NACo rep takes high-profile role at national rural affairs summit

By Erik Johnston
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Brookings County, S.D. Commissioner Don Larson, chair, Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee, provided the opening response to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack’s keynote speech about the future of rural America during the National Summit of Rural America, held June 3 in Hillsboro (Jefferson County), Mo.

The summit, convened by Vilsack, drew about 400 farmers, provided the opening at national rural affairs summit.

Carroll County, Md. Board Chair Julia Gouge expresses her support to Senate Banking Committee Chairman Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) for his Livable Communities Act.

Senate committee hears NACo's supporting testimony on Livable Communities Act

By Daria Daniel
ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

Julia Gouge, president of Carroll County, Md.’s Board of Commissioners, testified recently on behalf of NACo at the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee hearing on Local Perspectives on the Livable Communities Act, S. 1619.

The legislation introduced by Senate Banking Committee Chairman Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) would provide nearly $4 billion in funding over four years to regions and localities for sustainable development planning and implementation around housing, transportation, environmental and land use projects.

It would also formally establish the Interagency Council on Sustainable Communities, an existing partnership between the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency, focused on better coordination between federal agencies on sustainability issues including research and grants.

“NACo believes it is the right time for passage of the Livable Communities Act because of the difficult economic and fiscal environment in our counties, and the pressure of new social, economic and environmental imperatives,” Gouge said at the June 9 hearing.

“The goal of sustainability compels all levels of government to regroup, and to demand innovative multi-jurisdictional, multi-dimensional and fiscally sound approaches that will lead to better transportation choices, equitable and affordable housing, social equity and enhanced opportunities for our communities.”

Dodd noted during his opening statement the support the Obama administration has given to sustainable planning and development. The FY10 HUD appropriations bill included $150 million for the Sustainable Communities Initiative — of that amount, $100 million in planning grants should be released soon.

During her testimony, Gouge also discussed the importance of rural, suburban and urban communities.

See TESTIMONY page 5
Verizon offers to partner with rural wireless companies

Verizon Wireless recently launched plans to partner with rural operators and firms that own cell towers or provide backhaul services to bring advanced wireless services, or LTE, to rural America. LTE, or Long Term Evolution, is the fourth generation (4G) radio technology designed to increase the capacity and speed of mobile telephone networks. The technology is a high-speed mobile broadband service.

Verizon has been busily selling off DSL and landline customers in rural markets. The company is, however, trying to return to these rural markets and win back many of these customers with wireless 4G LTE services.

Verizon Wireless spokesman Jeffrey Nelson said the carrier launched a new site about its efforts to make information available to all the companies and organizations that have expressed interest in working with Verizon to bring LTE to rural America. The site is available at http://aboutvzw.com/rural/Overview.html.

According to Fierce Wireless, Rural Cellular Association President Steven Berry said the group is pleased Verizon recognizes rural carriers as essential to bringing LTE to rural America. However, he said the association is still concerned that Verizon is only interested in partnerships that will benefit its bottom line by filling in current coverage gaps rather than finding solutions to data roaming, 700 Megahertz (MHz) spectrum interoperability and handset availability.

“We can work to bring interoperable, 4G services to all rural Americans, not just the select few that Verizon is willing to partner with, through data-roaming agreements, by ending handset exclusivity and allowing a full build-out of the 700 MHz spectrum,” Berry said.

The promotion of broadband deployment and adoption is a 2010 key legislative priority for NACo. NACo is working with Congress and federal agencies to provide and support county efforts to ensure their citizens have access to robust broadband capabilities.

L.A.'s Fitness Zone gets rave reviews from urban county leaders

LUCC Chair Ilene Lieberman, commissioner, Broward County, Fla., and Jim McDonough, LUCC vice chair, commissioner, Ramsey County, Minn., try out some Fitness Zone equipment.

L.U.C.C. from page 1

Specifically, they highlighted the need for an extension of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act’s enhanced Medicaid federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) until June 30, 2011, enactment of the Restoring the Partnership for County Health Care Costs Act of 2009 (H.R.2209), and several other critical health policy matters. Additionally, Anita Cardwell, NACo senior associate, provided an overview of NACo’s health reform implementation activities. These services will assist counties in better understanding the new laws and help NACo members navigate the federal regulations which will affect communities in the months and years ahead.

Mid-morning and afternoon sessions highlighted the work and best practices of health officials in L.A. County. Dr. John Schunhoff, interim director for the county’s Department of Health Services (DHS), and Dr. Jonathan Fielding, director, Department of Public Health, discussed the impact of health reform on urban counties and their respective departments.

Additionally, an expert team of physicians and administrators from the Harbor-UCLA Medical Center discussed the concept of patient centered medical homes—a team-based model of care led by a personal physician who provides continuous and coordinated care throughout a patient’s lifetime to maximize health outcomes. The panelists gave an overview of Los Angeles County’s “Healthy Way L.A.” initiative. Participants of the annual meeting also toured the emergency department, the neonatal intensive care and burn units of the new Los Angeles County and USC Medical Center, prior to a tour and dinner at the Walt Disney Concert Hall.

The LUCC Annual Meeting kicked off the final day on Friday, June 4 with Michael Blake, deputy associate director, White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement, making a featured presentation. Armed with a message from President Obama, Blake shared what the administration’s next steps will be on health care implementation and discussed the Gulf oil spill, the White House Office of Urban Affairs and the importance of financial regulatory reform.

