

NACO National Association of Counties

CountyNews

| The Voice of America's Counties

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES ■ WASHINGTON, D.C.

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Reauthorization Act would help counties fund key programs

By RYAN YATES
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

A bipartisan group of senators introduced the County Payments Reauthorization Act of 2011 (S. 1692) on Oct. 12.

The act would reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program and fund the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Act for five more years. The bipartisan agreement, announced by Senate Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Jeff

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QuickTakes

Counties with the Highest Rent

Metropolitan Areas

San Jose County, Calif.
San Francisco County, Calif.
Washington, D.C.
San Diego County, Calif.
Los Angeles County, Calif.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 American Community Survey

CountyNews Features



Photo by Kami Smith, Michigan Association of Counties

NACo 2nd Vice President Linda Langston, a former RAC Steering Committee member, tells RAC members about the importance of strong advocacy efforts by RAC and NACo. Also pictured (l-r) are Ed Rosado, NACo legislative director, and Keith Langenhahn, RAC chair.

RAC sets 2012 rural priorities

By ERIK JOHNSTON
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

The increase in partisan gridlock, threat of unfunded mandates and impending federal austerity measures are all concerns for rural county elected officials.

NACo's Rural Action Caucus (RAC) Steering Committee recently met to analyze this political landscape and decided to focus its advocacy efforts in 2012 on five key issues:

- Relief from unfunded mandates,
- farm bill reauthorization,
- surface transportation and aviation reauthorization,
- rural healthcare and substance abuse, and
- the Secure Rural Schools Act and PILT funding.

The caucus will focus on educating Congress about these rural concerns and will ramp up

efforts to influence administration officials who are writing rules and regulations that will impact rural counties.

"Most rural counties will continue to face a difficult economic situation in 2012," said Keith Langenhahn, board chair, Marathon County, Wis. and RAC chair. "The federal government should ease our regulatory burden and find a balanced approach to deficit reduction that does not single out discretionary programs that are critical to rural counties."

Langenhahn added that it is more critical than ever for rural counties to educate Congress and the administration about rural county priorities.

This year, RAC will strengthen its focus on unfunded mandates. RAC will work with other NACo policy steering committees to pinpoint specific unfunded federal mandates that are costing rural tax-

payers and counties precious resources.

RAC will also work to ensure that both the surface transportation reauthorization and aviation reauthorization take into account the key role of rural counties in the nation's integrated transportation system. RAC will also emphasize the need for multi-year authorizations that give counties certainty in their planning and funding processes.

Raising the profile of NACo's farm bill priorities is also critical to addressing rural infrastructure and business development needs. NACo supports enhanced provisions aimed at bolstering renewable energy, beginning and young farmers, and flexibly funded rural development programs in the next farm bill.

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New voting language rules jolt counties as elections near

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Word that several counties will have to provide voting materials in languages other than English couldn't have come at a worse time for many of those newly affected.

The announcement by the Census Bureau came on Oct. 12, less than four weeks before many counties will hold elections, in a year when local elections officials have dealt with redistricting and many are already doing more with less. For many, absentee ballots had already been mailed, and voting machines had been programmed and locked down before the news broke.

"Even if we had four or five months, there would be a significant challenge to this," said Cameron Quinn, just four weeks into her new job as voter registrar for Fairfax County, Va.

For the first time, Harris County, Texas will have to provide

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Bernalillo County, N.M. tapped for Southwest's first urban national wildlife refuge » **Page 6**

Budget shortfalls still plague counties, survey says » **Page 2**

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Survey: Budget shortfalls persist among counties

By CHARLIE BAN
STAFF WRITER

Almost two-thirds of counties reported having passed budgets with anticipated shortfalls in a NACo economic status survey released Oct. 20, and half will dip into their rainy-day funds to plug budget holes.

Sixty-five percent of responding counties reported adopting budgets with anticipated shortfalls; 35 percent expected no shortages.

Contrary to reports from financial analysts who say the recession ended more than a year ago, counties are continuing to see stress on their budgets as revenues remain depressed. This has necessitated budget cuts that have been extended longer or deeper than what county managers initially planned.

“As a result of the slow economic recovery, counties appear to be settling into the ‘new normal’ of revenue, staffing and service delivery levels,” said Larry E. Naake, NACo executive director.

The survey, “Coping with the New Normal: An Economic Status Survey of Counties,” drew responses from 233 counties in 38 states.

Slightly more than half of the counties (51 percent) pointed to reductions in state or federal funding as the reason for their shortfalls, though more than a third (36 percent) said declining property tax revenues were to blame.

Almost three-quarters of counties are hamstrung by self-imposed (12 percent) or state-imposed (53 percent) caps that limit their millage rates.

At least half of the counties froze wages to balance their budgets, and almost 45 percent put off capital investments, purchases and repairs. Two-thirds of counties report employing fewer workers than last year, with 70 percent of them shedding up to 5 percent of their workforce.

To put a face on the numbers, *County News* interviewed managers and administrators of some of the counties that responded to the survey.

A quarter of survey respondents attributed their revenue shortfalls to a drop in building fee and permit income, including Berkeley County, W.Va., which saw its revenues from building trades plummet in 2007, down to less than \$200,000 from \$1.2 million. In addition to some layoffs in those permit-issuing departments, the county instituted a 10 percent budget cut across the board, stopped filling job vacancies, eliminated overtime and suspended all travel.

In the last two years, County Administrator Deborah Hammond said, the county has ended with a positive fund balance, and efforts to promote real estate development have paid off. A Macy’s distribution center is under construction, which will add 1,200 full-time jobs to the county next year, plus seasonal part-time work.

“We’ve been singularly blessed because we’ve taken these procedures to keep things tight, but our

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House efforts to repeal withholding law move forward

By MIKE BELARMINO
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Legislation to repeal the unpopular 3 percent withholding requirement got a significant boost earlier this month when the House Ways and Means Committee passed H.R. 674 out of committee by voice vote.

Introduced by Rep. Wally Herger (R-Calif.) in February, the bill now enjoys overwhelming support in the House as well over half of the chamber has signed on to be a co-sponsor of the measure to repeal the withholding requirement.

During the August recess, House leadership identified the provision’s repeal as legislation whose passage would be a priority before the end of the year. Now that the bill has passed out of committee, the hope is to possibly have floor action the week of Oct. 24 when representatives come back from their district work week.

For counties, this requirement will only apply to jurisdictions that make payments of more than \$100 million annually for property or services. Additionally, the requirement provides a minimum threshold of \$10,000 that dictates which payments government entities must withhold from.

During the committee’s markup of H.R. 674, the bill received approval without the identification of a dedicated offset for the estimated \$11.2 billion cost for repeal. Ways and Means Chairman Dave Camp (R-Mich.) acknowledged that it was not necessary to determine the offset in committee.

On the same day, the committee also approved H.R. 2576, a bill that would change a provision in the 2010 health care reform law that would allow people to exclude Social Security benefits from income when applying for health benefits. This change is estimated by the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation to raise \$13 billion over 10 years.

While no determination has been made, the option to use H.R. 2576 to offset H.R. 674 is one that is receiving consideration by House Republicans. Therefore, it

remains uncertain whether the two bills will be packaged together on the floor. NACo does not have specific policy on eligibility requirements but will closely monitor for any potential that this will result in a cost-shift to counties.

Nonetheless, the recent developments are welcome news to NACo and members of the broader Government Withholding Relief Coalition who have been working toward repeal for some time.

NACo has vigorously opposed this requirement as an unacceptable unfunded mandate that essentially causes counties to act as agents of the IRS. Counties would need to purchase equipment and then allocate already depleted resources to administer the systems that would be needed to collect the taxes for the IRS with no federal assistance.

The fate of the measure in the Senate remains uncertain.

RAC’s health focus includes support for critical-access hospitals, Medicaid

RAC from page 1

This work will be complemented by a simultaneous focus on securing strong appropriations for USDA Rural Development programs. USDA Rural Development’s grant and loan programs bolster local initiatives to enhance and maintain water and wastewater infrastructure, community facilities, broadband infrastructure, rural business programs and rural housing.

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS) and PILT are also critical to rural counties. RAC will work with NACo’s Public Lands Steering Committee and Western Interstate Region to support full funding of PILT and SRS.

