius at the end of October. Twenty-one of the 23 committee members present at the final meeting voted to endorse the recommendations.

Tarrant County, Texas Commissioner Roy Brooks, who represented NACo in the committee's deliberations, successfully worked to permit local-level data to be taken into consideration for designating subpopulations as underserved or as shortage areas.

Brooks, chairman of NACo's Health Reform Subcommittee, also successfully championed reversing current Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) policy to allow county jails to be designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) on the same basis as state and federal correctional facilities. HPSA designation would permit a jail to employ National Health Service Corps clinicians or J-1 visa waiver physicians, foreign doctors exempted from the requirement to return to their countries for two years after graduation from U.S. medical schools.

Lack of full consensus prevents Sebelius from issuing the committee's proposal as an interim final rule, as the Affordable Care Act provision setting up the committee would have required. Nevertheless, committee members were optimistic that large areas of consensus will pave the way for Sebelius to issue regulations that will not provoke the widespread opposition the failed 1998 and 2008 proposals had.

Some of the key improvements over the current methodology:

• **Counting Providers** – Since nurse practitioners, physician assistants and certified nurse midwives provide significant primary care services across the country, these clinicians would be included in the count for purposes of developing the population-to-provider ratio for the first time.

• **Medically Underserved Areas (MUA) Designation** – The proposed MUA designation process broadens the number and types of indicators that applicants may use when seeking designation. The proposal increases emphasis on ability-to-pay (defined as the percentage of the population at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level) above the other components, because it correlates strongly with poor health status and predicts poor health outcomes.

• **Medically Underserved Populations (MUP) Designation** – The proposed MUP designation methodology uses the same components as the MUA model; however, the MUP methodology emphasizes barriers-to-care above the other components. The MUP designation proposal allows applicants the ability to submit an alternative population-specific barrier or health status indicator, instead of the generally prescribed indicators for these components.

Additionally, it provides a flexible local data option for population groups, recognizing that data for the general population of an area may not adequately capture needs of some population groups, and that data for some can be hard to find.

• **Geographic HPSA Designation** – The proposal allows for designation of geographic Rational Service Areas (RSA) with patient to provider (P2P) ratios at or above 3,000-to-1 without consideration of other factors. It also expands the numbers of areas that would be eligible by allowing RSAs with P2P ratios between 3,000-to-1 and 1,500-to-1 to be eligible for designation provided that they demonstrate critical needs based on an analysis of health status and ability to pay.

Additionally, all frontier RSAs with P2P ratios above 1,500-to-1 would be eligible for designation without consideration of health status or ability to pay.

Impact analysis of these changes suggested that the recommended methodology would reach more areas with severe provider shortages than are reached with the existing geographic HPSA methodology.

• **Population Group HPSA Designation** – The population group HPSA designation proposal allows for designation of population groups demonstrating a P2P ratio of 2,550-to-1 or higher. Like the geographic HPSA designation process, the population-group HPSA designation method expands eligibility by allowing population groups with P2P ratios between 2,550-to-1 and 1,250-to-1 to be eligible provided that they can demonstrate need based on an analysis of health status and ability to pay. The committee's proposal makes more explicit that groups besides those living in poverty are eligible for designation as population group HPSAs.

The proposal also provides a flexible local data option for population groups, recognizing that data for the general population of an area may not adequately capture the needs of a population group, and that data for certain population groups are often non-existent.

• **Facility HPSA Designation** – The committee's proposal sets forth three new pathways for designation as facility HPSAs for safety-net providers, essential community providers and "magnet" facilities. The facility HPSA proposal also broadens eligibility for correctional institutions to include county jails.

House, Senate disagree on several program funding levels

APPROPS *from page 2*

• Rural Community Facilities Programs: The bill provides $26.3 million in budget authority to support both grants and subsidized loans. In contrast, the House provides only $18 million. Both levels are significantly below the FY11 level of $41.4 million.

The Senate did recommend a direct loan level of $1.3 billion, which is an increase of $1 billion and would greatly benefit rural counties with facility projects. This is likely to be accepted in conference because it requires no budget authority now that the subsidy rate for direct community facility loans is negative.

• Rural Broadband: The bill provides $46.9 million for Distance Learning, Telemedicine and Broadband Program grants and loans, while the House provides $15 million. The FY11 level was $68.1 million.

• Rural Business Programs: The bill provides $79.6 million for rural business grants and loan subsidies. The House provided $64.5 million. Both levels are below the FY11 level of $85.3 million. The Renewable Energy for America Program (REAP) would be funded at $4.5 million in the Senate and eliminated in the House. Both the Senate and House bills would eliminate discretionary funding for the Rural Micro-entrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP).

■ Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Bill Cuts Funding Important to Local Criminal Justice and Juvenile Justice Systems

The Senate minibus proposes a total of $53.2 billion in discretionary appropriations for the Department of Commerce, Department of Justice (DOJ), and other related agencies, an increase of $3 billion compared to the House version of the legislation. The legislation proposes significant reductions in DOJ's State and Local Law Enforcement account, and juvenile justice and delinquency prevention programs. However, the cuts are much less severe than the House version reported out of the Appropriations Committee in July.

The Senate bill proposes $1 billion for DOJ's State and Local Law Enforcement account, which is $54 million below the current year. Programs like the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP), Juvenile Justice Title V Incentive Grants for Local Delinquency Prevention Programs, the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) program and Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) hiring grants for local police are all funded unlike the House measure, which seeks to eliminate these programs. Missing from the Senate bill however is funding for Second Chance Act Reentry Grants and the Prison Rape Prevention and Prosecution program.

Funding for the following accounts is used to support a wide variety of programs and technical assistance important to local courts, corrections, law enforcement, juvenile justice and other agencies.

Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance-JAG grants is funded at $395 million ($357 million proposed in the House), DOJ's Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program is funded at $35 million ($40 million proposed in the House), Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTCRA) program is funded at $9 million ($10 million proposed in the House), SCAAP is funded at $273 million (none proposed in the House), COPS hiring grants are funded at $200 million (none proposed in the House), Byrne Competitive Grants are funded at $20 million ($15 million proposed in the House), Juvenile Justice Title V Incentive Grants for Local Delinquency Prevention Programs are funded at $33 million (none proposed in the House), and JABG is funded at $30 million (none proposed in the House).

■ HUD Appropriations: Senate Cuts Key Community Development Programs

The Senate cuts funding for the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) formula program from $3.3 billion to $2.8 billion. This is a $500 million decrease. The Senate bill also reduces the HOME program funding from $1.6 billion to $1 billion, a $600 million cut. The bill also includes reforms to ensure HOME funds are used in a timely fashion and for worthy projects.

The Senate bill includes $120 million for HUD's Choice Neighborhood Initiative, an increase above the $65 million current level. This program expands on the HOPE VI program to improve public housing. The bill includes $90 million for the Sustainable Communities Initiative, which is currently funded at $100 million. The House committee bill eliminated funding for both programs.

The Senate bill includes level funding of $1.9 billion for homeless assistance grants. It provides $18.9 billion for housing choice vouchers, $500 million above FY11. Of this amount, $17.1 billion is for renewal of current housing vouchers, $1.4 billion for program administration, and $75 million for vouchers for homeless veterans up from current $50 million.

The bill also includes $60 million for HUD's housing counseling program, which was eliminated in FY11, and $65 million level funding for the National Foreclosure Mitigation program.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee adopted its FY12 appropriations bill in September. The House bill provided an increase in CDBG funding to $3.5 billion and a smaller cut to the HOME program to $1.2 billion. It eliminated Sustainable Communities Initiative and Choice Neighborhood funding, and provided no funding for HUD's housing counseling programs.

NACo advocacy efforts will focus on supporting the higher levels of funding for CDBG and HOME programs in the House bill. Also of concern is a rider amendment related to housing that prohibits the use of any funds appropriated to support any federal, state, or local projects that seek to use the power of eminent domain, unless for public use.