Next, the meeting focused on the work of parks and recreational services in promoting wellness. Russ Guiney, director, Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation; Pascale Derrick, project manager, Trust for Public Land; and Dr. Eloiza Gonzalez, director of the L.A. County Physical Activity and Cardiovascular Health program, discussed the major role of local parks and recreation departments in promoting a healthy lifestyle and fighting the obesity epidemic.

Of particular note, panelists highlighted the L.A. Fitness Zone program. This public-private partnership installed custom-designed, easy-to-use isometric outdoor gym equipment in 29 of L.A. County’s parks. At the conclusion of the meeting, participants were allowed to tryout various Fitness Zone equipment.

Health Care Information Technology

Since health reform began, NACo has strongly supported federal, state and local efforts to implement and invest in innovative health information technology (IT). As a result, the meeting next highlighted how health information technology can benefit federal, state and local coordination, reduce medical errors, and improve health care quality and access for many. Two panelists, Dr. Karen Van Wagner, executive director of Sandill LLC, and Kevin Scala, executive vice president of corporate development, Netsmart Technologies, discussed how counties can take advantage of Recovery Act investments to deploy appropriate health IT technologies, increase efficiency, reduce health disparities, improve quality and better serve patients and taxpayers dollars.

Concluding, Cathy Chiester, director, L.A. County Emergency Medical Service Agency, and Dr. Brit Oulfsstad, pandemic influenza coordinator for emergency preparedness and response, L.A. County Department of Public Health, provided an overview of the county’s Mobile Medical Hospital System and its plans for surge capacity at hospitals and clinics in the event of pandemic events. One tool in the county’s arsenal is its fully equipped 12-bed and two operation-table mobile emergency treatment facility, consisting of two eighteen-wheeler trucks and a moderate sized staff.

“There is tremendous value for us as leaders in county government to talk to one another, learn from one another, and explore everything we can to serve our residents and businesses,” said LUCC chair and Broward County, Fla. Commissioner Ilene Lieberman. “We were pleased to hold this meeting in Los Angeles County and discuss health reform implementation.” She added “We hope to see more local leaders at future NACo events.”

For more information on NACo’s Health Reform Implementation services, please visit www.naco.org/healthreformimplement and send questions to healthreforminfo@naco.org.

(Paul Beddor, associate legislative director, and Anita Cardwell, senior associate, contributed to this report.)
By Charles Taylor
Senior Staff Writer

Santa Fe County is serving as a laboratory for the rest of New Mexico as the first jurisdiction in the state to establish a clean-energy loan program, repayable through the borrower's property taxes.

It's one of a growing number of counties nationwide with a Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE), or similar, program. Boulder County, Colo., Sonoma County, Calif. and Montgomery County, Md. are among the others.

With PACE programs, property owners can borrow money from newly created "municipal financing districts" to pay for energy retrofits — efficiency measures or renewable energy projects, such as solar panels. The financing districts may sell bonds to raise the money to lend. Loans are repaid through a voluntary property tax assessment that stays with the property not the borrower. The loans typically can be repaid over a period of up to 20 years.

Santa Fe County's program, Renew Santa Fe, has raised $10 million in private funding to begin as a pilot, according to Duncan Sill, the county's economic development director, who is in charge of the effort. That should be enough to fund 40–50 projects when the program ramps up later this year, he said.

Residential and commercial properties will be eligible for the loans. The county also intends to eventually sell "micro-bonds" in the $20,000 to $30,000 range, the proceeds from which will be used to make loans. Under most programs of this type, loans are capped at those amounts, or 10 percent of the home's value, whichever is lower.

St. Lucie County, Fla.'s nascent Solar Energy and Loan Fund (SELF) program takes a slightly different approach than Santa Fe's. Rather than selling bonds, it is creating a nonprofit "green" Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI). The county has $20 million in commitments from the banking community.

“We’re able to avoid the bonding process by partnering with the financial institutions, and then they put the financial capital in for the loan funds,” said Doug Coward, vice chairmain of the Board of County Commissioners. The St. Lucie program will focus in three areas: energy conservation, energy efficiency upgrades and rooftop solar. The first two are a no-brainer, according to Coward: “It doesn’t make a lot of sense to put solar photovoltaic on the roof if that new electricity is going out the window.”

Programs like these put energy efficiency improvements within reach for lower income residents and the working poor, he added. A CDFI requires that 60 percent of the program's energy improvements be in low- and middle-income communities.

In addition, the SELF program will be able to offer lower interest rates than traditional PACE programs, whose interest payments can range from 8 percent to 10 percent, Coward said. Using the CDFI approach, the county's program will be able to offer interest rates of 4 percent to 5 percent.

St. Lucie County and the Santa Fe County are also using monies provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which encourages such programs. Earlier this month, St. Lucie County was one of 20 jurisdictions nationwide awarded competitive grants from the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Efficiency Block Grant Program (EECBG), receiving $2.9 million for its SELF program. Santa Fe County is using state energy program funds that were distributed by formula.

While many counties are just starting PACE programs, developments are underway that could have a chilling effect. Last month, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac issued what officials of Sonoma County's Energy Improvement Program (SCEIP) termed "new, confusing instructions" to mortgage lenders on how to treat properties with assessments under PACE-type programs.
County chair takes a ‘civil’ approach to her job

By Charles Taylor
Senior Staff Writer

Bollards? Really? Who goes on a European vacation and comes home with pictures of ... bollards?