RAC will also support NACo’s policies on health and substance abuse. RAC will focus on supporting funding for critical-access hospitals, public health and prevention, and Medicaid. RAC will also work to support NACo President Lenny Eliason’s Healthy Counties Initiative.

RAC holds its annual meeting to establish priorities that can influence federal legislation, regulations and funding affecting rural county government programs and services.

The meeting was held Oct. 13–15 in Saginaw County (Frankenmuth), Mich. and was hosted by Tuscola County and the Michigan Association of Counties.

Meeting participants interacted with policy experts who helped RAC strategize on its priorities, including Mary Judnich, rural development expert for Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.).

RAC Vice Chair Lu Barron of Linn County, Iowa, NACo Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee Chair Don Larson of Brookings County, S.D. and NACo Legislative Director Ed Rosado spoke to the committee about NACo’s efforts to influence the White House Rural Council. All three

participated in high-level White House meetings during the past two months in which NACo’s RAC priorities were presented directly to President Obama and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, who chairs the council.

Participants also met some of the local business and industry leaders who are at the forefront of Michigan’s emerging agriculture and rural development efforts. They included representatives of the Harvest Wind Farm in Pigeon, the Thumb Octagon Barn and Agricultural Museum in Gagetown, POET Bio-refining in Caro and Zwerk Farms in Reese.

(For more information or to join RAC, contact: Erik Johnston at 202.942.4230 or ejohnston@naco.org)

What RAC does

RAC is the voice for America’s rural counties in Washington. It is a bipartisan coalition of rural elected officials, who strive to enhance the quality of life in rural counties through effective federal legislation. The caucus is not only an advocacy arm of the organization, but also serves as the conduit for technical and programmatic assistance through the NACo County Services Department. Each year, the caucus identifies the most pressing issues facing rural counties and brings them to the attention of Congressional leaders and key members of the administration.

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The Voice of America's Counties

Commentary

County landscape is not a pretty picture

By Ed Ferguson

COUNTY SERVICES DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR

This fall, county governments and elected officials are feeling pressures and demands they haven't experienced in more than a generation.

The continuing effects of the most severe and extensive downturn in the U.S. economy since the Great Depression of the 1930s, and increasingly negative public attitudes toward government and government employees have made the job of governing and managing counties difficult. At the same time, these pressures have presented county officials with opportunities — opportunities for improved service-delivery models, opportunities for partnering and consolidating, and opportunities for new approaches toward revenue generation and spending.

The “county landscape” doesn't make for a pretty picture. But it does give those who work in and for county government a chance to step back, to analyze the composition, and to make educated guesses about what the picture means.

In September, NACo's senior management team held a brainstorming session to consider the state of affairs in America's counties, focusing on eight broad categories: fiscal affairs; relationships with other levels of government (including cities, schools, the states and the federal government); services and service delivery; organizational structure; viability of the institution; employees and employment; political changes and pressures; and entrepreneurial attitudes.

What follows are observations and commentary about some of the issues, challenges and opportunities for counties over the next few years. The observations are general in nature and in no particular order of importance, and may overlap categories.

The real estate market remains stagnant, and declining property values and foreclosures have had, and will continue to have, a deleterious effect on county revenues, particularly given the heavy reliance by many counties on the property tax. Some economists predict that the foreclosure problem will get worse before it gets better, as unemployment increases the number of at-risk homeowners.

Many counties are laying off staff, putting added pressure on those employees who remain. Since many county services are mandated by the states and the federal government, counties must continue to

provide them — even with reduced staffs and revenues. Inevitably, service delivery schedules, efficiencies and quality will be affected.

A county employee retirement “wave” has begun. This presents counties with the challenges of

recruiting new employees at a time when public employee benefits (particularly public pensions) are being reduced and restructured. The historic attractions of public service careers — job security and attractive benefits — are not as apparent. In-

creasing anti-government, anti-tax and anti-government-employee attitudes may mean that fewer people will consider elected public service or public service careers worthwhile. Counties must be alert to a potential “brain-drain” phenomenon.

Counties are rethinking how county services are provided, and are considering outsourcing services or partnering with the private sector in delivering them. Outsourcing

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Green purchasing toolkit helps counties save dollars, environment

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

NACo has a new way to help counties save greenbacks when buying “green.”

It's called the County Green Purchasing Toolkit, an interactive Web-based resource that shares innovative county best practices with other local governments nationwide to help them save money while buying more environmentally preferable products (www.naco.org/greenpurchasing).

The toolkit was developed in partnership with several leaders in green purchasing — including U.S. Communities Government Purchasing Alliance, the Responsible Purchasing Network and Green Seal.

“NACo is pinpointing effective strategies to help counties save money and become more sustain-

able,” said Gregg Goslin, Cook County, Ill. commissioner, who chairs NACo's Green Government Initiative. “County innovators are redefining sustainability — taking it from a philanthropic venture to a sound investment strategy. We're looking forward to utilizing this toolkit to help counties protect resources and save taxpayer dollars.”

Through the toolkit, county leaders can learn from county successes in finding green products, setting goals, developing effective policies, and educating staff and community members about how to save money while purchasing green.

Responsible Purchasing Network Director Alicia Culver said that “by purchasing energy-efficient office equipment, fuel-efficient vehicles and water-efficient fixtures, counties across the U.S. are saving



thousands and sometimes even millions of dollars, which we all know is critically important in this era of budget deficits.”

NACo and its green purchasing partners believe that when buying products with reduced environmental impacts, it's unacceptable to compromise on quality and cost.

“Cooperative purchasing is a highly effective strategy for procurement professionals to more easily access green product lines,” said Jennifer Sulentic, program manager with U.S. Communities Government Purchasing Alliance.

The County Green Purchasing Toolkit highlights case studies that illustrate how counties are already purchasing green products and sav-

ing money through lower up-front costs, reduced operating costs, and avoiding substantial costs associated with hazardous material disposal.

It features sections on Getting Started, Finding Green Products, Tools and Resources, Model Processes, and Success Stories. The latter category includes highlights from programs and policies such as those in Georgia, Washington and Virginia, summarized below.

Cobb County Adopts Lifecycle Cost Analysis Policy for Fleet Maintenance

In 2008, Cobb County, Ga. adopted a Lifecycle Cost Analysis (LCCA) Policy, which established a methodology to determine the total cost of ownership of products during the bid-selection process for new vehicles. The policy's intent was to set up a process to examine county purchases based on long-term value, rather than simply up-front cost.

King County Inspires Staff to Find Environmentally Preferred Solutions

The original impetus for green purchasing in King County, Wash. came in the 1980s from the Coun-

ty's Solid Waste Division. Waste haulers were overburdened with an increase in collected recyclables after the county adopted more stringent recycling regulations and experienced difficulty with finding markets for these items.

Loudoun County Is a Pioneer in Solar Lighting Purchase

Loudoun County, Va. purchased solar lighting for a project using Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funding. Loudoun's energy specialist worked through a product distributor to obtain information for several products and shape product specification for a bidding process.

Arthur Weissman is president and CEO of Green Seal, Inc., a toolkit partner. He said the resource will “greatly assist” the nation's counties in finding more sustainable products, resulting in healthier and sustainable communities.

NACo has hosted webinars on green purchasing. They can be accessed on-demand at www.naco.org ► Meetings and Education ► Web-based Education ► Webinars on Demand.

For more information contact Jared Lang at 202.942.4224 or jlange@naco.org.

Profiles in Service



» John Twomey

NACo Board of Directors
Executive Director
New York Association of Training
and Employment Professionals
Albany County, N.Y.

Number of years active in NACo: 25

Years in public service: 35

Occupation: director, New York's Workforce Association, affiliate of New York State Association of Counties

Education: Fordham University (Go Rams!)

The hardest thing I've ever done: lay off very good workers in a time of funding cuts

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Bill Clinton, Steve Jobs and Mickey Mantle

A dream I have is to: see our federal elected officials recognize both the need to upgrade the skills of our workforce and to act on that recognition in a bipartisan manner.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: would like to own part of a racehorse someday.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: travel through South America.

My favorite way to relax is: watching the Yankees or reading a book.

I'm most proud of: what a great first grade teacher my wife was.

Every morning I read: four newspapers.

My favorite meal is: a barbecued steak on an early spring day.

My pet peeve is: people who think it is okay to cut into lines.

My motto is: “Never be discouraged two days in a row.”

The last book I read was: *The Defector* by Daniel Silva.