■ Transportation

During consideration of the Senate appropriations bill, two transportation-related amendments that NACo took an active role in opposing were defeated. Sen. Coburn's amendment to eliminate all funding for the Small Community Air Service Development Program lost 57–41, and Sen. Rand Paul's (R-Ky.) amendment cutting Transportation Enhancement funding lost 60–38. The Senate-passed transportation funding levels generally provide a higher level of funding than their House counterpart.

The Senate bill provides $41.1 billion for highway funding, the same as current-year funding, and $1.9 billion in emergency relief highway funding. Transit funding is $10.6 billion, a $585 million increase over FY11. The Airport Improvement Program is funded at the current level of $3.5 billion while Essential Air Service is reduced by $6.7 million to $193 million.

Amtrak operating assistance is set at $544 million, an $18 million cut and the Amtrak capital program is funded at $937 million, a $15 million increase. High-speed rail is funded at $100 million and the TIGER grant program is provided with $550 million.

In contrast, the House bill makes deep cuts to transportation spending. The federal highway program is cut from $41 billion to $27.7 billion. Transit spending decreases from $10.3 billion to $7 billion, the Airport Improvement Program is reduced from $3.5 billion to $3.3 billion and Essential Air Service is cut from $200 billion to $150 billion. There is no funding for high-speed rail; Amtrak operating subsidies are cut by 60 percent and funding for TIGER grants are eliminated.

(Erik Johnston, associate legislative director for agriculture and rural affairs, ejohnston@naco.org; Dalen Harris, associate legislative director for justice and public safety, dharris@naco.org; Daria Daniel, associate legislative director for community and economic development, ddaniel@naco.org; and Bob Fogel, senior legislative director for transportation, bfogel@naco.org, contributed to this report.)

SpeedRead » » »

» NACo beats back Senate amendment to cut $1 billion in rural development spending

» Senate cuts CDBG funding by $500 million

» House bill proposes deep transportation spending cuts

Profiles in Service

» Matthew Fellows

NACo
Legislative Grassroots Coordinator

Number of years at NACo: 4

Education: B.A. English, University of Maryland – College Park

The hardest thing I've ever done: is attend my brother's funeral.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Richard M. Nixon, Hunter S. Thompson and George Carlin

A dream I have is to: go ski-gliding.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: have never seen *It's a Wonderful Life*.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Class 4 and 5 rapids on my first-ever rafting trip.

My favorite way to relax is: on the beach, for a prolonged period of time.

I'm most proud of: my mother and father. Who are probably still debating the turnout.

Every morning I read: *CQ*, *National Journal*, *Congress Matters*, *Roll Call*, *Politico*, *The Fix*, *K Street Café* and *Political Wire*.

My favorite meal is: a thick, medium-rare porterhouse, steamed fingerling potatoes and onions, sautéed asparagus and a glass of zinfandel.

My pet peeve is: lack of concision.

My motto is: "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are."

The last book I read was: *Sometimes a Great Notion* by Ken Kesey, and I'm just about through *Nostromo* by James Conrad.

My favorite movie is: Too close to call. The greatest movie I've seen in the last several years has been *There Will Be Blood*.

My favorite music is: ambient, electronic, instrumental, blues, jazz, rap, hip-hop and rock of all types.

My favorite president is: Theodore Roosevelt.

Oregon commissioner takes weight battle public

By Charlie Ban
STAFF WRITER

Public servants learn that life in office means losing a modicum of privacy. Most often that means giving up time to attend meetings, campaign and answer questions from the media, but Klamath County, Ore. Commissioner Cheryl Hukill chose to open up a private part of her life in hopes of benefitting her constituents.

For more than 50 years, she struggled with obesity, but lately after some dramatic and consistent weight loss, she's felt like she has a handle on things and can be a role model to others. There are plenty of others, with Klamath County sporting 64 percent of the population being overweight or obese.

"It's amazing, everywhere I go, people tell me what they're doing to lose weight," she said. "It's almost created a safe place to admit it's an issue and work to improve people's heath."

She knew she had a problem when she was 10 years old and weighed 100 pounds. Neither parent was heavy, and her twin sister didn't have the same extent of an issue with her weight, though both girls eventually tried eating a Spartan dinner early, then retiring to their room to do homework while the rest of the family ate.

As an adult, four closely spaced pregnancies and the death of one of her newborn children backed her into an emotional and physical weight-gain cycle that she found impossible to break.

"Food was the only thing that felt good to me," she said. "It had always been an emotional thing for me, but when I was having a hard time, food comforted me unconditionally."

In 2001, she suffered a heart attack and temporarily lost some weight — she was up to 280 pounds at this point — but she did not feel much improvement.

Ten years later, at 64, she turned a corner. In the middle of May, she quietly went to work reversing decades of neglect, starting at 222 pounds. She told nobody, not even her husband, about the daily exercise sessions doing stepping workouts on a small trampoline, a surface that helped relieve the impact on her joints. She registered for an online diet-tracking program and saw the pounds disappear when her routine caught on. Since then, she's lost more than 50 pounds, more than two a week.

But when she saw her struggle with weigh loss repeating itself in so many Klamath County residents, her attitude changed.

She approached the *Herald and News* about doing a weekly column on her effort, in hopes that the information she could provide would be educational and her candor would persuade others to scrutinize themselves.

"Face it, if there's anything women don't like to talk about, it's their weight," she said. "But that kind of silence is how we get into these situations."

See **WEIGHT LOSS** *page 6*

Photo courtesy of Klamath County, Ore.

Klamath County, Ore. Commissioner Cheryl Hukill depicts her 100-plus-pound weight loss with two 50-pound bags of dog food with Commissioners Dennis Linthicum (l) and Al Switzer.

Word Search

Counties with Thanksgiving-themed Towns

E N Q N J E O S O Z M D Y L J T Z D E Y
W E R J F V A H A I I X N E P P I P G B
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BUTLER (Cranberry Township, Pa.)
CATRON (Pie Town, N.M.)
CHEROKEE (Pumpkin Center, Okla.)
COMANCHEE (Pumpkin Center, Okla.)
EVANGELINE (Turkey, La.)
FORT BEND (Pecan Grove, Texas)
HALL (Turkey, Texas)
KERN (Pumpkin Center, Calif.)
MIDDLESEX (Cranberry, N.J.)
MUSKOGEE (Pumpkin Center, Okla.)
OKMULGEE (Pumpkin Center, Okla.)
ONSLOW (Pumpkin Center, N.C.)
SAMPSON (Turkey, N.C.)
WASHITA (Corn, Okla.)
YUMA (Roll, Ariz.)

Created by: Christopher Johnson

Government-issued IDs, redistricting among initiatives passed by voters

By Christopher Johnson
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Ballot initiatives on government issued IDs and collective bargaining rights for municipal employees were among those passed during the off-year Nov. 8 elections.

In Ohio, 61 percent of voters handily rejected Senate Bill 5, which would have limited the collective bargaining abilities of 350,000 unionized public workers. It is the first time in U.S. history that collective bargaining rights have been upheld on a statewide ballot.

Another question on the ballot was whether Ohioans wanted to reject the federal Affordable Care Act. With more than 1.5 million votes tallied, 66 percent passed Ohio Issue 3, which would exempt Ohioans from mandated participation in a health care system. The official language says it is a proposal to "preserve the freedom of Ohioans to choose their own health care."

Colorado voters shot down an attempt to raise their taxes to fund education for the next five years. Under Proposition 103, the state's current income-tax rate of 4.63 percent for households and businesses would have been raised — for five years — to 5 percent. Increasing the income tax would have generated an estimated $398.8 million in revenue in 2012 and a projected $498.7 million annually by 2016.

Voters in the City and County of Denver defeated the "Paid Sick Days" initiative by a 64 percent margin. The initiative would have required employers to give workers paid sick days at a rate of one hour off per every 30 hours worked. Large businesses would have had to supply up to nine days of paid leave, and small businesses would have been capped at five.