Lynn Peterson does, that’s who.

The Clackamas County, Ore. Commission chair has a fascination with the tubular posts that indicate who and what go where — traffic here, people there. She is, after all, a civil engineer who also has “a little bit of an obsession” with roundabouts.

“I’m amazed in Europe and other places how they don’t just put up an orange flexible tubular marker to say pedestrians should be here and the cars should be here,” Peterson said. “But they actually have giant, round spherical polished marble in the middle of a neighborhood in the middle of nowhere.

“They’ve made it nice. They’ve put some time and energy into saying we value your neighborhood enough to think through this.”

Peterson was in Washington, D.C. earlier this month to testify before a congressional committee about using practical design and context-sensitive solutions in developing surface transportation projects. It’s a topic she knows well, since her county employs the concepts in its planning.

It involves working with stakeholders to find out what things they value and tailoring projects to those values — “So that you’re not just taking a standard out of a three-ring binder and ‘shloppping’ it down on top of somebody’s main street and saying this is the road we’re going to build you… and oh by the way, we’re going to have to wipe out a third of your business district to build you… and oh by the way,” she explained.

“It’ll sound a little clichéd, but it’s taken me 20–25 years for me to figure it out.”

Peterson run?

“It sound a little clichéd, but it’s taken me 20–25 years for me to be able to articulate it,” she said. “It really, to me, is about being able to have healthy and safe communities. What keeps me going everyday is that there are problems that need to be solved, and there’s always a solution, but you need to be open to the vast array of solutions. "You need to be excited that there’s something you don’t see that’s just beyond you. That the citizens are going to help you figure it out.”

Peterson is, in the words of her friend and mentor, Judie Hammerstad, a civil engineer who also has a “conservation ethic.”

“You want to do right by the land, and so there’s a lot of thought about that, and a lot of value,” she said. “And I think that that’s the same out here in Oregon. You don’t take that for granted. You really do try to do the best you can with the knowledge that you have to manage the ecosystem and the biodiversity, as well as the human habitat as well as you can.

“You make some tradeoffs here and there, and in the end you should leave it better off than you found it.”

In her down time, Peterson enjoys hiking, backpacking, gardening and quilting. Her husband, Mark, is an optical engineer, and they share their Lake Oswego home with their three Malamutes with Inuit names, Nukka, Miki and Qannik.

Biking is another hobby she enjoys, and it’s on long rides that she can indulge one of her musical instincts. “She sings spontaneously,” according to her friend, Hammerstad, “and she knows the words to every song that was ever written” — everything from “I’m Looking Over A Four-leaf Clover” to “The Battle of New Orleans” to modern pop songs. She grew up in a musical household, played trombone and heard all types of music from the different generations of her family.

“It’s the best thing to get me through an 80-mile bike ride,” Peterson said. “At about 60 miles I’m, like, I’ve gotta start singing because I’ve gotta be happy about this.”

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Best and Worst Healthy California Counties


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Photo courtesy of Clackamas County, Ore.

Lynn Peterson, chair, Clackamas County, Ore. Board of Commissioners, helps celebrate the grand opening of the TriMet regional transit system's Green Line, linking Clackamas County to downtown Portland. A civil engineer, she has a “passion” for transportation.

Photo courtesy of Clackamas County, Ore.

Clackamas is geographically the smallest population — a not-Large of the major counties in the Portland metropolitan area but has the smallest population — a not-insignificant 186,143 residents. It is a suburban-rural county that has been targeted by regional planners for more development. That means infrastructure improvements. “It always comes down to sewer, water and transportation,” Peterson says.

Because of her engineering background, Peterson said it’s easy for her to be a bridge — no pun intended — between engineers and non-engineers.

Madison, Wis. Mayor Dave Cieslewicz met Peterson about a decade ago, when they both were environmental advocates. He said, “She has a knack for getting along with people and for being able to

explain relatively complex policies in a way that makes people understand them and want to support them.”

Peterson has known since junior high school that she wanted to be a civil engineer — after doing a paper on civil engineering.

“It just seemed like the right thing to do. It was science, and it was working in the public sector, and I come from a very strong family of teachers and public service,” she said.

She loved growing up in Wisconsin's liberal capital city, a university town and the seat of Dane County.

Cieslewicz said, “We’re also a very progressive community. It probably played some role in Lynn’s concern for the environment.”

Peterson calls it a “conservation ethic.”

“... "You need to be excited that there’s something you don’t see that’s just beyond you. That the citizens are going to help you figure it out."”
Budgets take a bite out of mosquito programs

By Christopher Johnson
Editorial Assistant

As summertime temperatures heat up across the United States, county mosquito control programs are seeing drastic cuts in funding. Recession-wary officials are either cutting funding or ending programs that help prevent the spread of West Nile Virus and keep the mosquito populations under control. This is in large part due to the sharp decline in the concern over West Nile disease and other mosquito-borne illnesses, and the growing deficits of county budgets.

In Washoe County, Nev., health officials say programs to combat mosquitoes will be cut significantly this year due to budget reductions. The county plans on 40 percent less aerial spraying this season, which began May 27 and continues through Sept. 2, when weather allows.

“There will be a different approach this year,” said Scott Monsen, a Washoe County health official. “We’re looking at cutting down the number of acres we treat by air.”