My favorite movie is: *It's a Wonderful Life*.

My favorite music is: almost anything by Jerry Jeff Walker.

My favorite president is: Bill Clinton.

Bipartisan education bill unveiled

By MARILINA SANZ
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

On Oct. 11, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), chairman of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee and Sen. Michael Enzi (R-Wyo.) unveiled their draft bill to reauthorize No Child Left Behind.

It is doubtful that Congress will finish reauthorization given the different approaches in both chambers. The House is considering piecemeal legislation. The Senate draft addresses comprehensive reauthorization.

One of the goals of the legislation is to focus on closing achievement gaps. A common theme throughout the draft bill is replacing arbitrary federal standards with state and local decision-making, a goal shared in NACo's policy.

Some of the highlights of the bill include:

- eliminating the controversial Annual Yearly Progress requirement
- replacing federal accountabil-

ity measures with state-designed systems

• flexibility to transfer funds among the different programs as long as they don't divert dollars from programs for disadvantaged students

• requiring states to adopt academic standards for college and career readiness

• requiring states and school districts to implement interventions for schools with lowest

performance, highest achievement gaps and highest dropout rates, and

• new teacher and principal evaluation systems designed by states and school districts.

The bill also consolidates and streamlines a number of programs, going from 82 to 40. This list includes some new programs on literacy, teacher preparation, safe and healthy students, and codifying administration initiatives such as Race to the Top.

In Case You Missed It ...

News to Use from Past County News

► Register for NACo's 2011 Healthy Counties Forum

Join NACo in Washington, D.C. on Dec. 1–2 for a 1½-day, health-focused forum to learn how your county can advance community wellness initiatives and demonstrate the positive return on local investments in county health projects. The forum will include information about strategies counties can implement to contain health care costs and improve coordination of county health promotion efforts. Space is limited; registration deadline is Nov. 1.

To register, visit www.naco.org/programs/csd/Pages/NACoHealthyCountiesForum.aspx.

Mexican drug violence lowers revenues for Texas county

By CHARLIE BAN
STAFF WRITER

Talk of collateral effects of the Mexican drug wars has focused on spillover violence, but a Texas border county is experiencing a much more mundane, but still harmful, consequence.

Across the river from Cameron County, which includes the city of Brownsville, is the part of Mexico firmly in the grip of the *Los Zetas* cartel, which controls Mexico's Gulf Coast and inland, and is struggling against other cartels for control of lucrative drug trafficking routes into the United States.

The majority of violent incidents have taken place on the Mexican side of the border—mass graves and a recent prison riot across the border from Brownsville in its sister city Matamoros that left 20 dead—and county officials say the threat of harm has depressed international travel, and in doing so the county's revenue.

Three Cameron County toll bridges have carried dramatically fewer cars across the Rio Grande River in the last few years as tensions have increased and bullets

have flown, though to a limited extent in Texas, eviscerating a revenue source for the county. They are the Gateway International, Los Indios Free Trade and Veterans, bridges, though the latter two are partly owned by cities, which share in the revenue.

The bridges charge cars \$3, and pedestrians \$1, for each southbound trip. They used to bring in \$18 million annually, but Deputy County Administrator David Garcia said those numbers are now down to \$14.6 million, highlighted by a 14 percent drop in revenue between 2008 and 2009. The number of automobile crossings for all three has declined to 5.6 million in 2010 from 8 million in 2006.

After maintenance and operational costs are deducted, the remaining proceeds go to the county's general fund, but that contribution dropped to \$5.6 million in 2010 from \$9 million in 2007, of the county's \$120 million 2010 budget. The county, which has no sales tax, had to increase property taxes to offset the drop in bridge toll revenue.

"We used to have many college



Photo by Mayra Cruz

The Gateway International Bridge, pictured here in 2005, is one of three bridges between Cameron County, Texas and Matamoros, Mexico. It supports the most pedestrian traffic of the bridges, but its automobile traffic has declined sharply in the last four years, cutting into toll revenues.

spring breakers come to South Padre Island and then head down into Mexico for a few days," Garcia said. "That always gave us a nice boost in March, and we had tourists all year and people who would travel to Mexico to buy cheap medicine. That's slowed down dramatically. Some still go

back to Matamoros to do business, but they consolidate a lot of trips into one, to limit their exposure down there."

Most of the reported violence on the Mexican side of the border has involved the cartels battling government forces, but Texas has not been immune from the conflict.

Officials don't cite any drug-related violence on the Texas side of the border, though a gunfight during a police raid in Matamoros in 2009 caused Sheriff Omar Lucio to close the Gateway bridge briefly. Gunshots could be heard on the northern side of the bridge.

There have also been widespread rumors of kidnappings, County Judge Carlos Cascos said, though few people have stepped forward to report them to the authorities, for fear of reprisals.

"We don't have any documentation on most of it, and however people are working these situations out, they aren't involving law enforcement," Cascos said. "It's coffee shop talk that we can't put our fingers on, to find out how much of a problem this is, but it is a problem because it's on people's minds."

The increase in violence in Mexico has driven a lot of people who work in Mexico to move north to Cameron County, Cascos said, which eliminates that regular \$3 per commute the county was collecting.

"We had this golden goose for a generation, international travel, and now it's dying," Cascos said.

How did Gaston County, NC,
save **28,500 hours** a year?

Since implementing Laserfiche in 2007, Gaston County has standardized enterprise content management across **8 county departments and processes, from finance and payroll to DSS and case management**, saving over 28,500 man hours—the equivalent of 14 FTEs—a year. Three more departmental deployments are planned this year.

"Standardization is vital to the long-term success of the whole organization," says CIO Brandon Jackson. "We know that once we start deploying to larger departments, savings will mount up into the millions of dollars."



Visit Laserfiche.com/gc to download the Gaston County case study white paper.

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N.M. county site approved for urban national wildlife refuge

By CHARLES TAYLOR
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

New Mexico is on track to host the first urban national wildlife refuge in the U.S. Southwest, thanks in large part to Bernalillo County's persistent efforts.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) joined county officials late last month to announce federal approval of a 570-acre former dairy farm in the county as a refuge.

Bernalillo County, N.M., where Albuquerque is located, has pledged \$5 million towards the estimated \$18 million to \$20 million it will cost the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to acquire

the Price's Dairy property. The county's annual operating budget is about \$200 million, according to Commissioner Art De La Cruz, a leading proponent of the project.

Greg Hiner is the Trust for Public Lands' project manager for the proposed refuge; he said the county's role has been essential.

"Here the county stepped in early; the county stepped in big, and the county stepped in unequivocally and said we believe that this is important — and we believe that this is so important that we're going to put in \$5 million," he said.

"Without having that, I'm not quite sure we could have made that announcement here a few weeks ago."

Salazar said the county and

its partners' plans fit perfectly in the context of President Obama's America's Great Outdoors initiative, announced last year. "I applaud the vision of the landowner, the Fish and Wildlife Service and Bernalillo County, and all other partners, for recognizing that this special place can, and should, be protected for future generations," he said.

Only a handful — fewer than 5 percent — of the more than 550 national wildlife refuges in the country are in urban areas. And the more commonly known refuges are far larger, some as big as 100,000 acres. The refuge in Bernalillo would be five miles from downtown Albuquerque, and more than 110,000 elementary

school children live within a half-hour of the site, according to Jose Viramontes, who is shepherding the project for FWS.

The Great Outdoors initiative seeks address the "nature-deficit disorder" in highly developed areas where children and families have little access to wildlife and vast open spaces, he said, calling Bernalillo County's role in the local project "monumental."

"The America's Great Outdoors initiative fully recognized the value of these urban landscapes in contributing towards our sort of conservation portfolio throughout the country," Viramontes added. "We were looking more and more at properties like this, and the land was still available."

There's another value associated with urban refuges, call them accounts receivable. According to a FWS study of recreation on America's refuges, estimates of annual sales for local communities, job creation, employment income and tax revenue all show that for every dollar invested by the federal government in the refuge system there is an average \$4 return to the local communities.

Additionally, the county stands to reap more from the land in federal hands than in its current privately owned status. Similar to payments in lieu of taxes, jurisdictions with refuges receive refuge revenue-sharing payments.

See **WILDLIFE** page 8

Official says federal aid lacking for language assistance

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information in Chinese, and King County, Wash. must offer materials in Vietnamese. Salt Lake County, Utah and Fairfax County became the first jurisdictions in their states mandated to provide information in Spanish.