Voters also turned down the Larimer County, Colo. Jail Sales Tax Replacement measure with a vote of 56 percent. It sought to replace two expiring 0.2 percent sales taxes with one tax set at a rate of 0.375 percent which would go towards funding jail operation and maintenance costs.

Meanwhile in Maine, a redistricting measure passed with 53 percent. This amends the Maine Constitution to change the years of redistricting the legislative, congressional and county commissioner districts after 2013 from 2023 and every 10th year after that to 2021 and every 10th year after that.

Three constitutional amendments were on the ballot in Mississippi. Sixty-two percent of voters approved an amendment to require that voters present a driver's license or government-issued identification at the polls.

Mississippi law says that if an initiative passes, it should take effect 30 days later. In this case, the process could take longer because the U.S. Justice Department must approve any changes to the state's election laws to ensure changes don't dilute minority voting strength.

Also passed with 73 percent of the vote was an "eminent domain restriction" amendment aimed at limiting governments' ability to seize property and hand it over to private developers. The amendment prevents the taking of private land for private development. It keeps in place however, the state's authority to seize private land for public-use projects, such as streets or bridges.

The controversial Mississippi personhood amendment, that would have defined human life as beginning at fertilization, was defeated by 58 percent of the voters. Similar personhood amendments were rejected by Colorado voters in 2008 and 2010.

Disaster date night is boffo in Harris County

By Charles Taylor
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

No buddy comedies or "chick flicks" on this movie night. It was a Date with Disaster.

But instead of "Contagion" or "Deep Impact," the movies screened hit closer to home: disaster preparedness videos on the silver screen, courtesy of the Harris County, Texas Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HCOHSEM).

It rented the biggest movie theater at a multiplex located in a hurricane surge zone, a 500-seater. In addition to hurricane readiness videos, attendees heard from experts on wildfires — which threatened the county earlier this fall — and were able to interact with emergency responders. Outside in the parking lot emergency vehicles were on display, including a Coast Guard boat, hazmat vehicles and a new regional ambulance that can accommodate 20 patients.

Francisco Sanchez, a spokesman for the office, said the Date with Disaster event was a chance to take their traditional preparedness message and "kick it up a notch."

"We're trying to find new ways to be creative, to be innovative and to really engage the public in a more entertaining way — so that they're willing to prepare for disaster," he said, "preferably long before the need for them to use those skills comes into play." A wildfire recovery video got "a lot of traction." Recent wildfires in neighboring counties raised awareness of a new kind of threat to an area more known for its vulnerability to hurricanes.

"It's easy to talk about hurricanes here; it's easy to talk about hazmat incidents," Sanchez added, "but we really had not experienced this level of drought and this level of wildfires in this kind of an urban area. It was new to folks."

Sanchez said the emergency management office gave about 240 community outreach presentations last year — at public events, business and civic association meetings — but was looking for a new way to engage residents with a "more entertaining" experience. The county's emergency operations center was activated about 40–50 times last year.

To connect with kids, the evening also featured a skit by three super-hero-costumed Ready Heroes. Mac Planner, Kit Builder and Stu entertained and educated with a 12-minute performance including an original song with a readiness theme.

The event cost just shy of $3,000, Sanchez said, which included the theater rental and purchase of Red Cross readiness kits that were distributed to the audience.

Harris County Judge Ed Emmett kicked off the event and introduced the first video, "Are You Ready?" a 15-minute DVD that is part of the region's preparedness toolkit. It offers advice that is useful in any type of disaster or emergency, regardless of the hazard.

"Harris County is committed to educating the residents and businesses in our area about the importance of disaster preparedness," Emmett said. "Keeping our community safe depends on the involvement of every individual."

The event, held late last month, was publicized through social media, news releases and traditional media outreach. About 250 people attended at a venue where regular commercial movie releases were also being shown. The "disaster daters" also had access to all the usual theater amenities and could buy tubs of popcorn and multi-liter sodas from the concession stand.

"The level of interest actually surprised us, they said, 'Can you bring this to my community to a theater close to us?'" Sanchez said. "And so we're looking now at how do we take lessons learned from this event, create a better event and make it something that we can take on the road." Harris County comprises 7,700 square miles and has a population of 4.1 million.

The event could easily be adapted to any part of the country, he added.

"If you have a video or a series of videos that you can borrow, it's a model you can use anywhere," Sanchez said. "We chose a prime theater, in a prime location and the biggest space available. Anyone who wants to replicate that can certainly downsize that to something that's appropriate to their community."

Photo courtesy of Harris County, Texas

Harris County, Texas' Date with Disaster movie night includes an expo of emergency-response vehicles and personnel in the parking lot of the movie theater where disaster-preparedness videos were screened.

Older Americans Act bill nears reauthorization

By Marilina Sanz
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) recently announced plans to introduce a bipartisan bill to reauthorize the Older Americans Act (OAA). He may issue a set of principles before the Thanksgiving recess and a comprehensive bill by the end of the month. The House is not on the same timetable as the Senate. The OAA expired Sept. 30.

The Administration on Aging issued a set of principles for reauthorization Nov. 1. The principles have several provisions of interest to counties.

Foremost among these is a proposed consolidation of the congregate (group site) and home-delivered meals programs. The consolidation would have a hold-harmless provision so that no state receives less funding than in the previous separate allocations.

NACo policy supports greater flexibility in the use of the OAA nutrition programs by increasing the percentage that can be transferred among programs.

The Administration on Aging is also proposing new language to the National Caregiver Support Program regarding disabled adult children. The proposal would add the term "parent caregiver" to the program and clarify that older adults caring for disabled adult children ages 19 to 59 are eligible for services. NACo has no policy on this technical issue.

Commissioner maintains public weight-loss blog

WEIGHT LOSS *from page 5*

She also keeps a blog on Klamathonline.com and her Facebook page. She writes emotionally about her progress, setbacks, goals and milestones.

By the time she dropped under the 200-pound mark, she knew her diet and exercise program was more than smoke and mirrors, it was a foundation she and others could use to improve their health. She has now lost more than 100 pounds and hopes to sustain a weight below 150.

"I have no idea what my ideal weight is, but a healthy lifestyle is getting me closer," she said. "I have more energy, I'm more alert and I'm hopeful for what we can accomplish."

Her advocacy is part of Basin Healthy Choices, a new publicity effort by the Klamath County Public Health Department. Program Coordinator Molly Brophy said the department is currently focusing on raising awareness with outreach and sponsored events.

The department held a 5 kilometer race and walk in September, and is reaching out to civic groups and the Klamath Tribes. For lower-income residents, Brophy said the county is coordinating with the local extension office to teach label reading and healthy cooking classes for young mothers.

"That would certainly help their children avoid the path I started on," Hukill said.

She said the county's agricultural focus causes a lot of people to eat a lot of beef, which, while healthy in moderation, can easily dominate a diet. Brophy said the frequency of pizza and fast food restaurants in Klamath County endangers a lot of people who are only casually committed to eating healthy.

"We know people are interested in living healthy lifestyles, but there are a lot of obstacles out there we compete against," she said.

She recommended people form healthy routines that take precedence over things that "just happen to come up."

For Hukill, it's keeping herself full on a diet of fruits of vegetables during the day and bringing her own home-made salad dressing everywhere she goes.

"The key is planning ahead," she said. "I don't care if I'm going to a nice dinner somewhere, I have my salad dressing with me. I always know I'll have that healthy option with me."

Commissioner Cheryl Hukill's journal on Klamath Online is available at http://klamathonline.com/SubSection/Human_Interest/Cheryl_Hukills_Journey/421.

County deals with occupation of Government Center plaza

OCCUPY *from page 1*

testing there) is a great American tradition," Commissioner Peter McLaughlin said. "They've generally been respectful we've been trying to manage this in such a way that we respect their rights under the constitution."