In Palm Beach County, Fla., mosquito control Director Ed Bradford is preparing for additional reduced funding for the program. In 2009, the county budget cut $150,000, which lessened aerial and overall treatment of standing water throughout the county. With hurricane season coming up, the budget might be used up by the time August rolls around.

“If we get hit with tropical storms and hurricanes, we go through our budget rather quickly,” said Bradford. “We’ve just got to hope the county doesn’t cut a lot out of our FY11 operating budget.”

In San Luis Obispo County, Calif., Curtis Batson, director of environmental health, said a referendum to fund mosquito control failed 2-1 and the program is now gone.

The mosquito control program was launched in 2003 amid fears of an outbreak of West Nile across the country. But it was dropped in January 2010, after the county decided it couldn’t afford the $300,000-a-year program, and a public survey revealed county taxpayers didn’t want to pay for it either. County officials have stated they will continue to test dead birds and monitor for West Nile virus.

Mosquitoes present both a public health concern and a community nuisance to citizens, particularly with emerging mosquito-transmitted diseases such as West Nile, Eastern equine encephalitis and malaria. County health officials fear that with little or no treatment of breeding waters, the mosquito populations could multiply to astounding levels and cause a rise in cases of West Nile disease and other illnesses.

“It’s a very dangerous precedent to set,” added Bradford. “Outbreaks of diseases such as West Nile or malaria will likely increase, and we’re finding it more difficult to treat via the air as money is cut.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), cases of West Nile disease in humans declined significantly, from 1,356 cases and 124 fatalities in 2008 to 720 cases and 32 fatalities in 2009. About 80 percent of people who are infected will not show any symptoms, the CDC says.

Dodd’s bill has $4 billion for sustainability planning

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ties being eligible for these federal incentive grants. She noted many counties have been utilizing sustainable planning for decades. She also discussed resources NACo provides to assist member counties on sustainability planning including the Green Government Initiative begun in 2007.

However, many rural and mid-size counties would like to begin such planning, but lack the resources to do. The Livable Communities Act is important because it provides grants for those counties that may be just in the planning stage but also for those with plans that lack money for implementation.

Gouge noted that Carroll County has developed three LEED-certified green buildings, invested in hybrid vehicles for the county fleets and transportation system. The county also participates in the Energy Management Initiative through partnership with the Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC). In FY09, Carroll County estimated a $900,000 electric savings from BG&E.

The county is a member of the BMC, which promotes coordinated policies among regional jurisdictions to realize smarter, more efficient energy purchases and utilization; share best practices for sustainable growth and development; and adopt model alternative energy and sustainability plans. To preserve the county’s rural history, Carroll County implemented an Installment Purchase Agreement Plan for farm preservation. This allows the county to purchase development rights, by leveraging money, so more land can be purchased at today’s prices. To date, Carroll County has preserved more than 60,000 acres.

Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) asked Gouge whether she thought the legislation did enough to ensure rural areas would be eligible to apply, assistance provided to ensure rural areas with small populations would have access to these grants. NACo supports a fix to the legislation that would ensure even the smallest rural areas would be eligible to apply. No mark-up date has been scheduled yet in the Senate.

Rep. Ed Perlmutter (D-Colo.) introduced a companion bill, H.R. 4690, in the House. NACo passed a resolution in support of the legislation at its 2009 Annual Conference. The Livable Communities Act has the support of more than 200 national and local organizations, including NACo.

For more information, contact Daria Daniel at 202.942.4212 or ddaniel@naco.org.

NACo Green Infrastructure Training Scholarships

NACo is offering scholarships to the Conservation Fund’s introductory “Conservation Planning Using Green Infrastructure” course, Sept. 13–17, in Shepardstown, W.Va.

The NACo scholarship will cover the $950 course fee for a limited number of elected officials and staff from NACo-member counties.

Applications are due by Monday, July 26.
For more information and an application, please contact Cindy Wasser at cwasser@naco.org.
SpeedRead

» Congress, administration discussing Farm Bill redo
» Rural infrastructure spurs economic development
» Federal government can provide technical assistance to develop infrastructure

Fast Internet and good roads needed in diverse rural economy

ranchers, foresters, community leaders and policymakers from all levels of government. Although not a Farm Bill hearing, the event brought together key rural constituencies as Congress and the Obama administration begin discussions about the reauthorization of the Farm Bill, which expires in 2012.

Vilsack said too many rural counties and small towns have been struggling economically for too long and that he hoped forums such as the Rural Summit will help Washington better understand what these communities need to grow economically. He also emphasized that the next Farm Bill should also be a broader “Rural Revitalization Bill.”

Larson commended Vilsack for convening the summit and expressed NACo’s support of his effort to challenge the nation to renew its commitment to rural America. Specifically, NACo supports Vilsack’s commitment to locally created regional development strategies that add value to the agricultural economy and invest in modern infrastructure and promising new sectors such as renewable energy. He said NACo will continue to work with the administration and Congress to craft a Farm Bill and other federal policies — such as a surface transportation bill — to help rural economies grow.

Larson emphasized the need for a robust rural development title in the next Farm Bill that will help rural local governments work regionally to build the infrastructure necessary to create and attract businesses that can compete in the global economy.

“NACo supports a strategy that maintains agriculture at the heart of the rural economy, but emphasizes the need to create a companion rural economy that is diversified and will allow youth and young adults to stay and return to our rural communities,” Larson said.