Counties with November elections are looking at what is doable given the time they have remaining.

Quinn said her office is scrambling to recruit Spanish-speaking poll workers for what would be an "extremely challenging" election even without the new language requirement. The county, population 1.1 million, has 76 different ballot styles, she said.

"For 2012, it's an opportunity. For 2011, it's truly a challenge," said Quinn, operating on one-hour's sleep when she spoke with a reporter. "Even if we had four or five months, there would be a significant challenge to this."

She is also a former special counsel for voting matters at the U.S. Department of Justice. Quinn said under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act, the applicable law, jurisdictions are "immediately expected to be compliant" at the time they are designated to provide language assistance.

Justice Department spokeswoman Xochitl Hinojosa said, "We will provide guidance to newly covered jurisdictions to assist them in how to come into compliance" — but did not elaborate further.

Section 203 requires that jurisdictions make bilingual ballots, registration forms and other materials available if a "language minority" comprises more than 5 percent of



Photo courtesy of King County Elections

An unidentified King County, Wash. elections worker moves English-Chinese signage into place at one of the county's three Accessible Voting Centers. The county must now also provide such information in Vietnamese.

the voting age population or 10,000 people — as determined by the Census Bureau's American Community Survey data.

Nationwide, 248 jurisdictions were mandated to provide bilingual elections materials, down from 296 after the 2000 census. But as some localities lost language-minority population, others gained.

None of the elections officers interviewed had hard numbers on

how much the new requirement will cost, but they offered varying estimates.

Scott Konopasek is elections director for the Salt Lake County clerk's office. "It's the first time anyone's had to do this here," he said, "so it's kind of an alien concept in a place that's really sensitive to federal mandates, essentially unfunded federal mandates."

He currently has no one on

his staff who speaks Spanish and expects a challenge in identifying and recruiting bilingual poll workers. "It's kind of hard to know what exactly all the costs are going to be," he said. Konopasek's office has faced budget cuts "each year," which he'll try to offset by being "leaner and meaner, and more efficient." But in Utah, counties are responsible for all election-related costs.

Harris and King counties are perhaps better situated to predict the financial impact. Each has offered another non-English language since the 2000 census: Vietnamese for Harris and Chinese for King, so this is déjà vu. Both counties have elections in November.

"My hope that at some point in time there can be the willingness to look at Section 203 again and address it from the standpoint of cost," King County Elections Director Sherril Huff said. "When it was initiated, it was initiated with the promise that this would not be expensive, which is patently untrue. Additionally, it is not enforced evenly across the country."

Her budget has been cut each of the past three years, and she expects that adding Vietnamese will cost again as much as providing Chinese-language information. One saving grace is that the county's elections are vote-by-mail, except for three accessible voting centers for in-person voting. "We've been able to continue to find efficiencies in our processes that have helped offset some of the staffing issues and some of the costs," Huff said. "It becomes, year-by-year, a little more difficult to do that."

Harris County Clerk Stan Stanart anticipates needing to have

to hire "a couple of people" and estimated "very ballpark" figures of \$50,000 to \$100,000 in startup costs and \$120,000 to \$200,000 in recurring expenses for printing, staff and outreach, among other things.

"Having gone through that process, we know what to do," he said. "I'm sure a county that has not had to experience this, it's going to be a lot more painful."

That's the case in Salt Lake County, where, budgets and logistics aside, there is also public opinion to deal with, Konopasek said. The language mandate had a hard landing among many in the community. "That's probably going to be our biggest challenge, dealing with the English-speaking population's reaction to seeing voting material in Spanish," he said.

Large urban counties aren't the only ones affected. Napa County, Calif., with 136,000 residents, must newly provide Spanish-language assistance, but its next elections aren't until the June 2012 presidential primary, much to Voter Registrar John Tuteur's relief. But he has lots of help in California, where 26 other counties have a Spanish requirement.

While he sees it as a challenge to implement, he waxed philosophical that the change will help him achieve his office's mission, which includes making sure every eligible voter registers and that every registered voter votes.

"My great goal," he said, "is that it's going to help us increase turnout, because we're going to be able to reach a larger proportion of our citizens who now will take the time and have the knowledge to be able to cast their ballots intelligently and knowingly...."

First Lady praises NACo premier member's plans to cut calories, sodium

Earlier this month, NACo's newest premier corporate member, Darden Restaurants, hosted First Lady Michelle Obama at the Olive Garden in Prince George's County (Hyattsville), Md. as part of the First Lady's Let's Move! campaign. Darden Restaurants, Inc. owns and operates more than 1,900 restaurants around the country including Red Lobster, the Olive Garden and the LongHorn Steakhouse.

The First Lady joined Clarence Otis Jr., chairman and CEO of Darden Restaurants, Inc., and Drew Madsen, Darden's president and chief operating officer, to unveil the company's plans for a comprehensive new health and wellness initiative for menu changes that support the goal of Let's Move!.

The First Lady praised Darden Restaurants, saying, "I'm here because this is a breakthrough moment in the restaurant industry. And I'm here because I believe that the changes that Darden will

make could impact the health and well-being of an entire generation of young people."

The Darden initiative will reduce its overall calorie footprint across the portfolio of its brands, working toward a 10 percent reduction in calories over five years and a 20 percent reduction over 10 years.

In addition, Darden is committed to reducing sodium in its offerings by 10 percent over the next five years and 20 percent over the next 10 years. And in line with the Let's Move! campaign, Darden will ensure its children's menus provide healthier choices.

The company worked with the Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA), one of the nonprofit organizations that works with the First Lady on her Let's Move! initiative to reduce childhood obesity, as it developed its commitment to reduce its calorie and sodium footprints, and to provide greater choice and variety on its children's menus.

Counties consider functional mergers to reduce their costs

LANDSCAPE from page 3

and partnering may be a more cost-effective and efficient way to deliver certain services, but questions of appropriateness and long-term impacts must be considered.

Counties are giving increased attention to fee-for-service models. Counties that haven't previously focused on fee-for-service models are now doing so, while others are looking at additional services that could be offered using that approach. Counties should be wary of overusing the model because of the potential for increased public resistance and attempts by the states to control or restrict its use.

Counties should anticipate an increasing demand for government transparency and openness, and not just in the context of open meetings and Freedom-of-Information-Act requests. Public demand for Internet access to accurate, near-real-time county budget and expenditure information will become more prevalent.

Federal and state funding for counties will continue to decline in nearly all parts of the country. As revenues from these and other sources stagnate or decline, there will be increasing examination of the roles and responsibilities of all levels of government, with an eye toward eliminating or reducing services that are considered to be nonessential or less important.

Ironically, service demands will increase because of the needs of a growing retiree and elderly population, and because of the needs of the unemployed and "new poor" who are facing personal and family financial stresses. Efforts to eliminate "entitlements" at the federal and state levels also will strain county services. Since counties are often the service providers of last resort (either constitutionally or by state law), services will either have to be curtailed or eliminated, or funds to continue providing them will have to be found.

Counties and county officials have historically been the level of government that the public trusts most. A recent Gallup poll confirmed this, but the percentage of those who trust local government — approximately 68 percent — is not increasing. At the same time, the public is increasingly unaware of counties and county government functions and services, and the time devoted in the schools to civic education has been cut back or eliminated.

Although the city-county consolidation wave that began and peaked in the 1970s and 1980s has waned, increased attention is being given to functional consolidations between local government jurisdictions, particularly county-city and county-county. Improved efficiency, elimination of duplication and cost savings are potential benefits. Counties are also exploring partnerships with the private sector as they consider functional consolidation.

The political gridlock often seen at the federal and state levels is being seen more frequently at the county level. For many county boards, partisanship has replaced collegiality and civility in deliberations and policy-making.

Counties are seeking new and innovative ways to utilize community volunteers and non-governmental organizations to provide or augment services that heretofore were provided by paid employees.

Adversarial relationships between counties and other levels of government and schools are increasing, as each level competes

for scarce resources, and "higher" levels look to shift responsibilities to "lower" levels.

More political "newcomers" and persons with limited experience in county government are being elected. This means opportunities for fresh approaches and ideas, but at the same time means that the newcomers will have steep learning curves about county government and county operations that must be quickly addressed.