The new rules prohibit sleeping on the plaza, signs being hung from county property and personal items being left unattended. Approximately 40 people had been sleeping overnight at the plaza over the last month. As of mid-November, the overnight temperatures have reached below freezing. The county's ban on signs covering its property aims to avoid the appearance of the county endorsing those messages. The ban on unattended items originates from a safety concern.

"People use the plaza for demonstrations all the time, and (the demonstrations) usually have nothing to do with the county," said Carolyn Marinan, county public affairs director. "It's a visible public platform in the urban center. We don't decide who can and can't protest there, but it wasn't designed to be a campground."

She has consistently disseminated the county's policies to news media and protesters to ensure they are aware of them. When county facilities workers winterized the plaza earlier in November, the protesters were reportedly agreeable when they needed to consolidate their property so the workers could complete

Photo courtesy of Hennepin County, Minn.

Members of the Occupy Minneapolis protest group milled around the emptied fountain in the Hennepin County, Minn. Government Center plaza on Oct. 11, four days after the protest began.

their tasks.

In the name of safety, the county also turned off electrical outlets to the plaza, a move county officials had communicated in advance to the group. Protesters had already been told not to use electric heaters because of the danger of electrocution.

The commissioners placed no restrictions on when protesters can demonstrate, and people are free to hold signs under their own power.

Between Oct. 7 and Nov.15, the Sheriff's Office spent $251,937 patrolling the plaza, including $132,912 in overtime pay. In addition, the county's building security department had spent more than $42,000 on personnel for the plaza. An additional, uncalculated amount had been spent on providing water, electricity and medical services.

McLaughlin said the board decided against any curfew in favor of the sleeping restriction. Initially, some protesters ignored the ban. County counts indicated 76 people slept on the plaza the night after the policy changed, and 25 slept there two days later. No one was arrested for trespassing, McLaughlin said, despite claims by the protesters to the contrary. Officials say sleepers would be given several warnings before being cited with trespass. "We're not looking for conflict with them," McLaughlin said of the county's decision not to remove the sleepers. "Eventually it will get cold enough that the policy will seem unnecessary."

Commissioners also cited the right of other groups and individuals to use the plaza in their rationale for the new use policy. Protesters' equipment and personal property have left much of the plaza unusable by anyone else, Hough said.

All along, the county has worked hard to treat the Occupy group evenhandedly. When some protesters staged a sit-in Oct. 16 in the commissioners' lobby, hoping to talk to someone, McLaughlin and Chairman Mike Opet met with them briefly. Early in the occupation, the county spread a canopy over part of the plaza to provide some shelter in response to outcry about a Minneapolis ordinance prohibiting tents.

Deputy County Administrator David Hough said representatives from Occupy Minneapolis have attended regular open meetings with county administrators and have had daily opportunities to communicate officially. Once a day, representatives from the administrator's and sheriff's offices or the building services department met with the group's leaders.

McLaughlin said although the protesters have been visible, managing the county's role in their ongoing occupation has not been a distraction. "We're keeping them in mind, but they don't dominate our time; it's a busy county," he said.

With the policy framework in place, county officials will wait and see what the winter brings and how the protesters react.

"People have a right to express their views," McLaughlin said. "They're not always coherent, but by nature, grassroots movements don't have a single voice."

As of Nov. 16, the county had no plans to remove the protesters from the plaza in a manner similar to Occupy Wall Street's eviction from privately owned Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan for cleaning.

"We don't believe there's a right to camp on county property," Hough said, "They are free to exercise their first amendment rights, but using county property as a campground isn't consistent with the design of the plaza."

Local stimulus plan looks to create jobs

To address the critical needs of citizens, DeKalb County, Ga. has embarked on an ambitious plan to create jobs and boost businesses.

ONE DeKalb Works is a two-pronged public service jobs program. The goal is to promote local business contracts with government, primarily through a $1.3 billion water and sewer infrastructure upgrade project, part of a five-year Capital Improvements Plan (CIP).

"This is a major initiative that will help us implement our own local stimulus plan," said Burrell Ellis, chief executive officer, DeKalb County. "It will create jobs now and help citizens grow businesses."

The county operates one of the largest water and sewer systems in the southeast U.S., serving more than 730,000 people each day and more than 20,000 businesses with more than 2,600 miles of water and sewer lines. The treatment plants, as well as thousands of miles of water and sewer pipes, need significant repairs and upgrades.

DeKalb County's Watershed Management, Purchasing and Contracting, and Workforce Development departments are implementing this local stimulus program in collaboration with a national partner, the National Urban League, and local partners including Goodwill Industries and Georgia Piedmont Technical College.

Under the agreement, the Urban League will promote employment opportunities by promoting contracts and jobs opportunities to minority- and woman-owned businesses, as well as other technical assistance and economic growth programs available to them. The Urban League will also report on goals, objectives and progress of contracts while coordinating all county departments and partnering agencies.

As a result of these partnerships, ONE DeKalb Works is expected to create up to 3,670 direct jobs and 709 indirect jobs over the next 8 1/2 years, according to a University of Georgia study. Up to 277 additional jobs may also be generated by the economic activity resulting from these projects, such as grocers and retailers. Many of these jobs will be set aside exclusively for DeKalb residents, and result in a total economic impact of $1.8 billion.

The bond funding for the CIP is expected to be completed in December. The first projects could be put to bid in the first quarter of 2012.

"The bottom line is we know America needs to get back to work, and we need to start right here at home," Ellis said.

(Christopher Johnson, editorial assistant, contributed to this report.)

Declaring Chapter 9 was 'only responsible choice'

JEFFERSON *from page 1*

December, a U.S. bankruptcy judge will rule on the county's eligibility to file. It's not a sure thing in municipal bankruptcy cases. An Idaho federal bankruptcy judge dismissed Boise County's petition to file for Chapter 9 reorganization in September, finding the county had enough "surplus moneys" to cover a $4 million legal judgment against the county.

But in this order-of-magnitude-larger case, Carrington has little doubt that the county will qualify. "I don't think realistically there is any doubt that Jefferson County, Alabama, with a debt structure of $4 billion and a population of 650,000 is not bankrupt," he said.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley (R) chastised the county for giving up on negotiations with creditors, which had been ongoing for several years. He warned that bankruptcy of the state's largest county could negatively impact the entire state.

"The Jefferson County sewer debt crisis has been an impediment to economic growth in the state, and the bankruptcy filing will now be an even greater challenge to overcome," Bentley said.

Sonny Brasfield, executive director of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama (ACCA), says it's too soon to tell.

"We're going to have to have counties that don't have any financial difficulties — that have had solid track records in being able to find markets for their bonds —go to market and see if there's any kind of change before we can jump to some conclusion that this is somehow Armageddon for all local governments in Alabama," he said. "I don't think we know."

Carrington said he considered the impact of bankruptcy on the state, county and cities within the county, including Birmingham. "That surely was an issue that was important to me," he said, "but at the end of the day, the governor is elected to represent all of the cities in the state, and I'm elected to represent the citizens of Jefferson County."

Robert Brooks, a professor of finance at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, said the county had little choice but to file for bankruptcy. It had been negotiating with creditors for more than three years.

The declaration followed a series of financial setbacks to the county. In 2008, the Jefferson County's credit rating was downgraded "for reasons outside of its control," county officials said. Those include the downgrading of the credit ratings of the companies that insured the county's long-term debt.

Photo Courtesy The Birmingham News

Jefferson County, Ala. Commission President David Carrington signs Chapter 9 bankruptcy papers in his office Nov. 9 at the Jefferson County Courthouse in Birmingham. The commission voted 4–1 to file the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history.

With the county's credit downgraded, much of its long-term debt accelerated, including $105 million in Series 2001-B general obligation warrants and a substantial part of the approximately $3.2 billion in warrants issued for the county's sanitary sewer system. When the county could not pay the accelerated sewer debt, buyers and insurers of that debt sued the county. In 2010, an Alabama court appointed a receiver to take control of operations of the sanitary sewer system.