To help rural counties support agriculture and create a companion economy, Larson said that the federal government can assist with the resources and technical assistance necessary to develop cutting-edge infrastructure and regional development strategies that will help rural communities develop their unique regional economic assets.

Infrastrucure development remains one of the most significant roadblocks to economic development and competitiveness in rural America,” Larson said. “Resources should not only focus on new opportunities such as rural broadband deployment and rural renewable energy development, but must build and maintain traditional rural infrastructure, such as water-wastewater infrastructure, community facilities, rural housing, business incubators, roads and bridges.”

Larson also emphasized that federal rural development programs, especially those at USDA, can be made more effective by including aggressive incentives to promote and reward flexibly funded regional economic development strategies. Vilsack also made several announcements to support the Obama administration’s rural development goals:

» USDA signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Small Business Administration to outline a collaborative approach for supporting small businesses in rural America.

» USDA is seeking applications to support rural microentrepreneurs and microenterprises, which will provide $45.1 million to encourage lending to start-up businesses. Funding is available from USDA’s Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program. Counties are not eligible despite lobbying efforts by NACo, but can partner with nonprofit organizations to offer these resources in their counties.

» USDA announced $22.5 million in funding for recipients in 45 states to receive business development assistance and pursue marketing opportunities for agricultural commodities through USDA’s Value-Added Producer Grant program.

» USDA announced $6.7 million in grant and loan funding to recipients in 10 states that will promote job creation through USDA Rural Development’s Intermediary Relending Program and the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program.

Don Larson (c), Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee chair and Brookings County, S.D. commissioner, greets Dallas Tonsager, USDA undersecretary for rural development. Also pictured is RAC Steering Committee member Jim Strafuss, Taney County, Mo. commissioner.

Santa Fe County will test drive N.M.’s clean energy loans

PACE from page 3

A $1.3 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation funded the center, which later conducted a national survey of county health programs, expenditures and problems.

A NACo study, “Linking America: The County Highway System,” concluded that the traditional revenue sources used in the past to repair, build and replace county roads and bridges are inadequate.

The report was written for NACo by Norman Walzer, chairman of the economics department at Western Illinois University.

This Month in …

County News celebrates NACo’s 75th Anniversary with a look back at the issues and events that affected counties over the past several decades.

1982

- The U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5–4 that illegal alien children have a constitutional right to a free public education. The decision of Plyler vs. Doe struck down a Texas law that withheld state funds for the education of children who were not legally admitted into the United States. NACo was concerned that temporary residents would be eligible for county and state services such as general welfare assistance and health care. Thus their ineligibility for federal benefits would place the burden on state and local governments.

1984

- The House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a temporary ban on antitrust actions against local governments brought by federal agencies. The restriction, in the form of an amendment to a $10.7 billion appropriations bill for the State, Justice and Commerce departments, prohibits using these funds to initiate or enforce “any antitrust action against a municipality or other unit of government except that limitation shall apply to private antitrust actions.”

1989

- NACo and Brandeis University established the national County Health Policy Center to develop and manage county health care programs more efficiently.

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(Eric Johnston)

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Photo by Erik Johnston

(Santa Fe County (WWW.readnewsantafe.com) and Boulder County (WWW.beclimatesmart.com),

Santa Fe County will test drive N.M.’s clean energy loans

PACE from page 3

A Stateissue the “seniority” of liens created by PACE program loans. SIEP said Fannie and Freddie take the position that “energy assessments could be considered by the lender to be ‘loans’ instead of ‘assessments.’ This may lead some lenders to conclude the assessment should be paid off before the property transfers or is refinanced,” according to SIEP’s website. The county disagrees with that view and is working with the government-backed mortgage lenders to clarify their position.

Will Toor, a Boulder County, Colo. commissioner, said, “Everybody who is running programs right now is trying to come to an understanding of the implications of the Fannie and Freddie actions. It does not necessarily stop PACE financing, but it’s thrown some uncertainty into the residential PACE market.”

Visit the following websites for information about programs in Sonoma County (WWW.sonomacountyenergy.org), Santa Fe County (WWW.readnewsantafe.org) and Boulder County (WWW.beclimatesmart.com).

Santa Fe County will test drive N.M.’s clean energy loans

PACE from page 3

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San Diego County Employees Keep Kittens Healthy

BY CHARLIE BAN
STAFF WRITER

San Diego County, Calif. is dealing with an adorable surplus. The number of kittens given up for adoption to the county’s three shelters has not abated, despite efforts to make spaying and neutering a high-profile and affordable procedure. And as summer approaches, the birthrate of cats skyrockets — and stays there for several months.

“We are not winning the war on spaying and neutering cats,” said Dave Johnson, Animal Medical Operations manager. “They just keep coming in. We’re not going to see our intake drop until the fall, so our shelters are going to get pretty crowded.”

To cope with the problem, the shelters have been outsourcing kitten care to county employees for the last three years. Starting with a list of all county employees, Johnson e-mails, looking for volunteers to take one or more kittens. With thousands of employees and their family and social groups, he hopes to continue to find willing volunteers to take a kitten.

“Preferably two,” he said. “It takes more cats off of our hands, but it’s also better for the kittens, they’re social at that point and will want to play more than a foster family will be able to.”

The shelter provides the supplies to care for the kittens — food, bedding, litter and toys. Johnson hopes that the one-month experience of taking care of kittens ends up being a permanent situation for foster parents.

“We hope it’s like taking the cats for a test drive — maybe things will click and they’ll end up staying with their foster family,” Johnson said.