While much of the "landscape" is painted in dark colors, there are nevertheless rays of sunshine peeking through the clouds. In times of economic uncertainty and pessimism, there are great opportunities to rethink and reshape county government and the ways counties do business. At NACo, we're using this information to help shape the services we provide and to look at new and improved ways to best serve our county members.

(Tell us what you think! Email your thoughts about the future of county government to ed.ferguson@naco.org)

Word Search

Counties with Halloween Themed Town Names

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

BLACK CAT (Mississippi County, Ark.)
BLOOD (Hillsborough County, N.H.)
BOOS (Jasper County, Ill.)
CANDY TOWN (Hocking County, Ohio)
CASPER (Natrona County, Wyo.)
DEADMANS (Muskingum County, Ohio)
DEVILS CORNER (Pepin County, Wis.)
FRANKENSTEIN (Osage County, Mo.)
GOBLIN TOWN (Montgomery County, Va.)
HERSHEY (Dauphin County, Pa.)

PUMPKIN (San Jacinto County, Tex.)
SCARY (Putnam County, W.Va.)
SCREAMER (Henry County, Ala.)
SKULLHEAD (Ware County, Ga.)
SLAUGHTER (Kent County, Del.)
SPIDER (Knott County, Ky.)
TOMBSTONE (Cochise County, Ariz.)
TRANSYLVANIA (Transylvania County, N.C.)
TREAT (Pope County, Ark.)
TRICKEM (Lowndes County, Ala.)

Created by: Christopher Johnson



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Urban wildlife refuge fits America's Great Outdoors Initiative



Photo by Kim Kurian/The Trust for Public Land

Bernalillo County, N.M. Commissioner Art De La Cruz speaks about the benefits an urban wildlife refuge will bring to the area. U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar (l) and Joy Nicholopoulos, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, are also pictured.

WILDLIFE from page 6

"In this particular project we anticipate that we'll be paying as much or greater than what the county currently receives from the landowner in taxes," Viramontes said. That's because as agricultural land, it is eligible for a county tax exemption. "From a tax base perspective there's no net loss."

The county, FWS and the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) have for years been exploring the possibility of establishing a refuge at the site. Earlier efforts fell through, but timing was on the county's side when FWS began to focus on smaller properties near big cities.

The working title for the project is the Middle Rio Grand National Wildlife Refuge, but Viramontes said a naming competition could eventually be held involving the local community and school children.

De La Cruz, in whose district the property lies, has been interested in the parcel since before taking office in 2009. Previously, he was the county's parks and recreation director for 14 years, so his open-space interest comes naturally.

"I wanted to try to secure the Price's Dairy because the district I represent has a significant amount of historical agrarian property, and unfortunately, like many communi-

ties, much of it is disappearing," De La Cruz said.

He worked to build coalitions of stakeholders who also had an interest in preserving the property, including TPL, FWS, the state and Albuquerque.

"By the time it came to a vote on the local level, we already had those people behind us," he said. The supervisors' vote to approve a \$5 million set-aside for the property was a unanimous 5-0 in favor. The allocation sunsets late in 2012, so the partners have their work cut out for them. Viramontes said additional funders are being identified and are coming forward to help.

"Right now, we have an acquisition boundary; we have a willing seller. We just need to match up the money with the seller, and we'll have a refuge," he said. One potential source is the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Congress established the fund in 1964 to use revenues from offshore oil and gas drilling to support the conservation of America's lands and waters.

FWS intends to work with its partners to establish environmental education programs at the refuge and provide demonstration areas for sustainable agriculture. Once fully restored, visitors to the refuge will likely be able to see waterfowl, small mammals, and neotropical migrant birds, such

as the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher.

De La Cruz grew up in the district he now represents and recalls that as a "poor kid," visits to Price's Dairy were a treat on school field trips.

"As much as I enjoyed visiting there as a little kid, when the cows and dairy were in full effect," he said, "I just look forward to it being a location for kids again. I spent a whole career working with family and kids, and I just look forward to seeing some kids out there."

Counties say state funding, real estate losses add up

SURVEY from page 2

economic development prospects are paying off, and we've been able to start replenishing our rainy day fund," she said,

Belknap County, N.H. Administrator Debra Shackett said although her county's revenues had been decreasing across the board, a loss of state funding was starting to make her look at which services were mandated and which could be cut.

Jefferson County, Miss. struggled with high unemployment, and increase in need for social services that went along with it, and the loss of income tax revenue.

County Administrator Brenda Buck said in August 2011 her county had the third-highest unemployment rate in Mississippi, and it could have been higher, she felt, if the figure included people who were out of work but had either not applied for government assistance or not exhausted their unemployment benefits.

Jefferson County's demographics also gave it an advantage in winning government aid that went to closing its budget gap.

"Almost 43 percent of our population is receiving some sort of subsidy, many with disabilities, so we stand out when we are looking for grants," she said. "Now other counties are starting look for the same grants, so what was once a non-competitive situation for us is now a level playing field, which will be harder for us to continue to take advantage of."

Mecosta County, Mich. had

not yet seen a lot of the budget mayhem that others had reported, though County Administrator Paul Bullock said it was likely the county would see about \$1 million less coming in during 2012 than in 2010, a significant part of the county's \$12 million general fund.

Most of that drop would come from real estate tax revenue, though Bullock said Mecosta had been spared the real estate wreckage in southeast Michigan.

For the most part, he said the county was looking for ways it could make capital improvements that would later yield savings, particularly in energy costs.

"We'll be putting the county on a diet, rather than having gastric bypass surgery," he said.

Bullock credited the county's elected officials and department heads with being on board with a tight fiscal strategy and county employees for accepting health insurance cost sharing since 1989, which has helped keep benefit costs low.

"We're still in a situation where we can do long-term planning, and figuring out how to dial back services rather than cut them," he said. "If we don't provide services, what's our reason for being here?"

Counties of all budget sizes responded to the survey, providing a representative sampling of counties in the nation by population. Four percent of responding counties had budgets of \$1 billion or more, and 21 percent had budgets of \$9 million or less.

You can read the full survey report online at www.naco.org ► Research and Publications ► Surveys.

Act would provide more than \$1.5 billion in SRS funding, extend PILT

S.1692 from page 1

Bingaman (D-N.M.) and Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) represents a strong commitment to support key programs critical to nearly 2,000 counties nationwide.

The act would provide more than \$1.5 billion in SRS funding to roughly 700 counties with national forest lands to support public schools, county road improvement and maintenance projects, forestry projects, and wildfire risk reduction programs.

It also would extend funding under the PILT program to more

than 1,900 counties in 49 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to help fund essential county government programs.

Payments in lieu of taxes are federal payments to local governments that help offset losses in property taxes due to federal lands within their boundaries.

While NACo supports the senate's efforts to reauthorize the SRS program, it is important to recognize that the funding levels and annual 5 percent ramp-down offered in the proposal will present continued

challenges to a number of forested counties. NACo will continue to work closely with members of Congress to address job creation and forest management legislation to provide a long-term solution to providing sustainable revenue sharing with forested counties.

NACo believes that a straight reauthorization is only part of the solution, and pursuing management and restoration of the nation's forests will generate significant environmental and social benefits, and create needed jobs and revenue for rural economies.

Model Programs From the Nation's Counties

El Paso County, Colo.

Ditching Checks Pays Off for County

By CHARLIE BAN
STAFF WRITER

Even when it was true, the common refrain that the check was in the mail didn't win many friends for El Paso County, Colo.

In the latter half of the last decade, the county was experiencing a lot of the same ills that would befall a person making that claim. Revenue losses forced the county to shed expenses like crazy — cutting \$45 million from its budget, almost a third, including layoffs of 200 full-time employees and freezing 100 job openings. That wasn't keeping the county from paying its bills, but for years, personnel in accounts payable heard complaints from vendors and contractors because their payments were delayed. Paying by check took up to four weeks after receipt of an invoice.

The belt-tightening continued when projections showed property tax revenues would plummet in 2012, and the county needed to tighten its belt further to save some stopgap funding, cruelly enough just as the county had reached operational sustainability. Then, the county's citizen budget oversight committee said it was time to stop applying one-time bandage fixes to the county's aging facilities.

With that dreary fiscal backdrop, the budget department uncovered a tool to mitigate a number of the circumstances and reveal an underused revenue source, Budget Administrator Nicola Sapp said.