"Jefferson County is a very unique case in the sense that if you imagine a conference table, Jefferson County on one side and creditors on the other, the lead negotiator is J.P. Morgan," Brooks explained. "Jefferson County would never be in the predicament they're in but for the efforts of J.P. Morgan. There was a lot of fraud; there was corruption." He said it was a lopsided negotiation.

In 2009, the Securities and Exchange Commission sued J.P. Morgan Securities charging it bribed friends of then-sitting Jefferson County commissioners in a scheme to sell bonds and trade in derivatives.

At the time, Glenn Gordon, associate director of the SEC's Miami Regional Office, said, "This self-serving strategy of paying hefty secret fees to local firms with ties to county commissioners assured J.P. Morgan Securities the largest municipal auction rate securities and swap agreement transactions in its history."

It was Goliath versus David, and the giant won, Brooks suggested. Using a local football metaphor, he said J.P. Morgan was Alabama's powerhouse Crimson Tide and the county commissioners were "some high school team."

J.P. Morgan settled the case — admitting no wrongdoing, but agreeing to pay $50 million in penalties to the county and $25 million to the SEC. It also forfeited $647 million in termination fees it had been trying to make Jefferson County pay on derivatives contracts it sold the county.

The bankruptcy caps what was a very bad year for Jefferson County. In March, the county's occupational tax, which accounted for more than 40 percent of its annual unrestricted revenues, was struck down by the Alabama Supreme Court. The State Legislature attempted to reauthorize the tax but adjourned without taking action.

To reduce expenses, the county cut more than $30 million from its budget, laid off 500 employees, closed four satellite courthouses and curtailed some law enforcement services, among others cutbacks. "There's not a department in the entire county that hasn't suffered Draconian cuts," Carrington said.

Then on April 27, a tornado hit and "wiped out huge chunks of this county," causing millions of dollars in damages. "We were focusing on one thing and all of a sudden, protecting the citizens became the top priority, and it remained the top priority for six or eight weeks," Carrington said. "What limited cash reserves we had, all of a sudden we had to spend cash reserves that really was our only liquidity in trying to stave off a bankruptcy."

County Commissioner Jimmie Stephens, who chairs the commission's finance committee, said these factors layered on top of intractable negotiations with creditors left the county with "no responsible choice" but to file Chapter 9.

"Under these circumstances, the commissioners concluded [it] was the best way to protect the county's limited cash and restructure the county's debt obligations," he said.

Brooks believes the county made the right choice, and if the county had continued to negotiate with its creditors — and come up with a less than ideal resolution — an eventual bankruptcy still would have been inevitable.

"The way things were going, Jefferson County would have been back in bankruptcy in four to five years because the creditors were demanding so much out of the constituents that … they would have been unable to meet the obligations and burdens that were being put on them," he said. "So that's just kicking the can down the road if you ask me."

ACCA drafted and backed legislation, passed by the legislature in 2009, that could prevent other Alabama counties from falling victim to predatory financing practices. "The statute deals with disclosure on costs," ACCA's Brasfield said. "It also required more detailed review of the risks involved, full disclosure and review on the front side of any kind of variable rates — all of that has to be disclosed on the front end in a more open and positive way."

As a caveat, he added that a weakness of governmental financing nationally, as well as in Alabama, is the lack of objective information available to governmental entities.

"Generally speaking, the information that's reaching the County Commission is information from people who have a vested interest in the decision that the commission is making," he said.

County Official Has Advice for Jefferson County

Finally dethroned as the municipal bankruptcy champ, Orange County, Calif. takes no pleasure in Jefferson County, Ala.'s surpassing its record $1.7 billion bankruptcy of 1994.

John Moorlach, vice chair of Orange County's Board of Supervisors, warned of impending financial problems when he ran, unsuccessfully, for treasurer in June of 1994. By December, the opponent who beat him would file for municipal bankruptcy — until now, the nation's largest — resign, and be replaced by a board-appointed Moorlach.

Asked what advice he would give Jefferson County, he outlined four steps, and maybe a fifth.

"The first is how can you increase your revenues?" he said. Jefferson County would be ill-advised to raise taxes. "If you overtax your residents you're going to start seeing residents leave." A proposed Orange County half-cent sales tax, Measure R, was defeated 60 percent to 40 percent in 1995.

"The sentiment of the residents of Orange County was you broke it, you fix it," Moorlach recalled. "Don't come to us, we're not dysfunctional. We're not going to enable you to do it again."

His other issues and questions include:

- Cut expenditures wherever you can — "What can you do without now?"
- What can be sold; what is surplus? County assets that can't be sold could be leased, perhaps for a 60-year period, to generate revenue.
- How do you restructure your debt; can you refinance at a lower rate?

A fifth step is not always possible, Moorlach said, but it's one Orange County took. "That is who can you sue" who has some culpability for the county's financial problems?

"They brought the county to the dance, and there's some liability for that," he said. "Yes, they were mature adults," he said of Jefferson County's former commissioners — "just like Orange County, we had adults that approved the investments; they all loved the interest rate that they were getting.

"They should have realized it was a red light, not a green light," he continued. "But someone was there enabling that kind of behavior through borrowing to invest in Orange County's case."

Moorlach, a CPA, added: "A financial advisor that's more focused on doing what's right as opposed to generating fees would have provided better counsel." So, Jefferson County could sue on grounds of malpractice.

Orange County emerged from bankruptcy about 18 months after it filed. He said a survey of residents 10 years after the bankruptcy found that 80 percent of those polled didn't know the county had been bankrupt.

Passing the mantel to Jefferson County, Moorlach, though not minimizing the seriousness of the situation, said: "This is OK, we've had first place for almost 17 years, I'm happy to relinquish it."

Model Programs From the Nation's Counties

Hanover County, Va.

Volunteers Keep Traffic Moving

By Charlie Ban
STAFF WRITER

Hanover County, Va. straddles I-95 and each side presents challenges for motorists.

One side is a growing suburb bustling with the lion's share of the county's population and cars. On the other, sprawling rural roads littered with tricky curves, low visibility and clueless deer can leave drivers wishing they saw someone else driving by. Four high schools churn out young drivers who more than likely are going to need help.

Although willing to help, the sheriff's deputies in a county of more than 100,000 are often busy elsewhere. Who isn't though, is a dedicated corps of volunteers who can offer help without having to carry a gun or badge.

"You don't need a sworn officer to do some things," Sheriff's Deputy Barry Bland said. "We have an outlet for people who want to help the county and free us up to do more."

The Motorists Assistance Patrol coordinates the training and assignment of these volunteers to supplement law enforcement. Participants must complete the office's 10-week citizens' police academy and a supplemental 24 hours of specialized training before hitting the road.

They then help plan their own weekend shifts, which they work in pairs in Ford Explorers previously used by the sheriff's office. They tackle a variety of traffic-related duties, including directing traffic at accident scenes or special events, including funerals, relocating sheriff's office decoy cars and assisting disabled motorists, which can involve moving stranded vehicles out of the roadway and helping to change flat tires. They can relieve multiple police cars at an accident scene by managing the logistics while the deputies handle writing the tickets or investigating. When county vehicles have to be moved among facilities, the patrol members can handle it.

"The deputies see what these volunteers can do to help our office run smoothly and they definitely appreciate it," Bland said. "We're under a budget crunch like everyone else, and this relives a lot of our workload."

Shifts cover six or seven daylight hours on Saturdays and Sundays, but Bland hopes that with more volunteers — the county has 24 on the roster — they can start rush-hour shifts on weekdays.

Volunteers also help the county's vacation house watch, cruising by a home or business when the occupants are away a few times a day and checking for anything suspicious, and reporting back to deputies if something seem awry.

"They're prepared for most situations," Bland said. "They have gas cans for people who run empty, teddy bears for kids if they respond to a wreck and all the equipment they need for typical car trouble."