Kittens can be separated from their mothers after four weeks, but cannot be neutered until one month is spent in a limbo during which the kittens cannot be adopted. They are usually stuck in the shelter, and by mid-July space gets tight.

“Kittens and cats don’t do well in shelter environment,” Johnson said. “They react poorly to stress, and I don’t care if you have the nicest shelter facility in the world, they won’t thrive there. That’s a crucial time in terms of a cat’s health.”

The community has responded. In 2008, 36 volunteers fostered 125 kittens and in 2008, 70 volunteers fostered 318 kittens. So far this year, 100 volunteers have fostered 200 kittens, just two months into the peak kitten season.

Because San Diego County’s three shelters accept all abandoned kittens, the threat of euthanasia to deal with the population looms large, but the vast numbers of cats stretch staffing even further.

“Our workers are doing all they can to keep the cats fed and their cages clean,” Johnson said. “There’s no time left over to attend to the kittens otherwise.”

A number of foster families have been mainstays of the program, taking care of every year. More experienced foster parents take care of the youngest cats, though only healthy kittens participate in the program.

“My husband is extremely patient with whatever I bring home,” said volunteer Carol Suggs, who has fostered an estimated 300 animals over seven years. “It’s like a library. I bring a pair of kittens back when they are old enough and get two more. It’s rewarding to watch them go from being little less-than-one-pound balls of fur and growing into socialized, two-pound kittens in a few weeks.”

Suggs also fosters puppies for the county.

“The county shelter does what a lot don’t even try — to keep these animals alive,” she said. “It would be much easier to euthanize them, but our shelters’ volunteers are willing to take this challenge on.”

Johnson has not calculated savings that the program has yielded, but said it does not cost anything because the supplies that foster parents receive would be purchased anyway for the shelters.

“We definitely save on the labor, and the quality of life is much better for the cats,” Johnson said. “Running the kitten nursery is a round-the-clock job, and caring for them is more expensive than others, so if we can get people who enjoy animals to care for them for a few weeks, everyone wins.

“Plus there is an emotional impact on the staff, not having to worry about as many cats being euthanized.”

(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.)
News From the Nation’s Counties

ARIZONA

YUMA COUNTY debuted its new website optimized for mobile devices and smart phones. This new feature converts all Web page content and key components, including an event calendar, news, job listings and requests for proposals, for optimal mobile-device viewing. Information on the mobile website will be optimized with mobile devices and cell phones in mind.

CALIFORNIA

Approximately 69 percent of voters approved term limits for members of the SAN DIEGO COUNTY Board of Supervisors. The five current members, all Republicans, were first elected in the mid-1990s.

FLORIDA

HERNANDO COUNTY got a pleasant surprise when an engineer’s report indicated that the county jail is in much better structural condition than previously thought.

There are no structural flaws, and much of what needs to be done will involve patches and seals instead of millions of dollars in major repairs, the St. Petersburg Times reported.

“It is the opinion of the engineer based on the observations as recorded that the subject structure did not represent a dangerous or unsafe structural condition,” according to the report released by Bracken Engineering of Tampa.

IDAHO

Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter has denied a last-ditch attempt by CANYON COUNTY officials to halt mandatory vehicle emissions testing.

In May, the Canyon County Commission sent Otter a letter asking for a reprieve from testing.

It was required by the 2008 Legislature to improve air quality, but has run afoul of residents and officials in this southwestern Idaho county who think it’s government intrusion and question its effectiveness.

The Idaho Statesman reported that Otter told commissioners their county missed an opportunity to block the implementation of the county budget on Oct. 1. failed.

MONTANA

The MISSOULA COUNTY Commission directed county offices and departments to incorporate or support the use of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) methods and techniques when designing, remodeling and operating county facilities.

The policy, developed by the county’s new Green Government Committee, encourages and promotes green building practices as long as they save money in the long run.

Peter Nielsen, environmental health supervisor for the City-County Health Department, said, "It is the opinion of the engineer based on the observations as recorded that the subject structure did not represent a dangerous or unsafe structural condition," according to the report released by Bracken Engineering of Tampa.

WASHINGTON

KING COUNTY, Wash. Executive Dow Constantine doesn’t mind getting his hands dirty when it’s for a good cause, like working in this temporary demonstration garden created by county employees.

The garden’s fresh produce will be donated to a local senior center.

The Goat Hill Giving Garden is also part of an effort to improve employee health by learning how to grow healthy food. “Gardening is a great way to get exercise, reduce stress and eat healthy,” said Cristina Del Alma, a county public health employee and co-leader of the garden. “I think a lot of us are excited to have the opportunity to do this on a regular basis.”

Employees used discarded and scavenged materials: Planters were fashioned from wastewater pipes, the land was a vacant lot, and the planter boxes are scavenged scrap lumber. The vegetables will be donated to a local senior center meal program.

OREGON

MULTNOMAH COUNTY’s Food Defense Toolkit is being distributed to restaurants in hopes of protecting them from food-related bioterrorism. In 1984, followers of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh sprinkled salmonella on salad bars in 10 restaurants, sickening more than 750 people, The Oregonian reported.

“These things don’t occur often, but they’re serious when they happen,” said Rosa Klein, a county health educator.

The county proposed the project, got the grant and wrote the guidelines. The FDA has guidelines to prevent a bioterrorism attack in food processing facilities, but Klein said nothing was available for restaurants. The county applied for a grant in 2008 and received $40,000 from FDA.