That solution, she found was akin to earning frequent flyer miles with every purchase using a credit card. The procurement card, or

p-card, program provided a direct payment option that included a cash rebate. The card is available through banks and financial services firms and operates like a credit card, allowing a county to pay with an account number, rather than processing an invoice with a check. An increasing number of businesses are accepting this payment method as they update their accounting systems to reduce paper usage.

In 2008, the county was getting \$6,000 back from paying a little more than \$800,000 using the p-card. It didn't take Sapp long to realize that the p-card account was doing more for the county than checks could, and in doing so could keep business partners happier with faster payment.

"It was a solution to how we could live within our means and maximize on every revenue program available," she said. "We had

cut our accounts payable staff, so writing hundreds of small checks wasn't an efficient use of a department that had to be extremely efficient."

By 2010, the county had expanded to pay \$11.3 million of its bills through its p-card, and reaped \$150,000 in rebates. It was enough to replace one of the accounts payable positions cut a few years before, and the accountant that holds that job performs regular evaluations

to see if new vendors have begun accepting p-cards. That position, plus other costs associated with administering the p-card program, add up to \$55,000, leaving almost \$100,000 in rebate money that goes back to the general fund.

"We had some pushback from vendors when we told them we wanted to pay that way, but we won them over by explaining that gets them their payment more quickly," Sapp said. "The more we spend on the p-card, the more we're getting back, so it's an easy decision to make to use it."

The \$11.3 million represents approximately 11 percent of the county's total accounts payable volume. Expanding the scope of the program, she said, is complicated.

"Some of our elected officials worked hard to negotiate some reduced costs with some of our vendors," she said. "In some cases, though, they don't accept p-cards, but for the most part the discounts are competitive with the rebates we'd be receiving."

As the county renews and signs new contracts, it will push for its vendors to accept p-card payments.

The program was named Best in Category for Fiscal Management in NACo's 2011 Achievement Awards.

(Model Programs from the Nation's Counties highlights Achievement Award-winning programs. For more information on this and other NACo Achievement Award winners, visit NACo's Web site, www.naco.org ► Resource Library ► Model County Programs.)

Financial Services News

County Installs Network of Care for Veterans and their Families



Snohomish County became the first of Washington's counties to install NACo's Network of Care for Service Members, Veterans and their Families as a critical resource for military service members returning from war or other service to the country.

It joined others in California, Maryland, Oregon, Texas and Colorado that have already launched Network of Care Military Service sites.

By providing a comprehensive directory of the service providers in Snohomish County and the region, Network of Care puts people in touch with the right services at the right time. Using a highly interactive Web portal, the Network of Care also provides easy-to-search libraries and vital information about crisis intervention, employment and education.

"We are excited to bring this Web-based program to our community," said Snohomish County Councilman John Koster, president of the Washington Association of Counties and NACo board member. "It is an excellent source to care for our men and women veterans returning from overseas. All the resources can be put in one easy place to access."

The Network of Care provides service members and their families with critical, comprehensive information to help them reintegrate into their communities upon return from active duty.

It provides a user-friendly service directory that can search all services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense, National Guard, the state, the county, local service providers and local grassroots organizations. It also features a continuously updated jobs board for all government, Fortune 1000 companies, and veterans-preferred job openings. In addition, it provides access to

crisis intervention and emergency services including all emergency shelters.

A sophisticated reintegration and outreach email platform has been developed to incorporate the Network of Care tools for direct, personal outreach to military personnel returning from deployment.

Through the Network of Care Program, Snohomish County can now link veterans to everything from how and where they can find out what federal benefits they are eligible for to what state and local services might be available for employment, housing assistance, counseling, transportation or even childcare. The Network of Care was selected by Fairfax County, Va. through a nationally solicited competitive bid process. The NACo contract is available immediately and most public agencies can piggyback on this contract, eliminating the need to bid for the services themselves.

The Network of Care is a project of the NACo in partnership with Trilogy Integrated Resources.

For more information about the Network of Care for Military Service, Veterans and their Families, please visit <http://veterans.trilogyir.com> or contact Jim Sawyer, NACo Financial Services Corporation, at 202.661.8868 or jsawyer@naco.org.

(Financial Services News was written by Jim Sawyer, director, NACo Financial Services Corporation.)

NACo on the Move

» NACo Officers and Elected Officials



Chris Rodgers

• **Chris Rodgers**, NACo first vice president, spoke about NACo and its dental discount program at the Georgia Association of Counties Annual Meeting in Fulton County (Atlanta) Oct. 18.

» Coming Up

• **Andrew Goldschmidt**, director, membership marketing, will be exhibiting on behalf of membership retention and recruitment at the Missouri Association of Counties Annual Conference in Camden County Oct. 27-28

On the Move is compiled by Christopher Johnson, editorial assistant.



Share your point of view ...

Letters to the Editor

Please include a phone number with your letter. Mail, fax or e-mail to:

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News From the Nation's Counties

► ALABAMA

• **CULLMAN COUNTY** is trying to get a little more mileage out of the county road department's efforts to maintain roads and rights of way by urging timber-cutting companies and loggers to **tread more lightly on county roads**.

The county is requiring timber harvesting operations to give notice to the county engineer before beginning any harvesting effort in the county. Associate County Commissioner Darrell Hicks said it's an attempt to ensure road officials can keep track of where work is being done, and to make sure rights of way are kept free of tree debris after cutting crews have gone.

The resolution also forbids cutters from parking equipment on county roadsides and from disturbing adjacent ditches. If a company needs to cross a ditch in order to gain access to a property, Hicks said the county road department will sell loggers an appropriate culvert that the county road department will install, the *Cullman Times* reported.

• Tired of exporting its **used tires** for disposal, **COFFEE COUNTY** is considering implementing its own processing center at its landfill.

The County Commission is seeking support from local municipalities to build a regional center and is applying for a grant to buy the machinery needed to shred tires and remove metals from them.

The county receives money each year through the Alabama Department of Environmental Management's Scrap Tire Commission to pick up and dispose of tires from roadsides. Currently, the tires are buried in **COVINGTON COUNTY**.

The center would not process the tire pieces into finished products, but the county could use some of the aggregate in its construction projects, a county engineer told the *Enterprise Ledger*.

► ARIZONA

• The **MARICOPA COUNTY** Board of Supervisors has given **subpoena power** to the county's six planning and development hearing officers.

The hearing officers will be able to issue subpoenas to companies or individuals for records or witnesses to prove whether they are complying with county permitting rules.

The county's planning and development staff asked the supervisors to approve subpoena power after a recent county permitting-rule violation case. A general contractor had done work without getting



Photo courtesy of Chesterfield County, Va.

Organized, fun physical activities for teens in Chesterfield County, Va., like jumping rope, contributed to its making the America's Promise 100 Best Communities for Young People list for a fifth consecutive year in 2011. Six other counties are also five-time winners.

► CONGRATULATIONS!

Seven counties are five-for-five with the recent announcement by America's Promise Alliance of its 2011 list of **100 Best Communities for Young People**.

The awards program, presented by ING, recognizes and rewards communities for extraordinary efforts to reduce dropout rates, and provide outstanding services and supports to their youths.

Being recognized for the fifth straight year are **SOLANO COUNTY**, Calif., **MANATEE COUNTY**, Fla., **SALISBURY/WICOMICO COUNTY**, Md., **MISSOULA COUNTY**, Mont. **CHESTERFIELD COUNTY**, Va., **LOUISVILLE/JEFFERSON COUNTY**, Ky. and **ANCHORAGE BOROUGH**, Alaska.

The following counties made the list for the first time this year: **MONTROSE COUNTY**, Colo., **HOUSTON COUNTY**, Ga., **FLOYD COUNTY**, Ind., **MULTNOMAH COUNTY**, Ore., **HANOVER COUNTY**, Va. and **RANDOLPH COUNTY**, W. Va.

Each winning county received a grant of \$2,500 that can be used to help fund a local program or service, within specified parameters, or for a local event to celebrate the win.

For a list of all county winners and their programs, visit www.americaspromise.org/100best.

the proper permits, but the county attorney's office did not have all the documentation it needed to cite the contractor's violation, *The Arizona Republic* reported.

• Inmates at the **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY** jail could soon be showering with water heated by the sun, thanks to an innovative hybrid system that providers say will come at no cost to the county.