During Hurricane Irene in late August, Bland called all the deputies in for chainsaw training, so they could help clear the roads of downed trees after the storm.

Garnett Fowlkes has been volunteering for the sheriff's office for 18 years, and sees the patrol volunteers as county ambassadors to residents and visitors.

"A lot of people come down 95 they pull off in Hanover, coming from New York or Florida and they don't know the area, so we can be a friendly face to come up, give them a hand and help them out if they have car trouble," he said.

Photo courtesy of Hanover County, Va.

Two Hanover County, Va. Motorists Assistance Patrol volunteers attend to a disabled vehicle.

Without police powers, they have a mandate to stay safe and out of conflict.

"I don't ask any questions," Fowlkes said. "If I see some beer cans in a car while pulling it out of a ditch, the only person I mention it to is the deputy who shows up."

Everywhere, he sees teenaged drivers who are still getting a hang of how to deal with difficult driving conditions.

The volunteers have saved Bland a lot of coordination time at no additional cost to the county, by setting up an online schedule collaboration system through which they can manage their shifts and assure Bland they have enough volunteers to cover the weekend.

Fowlkes said all of the volunteers turned out to help search for an autistic boy lost in Hanover County recently.

"The sheriff's office lets us know we're appreciated, but it means a lot to us to be involved," he said. "I'm retired, so I can get bored. Helping out with the sheriff's office has been a great way to do something for the county where I've lived most of my life."

Model Programs from the Nation's Counties highlights award-winning programs. For more information on this NACo Achievement Award winner, visit NACo's Web site, www.naco.org ▶ Research & Publications ▶ Find Solutions.

NACo on the Move

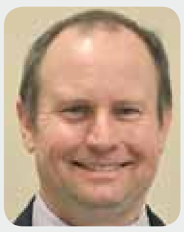
» NACo Officers and Elected Officials

• **Dow Constantine**, county executive, King County, Wash., and **Joyce M. Dickenson**, commissioner, Richland County, S.C., were named county representatives to the FCC's Intergovernmental Advisory Committee (IAC) Nov. 4. The FCC also appointed **Arlanda Williams**, councilwoman, Terrebone Parish, La., as a municipality representative.

» NACo Staff

Karon Harden

• **Karon Harden** has joined the Community Services Department as the director of educational services. Previously, Harden served as senior director of education at the American Academy of Physician Assistants. She graduated from North Carolina Central University with a bachelor's degree in community health education and Howard University with a Master's in community health.



James Davenport

• **James Davenport** has been promoted to program director, infrastructure and sustainability in the Community Services Department. Previously, Davenport was a project manager.

• **Paul Beddoe**, associate legislative director, moderated the panel discussion "Engaging Local Governments to Help Get Children Covered" at the Second Annual National Children's Health Insurance Summit in Cook County, (Chicago) Ill. Nov. 2.

• **Stephanie Osborn**, deputy director, **Carrie Clingan**, senior associate, and **Cindy Wasser**, community services assistant, hosted more than 40 county officials, federal agency representatives and corporate partners at the NACo Coastal Counties Forum in Chatham County (Savannah), Ga. Oct. 26–28. The forum explored ideas, tools and resources to help counties build resilient coastal ecosystems and economies.

» Coming Up

• **Andrew Goldschmidt**, director of membership marketing, will be exhibiting on behalf of NACo membership recruitment and retention at the Kansas Association of Counties Annual Conference in Shawnee County Nov. 12–14.

On the Move is compiled by Christopher Johnson.

News From the Nation's Counties

▶ALABAMA

Worried that it might be eavesdropping on privileged conversations, the **BALDWIN COUNTY** Commission has ordered an immediate disabling of audio capabilities for surveillance cameras installed in stairwells and halls of several courthouses.

Baldwin County Presiding Circuit Judge James Reid also has ordered a download of all oral communications recorded during the last 30 days for access by anyone who thinks their conversations might have been recorded.

Baldwin County Now reported that there may be more than 40 cameras in the courthouses. The commission is required by federal mandate to provide funding for security in public buildings.

▶CALIFORNIA

• Low-flying helicopters are becoming a nuisance, the **LOS ANGELES COUNTY** supervisors say, and federal authorities should restrict how low they can fly.

They voted to support a congressional bill that permits the Federal Aviation Administration to order that helicopters fly at a higher altitude in the county.

There has recently been a proliferation of low-flying helicopters carrying tourists, paparazzi and news reporters over the Hollywood Bowl during classical music concerts, drowning out solo acts. Noise concerns elsewhere have been reported, according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

• Solar power became a little more expensive in **RIVERSIDE COUNTY**, where supervisors placed a fee on new solar plants to compensate the county for the rights of way and loss of other land uses.

They backed away from the proposed $640 per acre and instead decided solar developers will have to pay $450 per acre. With incentives, companies can reduce the fee to $225 per acre, a figure much closer to the $140 industry representatives said they could support, the *Press-Enterprise* reported.

Riverside County is one of the top locations in the nation for solar development, and Supervisor John Benoit said he doesn't want to see vast stretches of desert land taken up by the projects without any benefit to local residents.

▶COLORADO

The traditional town hall meeting is taking the cyber route in **DOUGLAS COUNTY**, with the county's inaugural **virtual town hall meeting** — the first of its kind in Colorado, according to county officials. Commissioners will answer questions from residents Dec. 6 in a meeting that will stream live online.

The county's public affairs department launched the digital outreach effort on the heels of declining attendance at the county's town hall meetings, coupled with residents' increased access to high-speed Internet, *Our Castle Rock News* reported.

The county invited public input in advance of the meeting in hopes questions from residents will help shape the night's agenda.

▶FLORIDA

Large companies that do big business with **BROWARD COUNTY** must now provide equal benefits to **employees' domestic partners**. Broward is the first county in Florida to pass such a law.

The County Board passed an expanded Equal Benefits Ordinance ordering all companies, with five or more employees seeking contracts worth $100,000 or more, to give equal health care and other family benefits to same-sex and opposite-sex partners.

The ordinance does not force companies to provide certain benefits, such as health care or family leave, but if they offer them to married couples, they must provide the same benefits to unmarried couples who sign up with Broward's domestic-partner registry, the *Miami Herald* reported.

▶GEORGIA

Firefighters, youth groups and other organizations that **fundraise in the streets** might be history in **DEKALB COUNTY**.

Commissioner Stan Watson has introduced legislation banning street fundraisers. He said he saw girls as young as 10 in cheerleading uniforms wading through traffic near an exit off an interstate.

Watson is also hopeful the ordinance will help with panhandling issues.

"Sometimes you don't know who is who, and you don't know if they are really 'legit' at all and they are out there collecting money," he told WSB-TV.

▶ILLINOIS

COOK COUNTY homeowners can **appeal their property-tax assessments** online, the *Chicago Tribune* reported.

"This online filing system has made an incredible stride for making our agency a more accessible agency for taxpayers across Cook County who are interested in challenging the assessed values placed on their property," Board of Review Commissioner Larry Rogers Jr. said.

The filing system is open to homeowners and most property owners. Commercial property owners still have to file in person. Board of Review Commissioner Michael Cabonargi said the goal is to make the entire system paperless.

Photo courtesy of Oregon Office of the Secretary of State

Clatsop County, Ore. Clerk Maeve Grimes (l) and Oregon Secretary of State Kate Brown explore a tablet computer being used in a pilot as a voting assistive device.

▶OREGON

Call it **touch-screen voting** with an extra coolness factor. The November elections brought an innovation to five counties that used iPads to make it easier for persons with disabilities to vote.

It was part of a pilot led by the Oregon secretary of state's Elections Division in the 1st Congressional District which comprises **CLATSOP**, **COLUMBIA**, **WASHINGTON** and **YAMHILL counties**, and part of **MULTNOMAH COUNTY**.