The toolkit includes an employee training guide and video, and a risk assessment checklist.

• PENNSYLVANIA

After a recent shale gas well blowout, CLEARFIELD COUNTY commissioners say they want responses from landowners closest to the well.

A well spewed natural gas and contaminated drilling water for 16 hours following a June 4 incident before a response team from Texas could arrive.

The county’s centralized location could be an asset, since the response teams located closest to the well.

• TEXAS

Clean up or shut down. That’s the message HARRIS COUNTY is sending to unlicensed and scofflaw salvagers. County attorneys are preparing a number of lawsuits to force auto salvage yards to regulate their behavior or face sanctions, the Houston Chronicle reported.

This year, the county Commissioners Court empowered the county attorney to enforce state anti-nuisance rules against the owners, of which there are 282 in unincorporated Harris County. Harris County does not have zoning.

Any auto junkyard that keeps cars within 300 feet of a home or church, or within 50 feet of a road will be denied a county permit. Violators will be taken to court.

(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 e-mail taylor@@naco.org or ban@@naco.org.)
The H.R. Doctor Is In

The Masterpiece That Was John Wooden

The HR Doctor had the honor and the pleasure of graduating from UCLA during the 1960s. This was the time of the inspirational leadership of John Wooden, the greatest basketball coach in history.

Coach Wooden passed away June 4 at the age of 99. Far more than being a coach, he never swore, spit tobacco by-products or insulted players. He was stern, thoughtful and motivational.

After retiring from 40 years of coaching, he took with him the leadership principles he had taught at UCLA and created a “pyramid of success” philosophy that touched the lives of thousands of people.

With profound respect for the coach’s memory, the HR Doctor has asked NACo to reprint the HR Doctor article below from 2007 reflecting on one of his philosophies and what we can learn from it as public servants.

The Old Testament (Ecclesiastes) tells us that there are times in life for major events, such as a time to be born and a time to die. It suggests that the times are separate. However, it can also be interpreted to suggest that in some cases there can be a combination of “times.” This is a time to both mourn and celebrate the life of a great and inspirational person.

Every Day a Masterpiece (reprinted from Oct. 15, 2007)

John Wooden is the greatest coach in history. He was also a humble man who would no doubt very much disagree with being described so wonderfully. Nonetheless, this is not only the HR Doctor’s opinion but the opinion of other people in and out of sports. John Wooden served as the coach of the UCLA Bruins men’s basketball team and led the Bruins to 10 NCAA championships and an unsurpassed 88-consecutive-game winning streak.

The un-athletic HR Doctor had the amazing good fortune to be a student at UCLA during this period and to watch how the magic of the coach ignited not only individual basketball players and the basketball team but the spirit of a school and a much wider community.

John Wooden is a leader in making amazing things happen on a basketball court. However, his methods and his philosophies are really what make him an extraordinary life coach for every one of us.

Coach Wooden began every practice with a very important drill. The drill involved instructing the players about how to properly put on their socks, put on their shoes, and tie their shoes. What a strange way for a champion coach to treat champion players. What a waste of time, some might argue. However, the coach made one of his many absolutely critical points by this seemingly trivial activity.

That routine was part of an important view that champions not only have high expectations for themselves and their success, but they must pay careful attention to the little things. A sock not put on properly can lead to a blister which, in turn, diminishes the champion’s performance perhaps at a critical moment. It can mean pain and being sidelined instead of the chance to be in the game and be part of a successful team. Establishing a routine in which the little things are secured and managed properly creates a solid foundation for big success.

Coach Wooden’s philosophies on playing basketball and winning at life are the subject of multiple books, videos and lectures, including “Coach Wooden’s Pyramid of Success.”

Making a concerted effort to make each day a masterpiece lets you look back at an entire month, year, decade of life that also turned out to be a masterpiece.

One particular part of his philosophy is really what this article is about. In a brief moment of interaction with a colleague recently, I greeted him by saying “How are you?” That’s a phrase each of us speaks perhaps dozens of times a day. It’s almost always answered by a perfunctory response such as “Fine, how are you?”

In reality we don’t really care how the other person is most of the time. We’re simply using the phrase to express some form of basic interpersonal recognition. We don’t expect a meaningful answer. If we receive one, we worry that we might become engaged in a serious, protracted conversation that would make us late in arriving at Starbucks to order our cappuccino grande. When the HR Doctor asked this question, the person responded with “I’m having a bad day.” The conversation then turned to “What can I do to help your day be much better?” It turned out that the bad day was based on a collection of those small and seemingly insignificant issues in our day-to-day life.

He overslept. He had trouble getting online to check his e-mail. He was stuck in traffic. He had a tough day at the office. The danger was that the recited menu of problems this poor person was encountering could easily have become infectious and spread to anyone else listening. It wouldn’t be surprising to hear a response such as “I feel the same way. I’ve had the same problem. Traffic was bad on my drive to work, the door was locked, the newspaper gave bad stock market results,” and on and on.

“Buying into” this mistake in how we look back at one of the precious days in our lives is not very different than the blister that slows you down, puts you at risk for infection and doesn’t allow you to contribute to the overall success of everyone on your team.

Coach Wooden’s advice was simple, articulate and prudent. “Make everyday your masterpiece.” Take care of that foundation of daily activity, by living your day optimistically and by working hard to solve problems, fix something broken, right a wrong or help another person. The end product is a great day and a day that gives you satisfaction as you lie quietly after fall asleep.