The Board of Supervisors approved a plan to install **solar panels at the jail** to produce both hot water and electricity. The system uses a curved panel of mirrors to aim concentrated sunlight at a trough of photovoltaic cells. At the same time, the heat energy warms a transfer fluid that preheats water for an existing boiler system.

The system could save the county more than \$350,000 over its 25-year lifespan, *Nogales International* reported, and though it could cost up to \$290,000 to fully install the

system, all expenses will be covered by federal stimulus funds and government incentives.

► CALIFORNIA

Minority-owned businesses would get support from **RIVERSIDE COUNTY** through a new nonprofit organization under a proposal to the supervisors, in the form of staff advisors from the county offices.

The staff support would include the assistant county executive officer for economic development and foreign trade commissioner.

The Riverside-based Southern California Corporate Growth Partners (SCCGP) received a U.S. Department of Commerce grant totaling nearly \$1.8 million over the next five years. The group will serve as a minority business center for the Inland region.

According to the *Press-Enterprise*, the proposal has the county helping SCCGP as it works with businesses

to develop business plans, locate domestic and international investment and provide employee training.

► ILLINOIS

Families who can't afford a burial will see their loved ones' **remains donated to science** unless they object, under a new **COOK COUNTY** regulation.

Bodies will be kept at the county morgue for two weeks before they are given to a nonprofit organization that supplies them to universities for research and use in anatomy classes, Medical Examiner Nancy Jones wrote in a memo to staff.

The memo says unclaimed remains — which the county historically has paid \$300 to bury in a pauper's cemetery in Homewood — will also be kept for two weeks and then donated, effective immediately.

According to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the agreement between the county and the Anatomical Gift Association requires only notifica-

tion via a newspaper ad to identify bodies being donated. It does not require the county obtain the next of kin's consent, though the association holds the bodies for an additional 60 days before they are sent to research institutions.

► INDIANA

ALLEN COUNTY commissioners approved a cost-sharing agreement allowing a local school system to pay a membership fee to connect and **access the county's mapping data**.

The school systems use the data to design bus routes, GIS Office Manager Dave Estes told the *Journal-Gazette*. The membership fee is \$5,000 annually, better, Estes said, than the \$15,000 price tag for a copy of the county's mapping parcel that includes all of the mapping layers — land parcels, addresses, roads and jurisdiction boundaries.

► IOWA

Iowa Secretary of State Matt Schultz thinks it could be time to change how **county supervisor districts** are redrawn every 10 years.

Schultz's office has not drafted plans to put before state lawmakers, but he thinks it's time to look for ways to improve a county redistricting system that is frequently dogged by accusations of political motives, he said.

That could mean a system where local control exists but the state's nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency could get involved in drawing supervisor districts, he said.

"Nobody can prove either side is playing politics, and yet, everybody is accusing each other of the same thing. How do we take this out of it?" Schultz asked *The Des Moines Register*, rhetorically.

► MARYLAND

The **building excise tax** could be excised in **FREDERICK COUNTY**.

The tax generates \$925,000 annually for state road and bridge improvements, but Board of County Commissioners' President Blaine R. Young wants to cut the tax, which is 75 cents per square foot for businesses and 25 cents per square foot for housing to make it less expensive for developers to build, so more businesses can be created, according to *The Gazette*.

"The building industry has said Virginia is kicking our butts [in creating jobs]," Young said. "I've heard this."

Research News

Counties Intervene on Halloween

Halloween is a fun and exciting night of candy, costumes and thrills for children across the nation. For many parents, though, safety is one of the biggest concerns during this annual tradition.

Families often take extra safety precautions while trick-or-treating; this includes staying in groups, going out before dark, checking candy, and looking both ways before crossing the street. Along with the precautions that parents and kids take, some counties are also stepping in to help keep the children in their communities safe.

Last October, the Tulare County, Calif. Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 in favor of an ordinance that prohibits registered sex offenders from taking part in Halloween activities. All sex offenders living in unincorporated areas of the county are forbidden from putting up decorations, answering their

doors or turning on any outside lights between 5 p.m. and midnight on Halloween.

"This is a measure that's designed to empower parents and protect children," Tulare County Supervisor Steve Worthley said. Sex offenders who choose not to follow Tulare County's ordinance could face up to six months in jail or a \$1,000 fine.

A year earlier, a similar ordinance was unanimously passed in St. Johns County, Fla. by the County Commission. The St. Johns County Prohibited Holiday Activity Ordinance bans registered sex offenders in the county from passing out candy, decorating their doors or dressing up in costumes. Additionally, they must display a sign on their door that reads "No Candy Here." However, sex offenders do not have to post signs if they are not home on Halloween.



Violators in St. Johns County face up to 60 days in jail and a \$500 fine. When the ordinance was enacted in 2009, sheriff's deputies went around to every registered sex offender's home in the county and distributed the signs and explained the ordinance. Last year they made phone calls reminding the offenders of the ordinance.

No Candy Here signs are not a new concept. Since 2005,

Maryland has been distributing signs and letters to 1,200 violent and child-sex offenders throughout the state. Paper signs reading "No candy at this residence" must be posted on front doors on Oct. 31 or offenders face a parole violation. Maryland also distributes pamphlets statewide to inform families about the signs and to advise them to stay away from marked houses.

Officials in Geary County, Kan., are taking a different approach to the issue this year, with hopes of a similar outcome. County officials are encouraging parents to visit the website www.sheriffalerts.com before going trick-or-treating with their kids. This website lets parents search for violent offenders, drug offenders and sex offenders in their neighborhoods or wherever they plan on spending Halloween. Residents can also sign up for

automatic email updates if an offender moves near a registered address.

"If you aren't planning on trick-or-treating in your neighborhood, but will be in a family or friend's neighborhood, register their address beforehand so you know which houses to avoid," Geary County Sheriff Jim Jensen said.

Another way to inform the public about where sex offenders reside is to release the information to residents. Last year in the days leading up to Halloween, the Sheriff's Office in Jackson County, Ga. released a list of all sex offenders in the county and where they reside. It was subsequently picked up by the local newspaper and printed as a resource to all trick-or-treaters and parents.

(Research News was written by Sarah Sunderman, research associate.)

Pa. counties concerned about collecting shale gas impact fees

NEWS FROM *from page 10*

► NEW JERSEY

Let's hope these unions turn out better than "The Bride of Frankenstein."

Just days before Halloween, **BURLINGTON COUNTY** Clerk Timothy D. Tyler will perform **graveyard weddings** in the Burlington County Haunted Prison Oct. 28.

"Other county clerks have held mass weddings and Valentine's Day weddings," Tyler said. "We were looking for something a little bit different. The Historic Prison Museum has graciously offered a unique location for a unique event."

Ceremonies will be performed beginning at 5 p.m. in the mock cemetery of the Burlington County Prison Museum's annual Prison Haunt. Couples are encouraged to wear appropriate Halloween attire. Each couple will receive VIP admission to the Haunt after the ceremonies.

► NEW YORK

Twenty percent of **ONTARIO COUNTY** residents smoke, and

the lung cancer rate there is 75.7 per 100,000 residents, based on data from the Cancer Registry. The rate for all of New York state is 63.8 percent, the *Messenger Post* reported.

The county Board of Supervisors hopes to change that and is considering **banning smoking on county-owned or leased property**, and within county-owned vehicles — with exceptions where existing state law trumps local action.

Sixty percent of 400 county employees surveyed supported a smoking ban on county property, according to county Public Health Director Mary Beer. But some residents see it as an imposition on their rights.

"People have the right to smoke, but on our properties, they shouldn't," Beer said. "We're just trying to promote health."

► TENNESSEE

DICKSON COUNTY officials want their slice of the development pie and are looking at how to make their **incentives more competitive**.

RUTHERFORD, WILSON and MONTGOMERY counties were in the running for a million-

square-foot Amazon distribution facility. Rutherford and Wilson won out, but Dickson was never under consideration with its mid-state neighbors, *The Tennessean* reported.

Counties often offer tax breaks and fee waivers to compete for businesses. Rutherford County offered Amazon a 20-year tax break totaling more than \$15.8 million. Currently, Dickson County's maximum incentive package includes only a seven-year tax break.

"It's a whole new ball game since the last time the county upped its incentive package," David Hamilton, Dickson County Chamber of Commerce president, told the county's Industrial Development Board.