Elections Director Steve Trout said the tablet computer offers great flexibility for those with hearing or visual impairments. It can read the ballot aloud; text size and colors can be adjusted, and the tablet can be controlled using sip-and-puff wands for those who don't have full use of their hands, *Oregonlive.com* reported.

Apple donated the computers and the state spent about $75,000 developing the software. If the pilot is deemed successful, the state elections office will make iPads available to all 36 counties for use with disabled voters.

▶MICHIGAN

Inmates at the **BAY COUNTY** Jail can now be **X-rayed at the lockup**, rather than needing to be transported to the hospital.

The Board of Commissioners approved a contract with a Maryland-based company that will provide on-site X-ray, EKG and ultrasound services.

"It's going to be a saving measure for us," Sheriff John E. Miller told the *Bay City Times*. "We won't have to pay to transport [inmates] to a hospital or an X-ray facility. We'll save money for two transport officers — the money and the time."

Two officers are required to transport an inmate from the jail. Once the contract begins, a technician will visit the jail to perform examinations. The results would be forwarded to a radiologist for interpretation.

▶MISSOURI

Voters in **JACKSON** and **CLAY counties** approved a sales tax funding the **Kansas City Zoo**.

The tax is expected to generate $14.2 million a year, which proponents say will vault the animal park into the big leagues of regional and national zoos. The zoo's current budget is $11.6 million.

"It's extremely gratifying to take the Kansas City Zoo to a place where we now have stable funding," Zoo Director Randy Wisthoff told supporters.

The vote was a major milestone for the 102-year-old zoo, which struggled for years and was close to being shut down in the 1980s.

Money generated by the tax can be used only for zoological purposes and will be overseen by a new commission that will include representatives from the two counties, the *Kansas City Star* reported.

▶NEW JERSEY

BERGEN COUNTY's policies on employee leave are going under the microscope as the county prepares its 2012 budget.

See **NEWS FROM** *page 11*

What's in a Seal?

» Banks County, Ga.

www.bankscountyga.org

Banks County was formed out of Franklin and Habersham counties in 1858. It was named for Dr. Richard E. Banks, a circuit-riding physician who treated the settlers and Native Americans of northern Georgia and South Carolina.

The early economy in Banks County was based on cotton and corn, and gave way to beef and poultry production in the 1920s with textile manufacturing and poultry feeds by the 1960s.

The county seal displays the date it was founded along with the historic courthouse. Work began on the courthouse in 1860, but the outbreak of the Civil War delayed completion of the building until 1863. The courthouse still stands with the giant oaks out front memorialized by the "From the Acorn to the Oak" depicted at the bottom of the seal.

(If you would like your county's seal featured, please contact Christopher Johnson at 202.942.4256 or cjohnson@naco.org.)

Oregon counties balk at lawsuit to stop wolf-killing

NEWS FROM *from page 10*

At the beginning of 2011, county employees had banked 171,505 **sick and vacation days**, or 470 years' worth, according to a *Patch.com* analysis of the county's budget. Bergen has 2,754 employees.

"This has to be part of the entire equation,'' Freeholder Finance Chairman John Mitchell said. The County Board will "target" leave policies when it takes an in-depth look as payroll issues in the coming months, he added.

A Patch survey of New Jersey counties' budgets showed that Bergen's liability for employee sick and vacation time is more than twice as large as any other county, even some with more employees.

▶NORTH CAROLINA

The Local Management Entities (LME) of **WAKE COUNTY** and **DURHAM COUNTY** will merge following a unanimous vote this month by the Wake County Board of Commissioners.

LMEs are agencies of local government — area authorities or county programs — responsible for managing, coordinating, facilitating and monitoring the provision of mental health, developmental disabilities and substance abuse services.

If approved by both parties, it would create the state's largest managed care organization. The merged operation would also serve **JOHNSTON** and **CUMBERLAND counties.**

Wake had sought approval as a single-county authority, but its application did not meet minimum requirements to move forward in the waiver approval process, state officials said.

▶OHIO

Seven counties, faced with limited resources, are **merging their offices** of the Job and Family Services to increase their ability to handle more cases. This comes at a time of rising workloads and decreasing state funding.

DELAWARE, KNOX, WOOD, HANCOCK, MARION, MORROW and **SANDUSKY counties** will work together, *The Columbus Dispatch* reported. The effort is named Collabor8, as it was to additionally include an eighth county —Seneca County — which is waiting to decide whether to join in.

Beginning next month, the counties will start to pool applications for food stamps, Medicaid and cash assistance.

The counties have been overwhelmed in recent years by rising caseloads and hope to improve efficiency by 30 percent. The benchmark will be measured by call and hold times, and a quality-control analysis performed by Bowling Green State University.

▶OREGON

• Nine eastern Oregon counties say halting the **killing of two wolves** in **WALLOWA COUNTY** will undermine the goals of the state's wolf-management plan.

The counties filed a "friend of the court" brief in a case in which three environmental groups sought a court order to prevent the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife from killing the wolves.

Wallowa County is home to most of the wolf activity in the state and rallied neighboring **GRANT, UMATILLA, UNION, BAKER, GILLIAM, CROOK, MORROW** and **HARNEY counties** to join its cause.

The counties also restated their concerns, which had been voiced during development the wolf plan, about the impact of wolves on the livestock industry "which is a foundation of many of the counties' economies," according to the brief.

• About 65 inmates from five county jails and 15 deputies teamed up recently to work at United Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals shelter in **YAMHILL COUNTY**.

Livestock seized during law enforcement investigations of animal abuse oftentimes end up at the shelter, which is funded by donations, sponsorships and memberships, the *Statesman Journal* reported.

Sheriffs from **MARION**, Yamhill, **MULTNOMAH, CLACKAMAS** and **WASHINGTON counties** decided to donate work done by inmate crews and deputies to repay Barbara Kahl, the shelter's owner. Her facility provides free rescue and rehabilitation services.

The crews repaired and built fences, storage areas and horse shelters using recycled wood from an old barn.

"The work done by these crews will provide shelter for many horses this winter," Kahl said. "So much of this would have gone undone."

▶PENNSYLVANIA

"Get some cash for your trash," the old Fats Waller song says, and that's just what **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** is doing.

Montgomery County commissioners have inked a deal for 2012 with WeRecycle! of Mount Vernon, N.Y. **to collect e-waste** from county residents. The company will pay the county on a per-pound basis for the electronic waste collected in the program, said Timothy T. Hartman, county waste authority executive director.

Last year, Montgomery County paid about $100,000 for a private hauler to dispose of residents' e-waste.

"But now the value of electronic waste is being recognized and, instead of paying, we will get paid," Hartman told *phillyBurbs.com*.

Chris Edwards, **BUCKS COUNTY**'s public information director, expects his county to follow suit by year's end.

(News From the Nation's Counties is compiled by Charles Taylor and Charlie Ban, staff writers. If you have an item for News From, please email ctaylor@naco.org *or* cban@naco.org.*)*

Financial Services News

Purchasing Made Easy Through Online Marketplace

As part of ongoing efforts to make purchasing easier, U.S. Communities has launched a new online marketplace where you can complete a purchase in less than two minutes. It's available at no cost, provides a quick look at products and pricing, and integrates many U.S. Communities supplier contracts into a single shopping environment. Purchases can be made using purchase orders, p-cards or credit cards.

The following contracts are currently available through the online marketplace:

• **Insight** – technology products and equipment, service and solutions

• **Independent Stationers** – office supplies

• **HD Supply** – maintenance, repair and operations (MRO)

• **Graybar** – electrical and data communications

• **Fisher Science Education** – educational laboratory supplies

• **BSN Sports and U.S. Games** – athletic equipment and supplies

• **Hertz Equipment Rental** – small power tools to large earthmoving equipment

• **Knoll Furniture** – office furniture

• **Tech Depot** – technology products

• **Zep** – janitorial supplies

To get started, click on the "Shop Now" button on the front page of the U.S. Communities Web page (*www.uscommunities.org.*) You must be registered to use the Online Marketplace.