Making a concerted effort to make each day a masterpiece lets you look back at an entire month, year, decade or life that also turned out to be a masterpiece. Oct. 14 is Coach Wooden’s birthday. Listen carefully on that day, dearest readers, and you will be able to hear me singing a sincere “Happy Birthday” to a great man.

Phil Rosenberg
The HR Doctor and Bruin

San Francisco City and County, Calif., the only consolidated city and county in the state of California, was founded June 29, 1855. Faced with dramatic declines in revenue, the county’s internal and external stakeholders are making adjustments.

The California Gold Rush brought a flood of treasure seekers. With their sourdough bread in tow, prospectors accumulated in San Francisco, given its ongoing harbor.

The seal of San Francisco, Calif., which was adopted in the 1850s, depicts two working men, one a miner and the other a sailor. Above is a rising phoenix and behind it is the San Francisco Bay with sailing ships. The phoenix symbolizes the city’s emergence from the ashes of several devastating fires in the early 1850s. The motto reads “Oro en paz, fierro en guerra,” which is Spanish for “Gold in peace, iron in war.”

If you would like your county’s seal featured, please contact Christopher Johnson at 202.942.4256 or cjjohnson@naco.org.

What’s in a Seal?

Local governments are looking at measures such as tax hikes on cell phones, utilities and soft drinks.

California, given its ongoing fiscal woes, is sharing a larger portion of the financial challenge with its local governments when compared to other states. The state already borrowed from local governments’ property tax revenues, which will have to repay in a few years. Furthermore, redevelopment money and transportation funding were taken away from local governments. To cope, California counties are making adjustments.

For example, Stanislaus County is proposing to enact measures such as reduced sheriff’s patrols, early release for jail inmates, cuts to the district attorney and public defender offices, reduced library hours and furlough days for county employees. Yolo County has undergone an extensive process to address the budget shortfall, including a 10 percent cut in personnel and to numerous programs. The ratio of county employees per 1,000 residents will be the lowest in more than 20 years. Faced with dramatic declines in revenue, the county’s budgetary process for the upcoming fiscal year sought to engage as many internal and external stakeholders as possible.

Chris Bradley, deputy budget director for Maricopa County, Ariz., summarized the predicament these counties are facing by equating their budgetary measures as double the cuts that are normally made, since officials must already compensate for their own county’s revenue shortfall. But when their budget relies in some part on state aid, another cut is necessary to compensate for the state’s shortfall.

(Research News was written by Michael Belarmino, research associate.)

California's counties taking bigger hit
Network of Care Showcased at HHS Forum

NACo President Valerie Brown recently showcased NACo’s Network of Care for Healthy Communities program during a U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS) Department Community Health Data Initiative Forum held in Washington, D.C.

HHS created the initiative as a public-private partnership to encourage utilization of community health data and development of applications to help raise awareness of community health performance and drive outcomes to better health.

NACo, along with its affiliate organizations and other partners, is developing a nationwide Web-based system to provide health-related data to individuals, families and stakeholders in the health care field.

The Network of Care for Healthy Communities program is a collaborative program between NACo and Trilogy Integrated Resources in partnership with Healthy Communities Institute. It is a local delivery Web portal that enhances health decision-making by providing health-related data to individuals, families and stakeholders in the health care field.

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Please submit detailed résumé with salary history, work related references to: Carrie Byrum, Human Resources Manager, Chowan County, P.O. Box 1030, Edenton, NC 27932. Position open until filled. EOE.

NACo’s Network of Care for Healthy Communities project, we want to provide our communities the information and tools to not just recognize health problems, but use evidence-based programs to improve the health and quality of life in our counties,” Brown said. “We feel that collaboration with the HHS Community Health Data Initiative would be a terrific example of all levels of government and private innovation working together on common goals.”

NACo hopes to integrate specific national health-related data into the local system developed by NACo and its partners. The NACo program is currently available in Brown’s home county of Sonoma County, Calif. and features County Health Rankings, Health Landscape mapping and national 2010 Health Goals. This data is integrated into a community dashboard of more than 100 health and quality-of-life indicators.

The system automatically connects best practices from around the country that have been shown to make positive change, and it offers links to related news, library articles or legislation. Stakeholders have access to community health indicators and local collaboration tools. Individuals and families can use a directory of health services, a leading health library, database of legislation, social networking tools, national and local news, personal health records and much more.

Now that the program has been successfully developed, it can be replicated anywhere in the country.

NACo launched the Network of Care (NOC) in 2009 to provide consumers, community-based organizations, and local and state governments access to a wide variety of information relating to health and human services.

The Network of Care is an Internet network offered through a nationally solicited RFP from Fairfax County, Va.

In addition to the Healthy Communities program, NACo’s Network of Care program includes individual county-based websites for service members, veterans and their families to successfully manage deployment or reintegration and to provide mental health, employment and housing resources.

Other Network of Care sites are dedicated to behavioral health, aging, people with disabilities and children. In addition, an e-learning platform enables county leadership and training directors to develop, deliver and manage a wide variety of learning experiences and administrative tasks through an Internet-based learning portal.

For more information, please contact Jim Sawyer at 202.661.8868 or jsawyer@naco.org.

(Financial Services News was written by Jim Phillips, media relations manager, and Jim Sawyer, director, Financial Services Corporation.)