► PENNSYLVANIA

The **COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA (CCAP)** supports much of Gov. Tom Corbett's (R) plan to implement recommendations of the Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission but has concerns about **counties' role in collecting fees**.

Under the proposal, counties with shale gas would be authorized to levy an impact fee on active wells. CCAP believes that the interests of local government and of the industry are better served by a uniform statewide levy and state administration.

The proposed levy would decrease over time: a maximum of \$40,000 per well in its first year of production, \$30,000 in the second year, \$20,000 in the third, and \$10,000 per year through the 10th year. Seventy-five percent of the proceeds would stay with the impacted county.

Counties rely on landfill fees to pay for hazardous waste drop-off events and recycling education programs. But the state Department of Environmental Protection has **thwarted counties' efforts** to collect the fees since Gov. Tom Corbett took office in January, according to *The Morning Call*.

"DEP says we still need to reach our recycling goals, but they've effectively tied our hands behind our back with the funding," said Duane Dellecker, **CARBON COUNTY's** solid waste director.

A state law, passed in 1988, gave counties the authority to charge a Recycling Sustainability Fee and many did for 20 years, with few problems — until after the state sued Lehigh County. The court barred counties from levying the fee by ordinance, as Lehigh had done. This led landfills throughout the state to stop paying the fee.

The fees provided \$6.8 million in revenue to 37 counties in 2008, according to the advocacy group PennEnvironment. About

\$120,000 about is at stake in Carbon County.

► TEXAS

For the first time in Texas, two counties are sharing a **common juvenile justice database** with the rollout last month of a new, jointly developed software program.

TARRANT and DALLAS counties implemented the Juvenile Case Management System (JCMS), which can track individuals entered into the database by either county.

"We have been able to develop a major software package that is specifically designed for Texas Juvenile Probation programs," Tarrant County Administrator G.K. Maenius said.

The JCMS will enable both counties to see database information across jurisdictions, streamline the operations of juvenile probation by decreasing paperwork and increasing person-to-person contacts, and give counties the ability to allow local law enforcement agencies to access the database.

Maenius said the county could sell the software to other Texas counties to help offset software development costs.

(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.)

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The H.R. Doctor Is In

'Keep Calm and Carry On!'

Imagine that you are part of a society with an increasing sense of worry and uncertainty about the future. The effects of wars, the fear of losing some of the status which comes from being a world super-power, unrest and unemployment at home, and the effects of changing technologies all contribute to a general sense of unease. Sound familiar?

Actually, the HR Doctor is referring to Britain in the 1930s. Would the colonies be lost? Would there be a further decay in the

unity of the nation? What was causing the world-wide economic worries? Was the world heading for another massive war or would there be "peace in our time?" No one knew and no one seemed to have a credible answer. There was in general a worry about leadership and national morale.

One of the steps taken in Britain to help refocus the nation was very simple. It may offer some lessons on the power of communications of which we should take advantage in the United States in the second

decade of the 21st century. In 1939, the adoption of a slogan occurred which was designed to enhance morale and provide people with a symbolic point of reference and social grounding. The phrase was "Keep Calm and Carry On!"

Something so simple can have a profound effect. It can focus energy and attention on much that is good and much that is going very well. It can be a deterrent against incessant whining and provide a point of focus for unity of purpose in difficult times. Stay calm and carry

on implies a future of optimism. It implies a future in which policies will emerge to push through a crisis or to turn the forces of disunity into forces for a better life — the forces of unity.

All the slogans in the universe, however, are not enough. There is an essential ingredient which must go right along with the slogan to make it effective. That ingredient is dynamic, clear leadership. Such leadership infuses the entire society with confidence and faith. Leadership, confidence and faith are all key elements in resolving any crisis. Strong leadership must also communicate clearly, consistently and frequently.

Britain was entering a time when the disaffection about what was going on with the world would give way to the higher calling of the imperative of World War II. Certainly a strong wartime leader, such as Winston Churchill, would communicate effectively and often, showing all along his mastery of the English language, his sense of the nation's history and his sense of humor.

The HR Doctor earnestly recommends one easy form of treatment to help us avoid a national case of unease. That is, spend some

time listening to the speeches of Winston Churchill. Listen to his clarity in articulating a vision. Listen to the compelling statements he makes, such as, "Never, Ever Give Up!" Listen to how his humor frames his communications in a way which helps him relate well to every member of society.

Finally, consider how the leadership and communications approaches mentioned in this article might help you interact with colleagues at work and with members of your family.

They, too, need strong leaders to help them resolve crises in family economics and personal worries about the uncertainty in work problems and those at home. There certainly are lessons to be learned and practiced by community leaders in public, private and nonprofit organizations. When you worry that things aren't going well "Keep Calm and Carry On!" with a positive sense of the future and a confident commitment to get involved to make a positive difference.

Phil Rosenberg

Phil Rosenberg
The HR Doctor • www.hrdr.net

Job Market & Classifieds

► COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR – SARASOTA COUNTY, FLA.

Salary: DOQ.

Sarasota County, a full service county located in the middle of Florida's west coast, is seeking experienced administrator to plan, organize and direct all County programs and activities including an operating budget of \$867 million with over 2,000 full time employees. Requires Bachelor's degree and a minimum of 10 years' professional management experience or a Master's degree and two (2) years' experience as an appointed city manager or county administrator. A collaborative management style, candor, accessibility, fairness, transparency and flexibility are necessary attributes. Resumes by Fri., Oct. 28 to: Mr. James L. Mercer, 551 W. Cordova Road, Santa Fe, NM 87505. Email: jmercerc@mercergroupinc.com. More information at www.mercergroupinc.com.

► 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.

► ROAD DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR – DESCHUTES COUNTY, ORE.

Salary: \$93,900 – \$126,200 annually plus a competitive benefits package; DOQ.

Road Department Director, Deschutes County, Bend, Ore. Pop. 172,050. Annual salary range includes a competitive benefits package. Performs responsible administrative work directing the Road Department including road construction/maintenance, equipment maintenance, and civil engineering activities; directs the effective operation of each division through the management of supervisors. Bachelor's degree in civil engineering or related field with 8 years of progressively responsible administrative and/or managerial work associated with road department functions, OR equivalent combination of experience

and training. Oregon Professional Engineer registration desirable. Contact Natalie Jones 541.617.4722 to request a complete application packet. Deadline: Friday, Nov. 18.

► COUNTY MANAGER – PENDER COUNTY GOVERNMENT, N.C.

Salary: DOQ.

Pender County, North Carolina (Pop. 52,000) is inviting applications from highly qualified candidates for the County Manager position. Located in southeastern North Carolina within the Wilmington MSA, the County is comprised of a diverse population and communities. The County is governed by a five-member Board of Commissioners. The FY11-FY12 general fund budget is \$49 million and the total budget is \$80 million, supporting 350 full-time employees.

Successful candidates will demonstrate a high level of interest and successful experience in a broad range of local government issues, particularly in the areas of growth management, infrastructure and capital development, community and economic development, financial management, consensus building, and coastal management. Minimum educational requirements are a bachelor's degree in public or business administration or related field, with a master's degree preferable. ICMA Credentialed Managers are preferred, but credentialing is not required. A substantial amount of public sector management experience is required and a progressive record of strong professional, administrative leadership and developing high performance organizations is an important consideration.

The salary for the position is negotiable based on the candidate's qualification and experience. Please submit a letter of interest, detailed resume, and completed Pender County application to Amber Parker, Human Resources Director, P.O. Box 5, Burgaw, NC 28425. A Pender County application can be obtained or submitted online at www.pendercountync.gov. Position is open until filled. EOE

What's in a Seal?

► Kane County, Ill.
www.countyofkane.org



Kane County was formed out of LaSalle County on Jan. 16, 1836. The county was named in honor of Elias Kane, a U.S. senator from Illinois, and the first secretary of state of Illinois.

The Fox River, flowing south near the eastern boundary of Kane County, once provided power for early sawmills and gristmills. The river valley and the wide prairie beyond the river's west bank awaited northern and New York-born settlers who edged out of Chicago after 1832.

Early Kane County farmers produced milk and butter for Chicago's growing population. In 1865, the county became a dairy center to the world when Gail Borden chose it as the site of his company that condensed milk for unrefrigerated shipment in cans.

The county seal displays the date it was founded along with the county name around a blue border.

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

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