This new tool provides an efficient and effective way for buyers to purchase among various contracts without having to access multiple websites or portals. It also aggregates all of the purchases and allocates them on a single p-card, purchase order or credit card transaction. This saves time, administrative expense and auditing expense.

Watch a prerecorded webinar overview of the Online Marketplace at *www.uscommunities.org/news-events/webinar.aspx*.

For more information, contact Jim Sawyer at *jsawyer@naco.org* or visit the U.S. Communities website.

(Financial Services News was written by Steve Swendiman, managing director, NACo Financial Services Center.)

Research News

Smart Government in Tough Times

Challenged by tough economic times, counties nationwide are devising smart government programs to help cope with today's economic realities.

For all counties, cash flow is essential to providing services to residents throughout the year. When the older population of Isle of Wight County, Va. was having difficulty paying a large tax bill in early December, the Board of Supervisors asked the county's treasurer and commissioner of revenue to explore ways to improve the tax-collection process. Since the tax due date could not be adjusted, the county began promoting an option of prepaying portions of the tax bill over the year.

The program called Isle Pre-pay has been very successful with more than 3,000 participants and over $4.3 million in off-cycle payments to the county since 2007.

In Florida, the Office of Strategic Business Management in Miami-Dade County created the Resourcing for Results Online (RFRO) program to better link the strategic goals of the county, and the resource and budget allocation. Through this a Web-based application, all county departments submit their annual proposed operating budgets and final resource allocations based on the adopted budget in a consistent format.

Prior to the implementation of

this tool, it took more than 10 applications and thousands of hours of staff time throughout the resource allocation process to produce the county's annual budget. The lag time made it difficult to show the connection between strategic goals and allocated resources. The RFRO solution has become Miami-Dade County's primary system to outline the goals and objectives of the government for the fiscal year, the anticipated results, and provides a financial forecast for the next five years.

Henrico County, Va. took an aggressive approach to refinancing county debt. Beginning in February 2009, Henrico County refinanced existing debt four times over a 15-month period to cut costs during tough economic times. This approach required a coordinated and concise effort involving the county's management, financial advisor and external auditors to ensure the county maintained its AAA bond ratings. In the end, these debt refinancings reduced future debt service payments by $17.7 million due to the county's proactive effort.

Los Angeles County established a Web-based application for residents to file an appeal of property tax bills to reduce transaction costs and waiting time for residents. The Online Filing of Property Tax allows taxpayers, or their representatives, to electronically file appeals challenging the assessor's assessments of their property values. Once their appeal is filed, they can access the website to check the status of their appeals, electronically postpone a scheduled hearing or withdraw their appeals with the click of a button, no longer having to rely on paper forms, which could be misplaced or lost in transmission. The system not only increased efficiency for the county, but also allowed residents a more convenient way to follow the status of their appeals.

Although county officials and staff have created innovative ways to improve county government, some of the best ideas may come from residents. In this spirit, Harford County, Md. created a collaborative website for citizens to openly share ideas and innovations that they felt could benefit their community. As ideas are selected for implementation, citizen input is welcomed and encouraged throughout the process. The two-way dialogue also aids citizens in better understanding government programs and daily operations of county government departments.

(Research News was written by Kathryn Murphy, senior research associate.)

The H.R. Doctor Is In

Being Thankful at Thanksgiving

A most wonderful time of the year occurs in late November. Thanksgiving is an HR Doctor favorite because it is centered on the opportunity to step back and view our own lives at work and at home with a sense of perspective.

It's a great time for an employer to help members of the staff appreciate all that they have in the form of jobs, which are generally steady and career-oriented, and include retirement, health care, time off, educational support and much more.

Thanksgiving is an excellent time to do more than simply eat a tremendous meal with family and friends and maybe watch football. It is a time to ask, "What am I doing to make things easier and more enjoyable for my colleagues at work or those in need in the community?"

It is not coincidental that United Way campaigns occur during this holiday time nor that about one in three persons receive help from such an organization. "There but for fortune," could be any one of us.

This holiday is also a time to praise and recognize how much easier our own lives at work are made by having colleagues who work hard to help you as a county government leader and care about your success. Not a bad time to make some "Thanksgiving resolutions" and avoid a New Year's rush. Resolve not to take things for granted, but rather find new ways to help at the office and in community leadership through charitable giving and volunteering.

The HR Doctor has a lot to be thankful for, including the chance to share information on proactive Human Resources with each of you regularly. I bet if you stop for just a few seconds and think about it, you also have a lot to be thankful for in your own work life and personal life.

Take the time to do that — and save a slice of pumpkin pie for me.

Best wishes!

Phil Rosenberg
HR Doctor • *www.hrdr.net*

Job Market & Classifieds

▶COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR – DESCHUTES COUNTY, ORE.

Salary: DOQ.

County Administrator, Deschutes County, Bend, Ore. Pop. 172,050. Annual salary range DOQ plus a competitive benefits package. Annual budget $267 million, FTE 816. Deschutes County is one of the largest employers in Central Oregon. The County provides health and community services, public safety, economic development services, transportation and land use. Additional responsibilities include elections, assessment and taxation, human resources and employee relations. The County Administrator provides direction to department heads and is the first point of contact to independently elected County officials. The County Administrator is hired by and works under the direction of three County Commissioners. To learn more about the position, please contact Interim County Administrator Erik Kropp at 541.388.6584 or at *Erik.Kropp@deschutes.org*. Note: the Interim Administrator is not a candidate.

▶COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR – CLERMONT COUNTY, OHIO

Salary: DOQ.

Clermont County, Ohio (Population: 197,363), located 20 miles East of Cincinnati on the Ohio River is seeking candidates with proven executive management and leadership experience to be County Administrator. The County has a $243 million budget ($50 million General Fund). Position will be the Chief Administrative Officer of the County. For more information and to download a mandatory application or to submit an application electronically; visit *www.clermontcountyohio.gov* (Careers in Clermont). Call 513.732.7110 with questions. Deadline to apply is Nov. 30. EOE.

▶DIRECTOR OF PLANNING – COUNTY OF CLARKE, VA.

Salary: $65,000 – $105,000 annually; DOQ.

Clarke County, Va., population 14,034, is seeking to fill the position of Director of Planning. Applicants should possess a comprehensive knowledge of planning and zoning principals and concepts; understanding of economics, finances and sociology, general knowledge of civil and environmental engineering concepts; ability to use technical and statistical information and to prepare and present oral and written reports; ability to use common office equipment and software programs; ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with others.

Typical Duties: Advises public bodies and public regarding land use plans, zoning and subdivision ordinances; develops and maintains information pertaining to land use policy, rezoning, site plans, subdivisions, historic preservation, transportation, development design, environmental regulations and grant administration; recruits and selects department personnel; assigns, directs, trains, inspects and evaluates the work of department personnel; develops staff schedules subject to departmental needs, operating policy, and County Administrator approval; disciplines and counsels staff; may recommend suspension, demotion and termination; frequently attends and participates in meetings, hearings, presentations seminars and conferences that occur during evenings, weekends or other hours, outside of the regularly scheduled business day; responsible for long-range comprehensive planning program for community development; directs preparation of the Annual Land Use Report; analyzes state and federal programs for compatibility to County needs; serves as staff to various boards and committees as necessary and prepares and administers department budget.

For more information go to: *http://clarkecounty.gov/employment_opportunities/planning_director.html*.

Requirements: AICP Certification desirable; Master's degree in planning, or related field and extensive experience in local government planning, or equivalent combination of education and experience. Application Deadline: Close of Business, Friday, Dec. 2. Submit letter of interest and resume to County Administrator, 101 Chalmers Court, Suite B, Berryville, VA 22611 or email to *PlanningDirectorJob@clarkecounty.gov*.