Farm Bill deal boosts funds for rural development, nutrition

By Erik Johnston
Associate Legislative Director

As time ticked away on the latest farm bill extension, Senate and House negotiators brokered a funding framework that could lead to a final bill in the coming weeks.

The new framework reportedly restores $1.50 billion in mandatory

See FARM BILL page 10

Dem’s superdelegate county officials could be decisive in presidential race

By Charles Taylor
Senior Staff Writer

You’re a county commissioner in Montana. The phone rings; it’s for you. It’s Madeleine Albright, the former secretary of state. Yeah, right. No really.

“At first you think your friends are messing with you,” said Ed Tinsley, a Lewis and Clark County commissioner, who also happens to be a Democratic “superdelegate.”

But Albright did call him — twice — as did Chelsea Clinton, seeking his commitment to support Sen. Hillary Clinton. He also heard from former Sen. Tom Daschle of South Dakota on behalf of Sen. Barack Obama before deciding in February to back Obama.

“It’s pretty exciting to actually be this close to the process — being a little county commissioner out here in Montana,” Tinsley said.

There are nearly 800 superdelegates nationwide, most of whom are members of Congress and governors. But Tinsley is among the relative handful who are elected county officials, and they will help to determine who will be the Democratic candidate for president. Neither Clinton nor Obama can reach the magic number of delegates needed for the nomination — 2.024 — without them. (As of May 1, Clinton held a slight lead over Obama in pledged superdelegates by an average of

See SUPERDELEGATE page 9
RF Check's database is funded through private investors and through a small surcharge on wireless bills. The privately held company expects to begin a pilot program for the databases soon in California, which will include some 15 sites. “We’re about 100 or 90 days out from starting the pilots,” said Drew Fountain, RF Check CEO. “We’ve got the majority of the databases done. What we need to do now is to work out the kinks with the community and with the carrier, and do that pilot, prior to national expansion.”

The company will donate a portion of its profits to ensure municipalities have their own interface for the database that includes their site, so they will have better control over it and prevent unforeseen liability.

He said members of the local community will be able to identify existing and proposed sites in their area. They can also see reasons the service provider picked the proposed site and why they were not able to use an existing one. The information contained in the database is “hierarchy gated,” meaning counties will have access to their own information, but no one else’s.

“It provides accountability and exposure information,” Fountain said. “The database is an asset for the community that is maintained free of charge. All of the sites are audited on an annual basis to ensure they are in compliance.”

He said it will take 18 months to get all of the sites up and running throughout the country, and will cost the investors approximately $500 million – $600 million dollars, but the database will not cost local governments anything.

### In Case You Missed It ...

**News to Use from Past County News**

Due in 18 Months

RF Database Pilot Due in 18 Months

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### SAFETEA-LU technical amendments pass Congress

SAFETEA-LU technical amendments pass Congress

The Senate and House recently gave final approval to the SAFETEA-LU technical amendments. This legislation, which is expected to be signed by the president, is intended to correct any provisions that were mistakenly left out of the original bill when passed in 2005, but naturally included some other provisions.

Most importantly to counties is a NACo-recommended provision allowing the expenditure of some Surface Transportation Program funds, a category in the federal highway program, on so-called minor rural collectors in areas under 5,000 population. This language had been in law since 1991 and was inadvertently left out of SAFETEA-LU.

Many counties own minor rural collectors and have used this exception to the law, which generally prohibits expenditure of federal funds on such roads, to maintain and improve this classification of rural road.

The bill also includes additional research funding for the Federal Highway Administration, increases the minimum grants each state would receive in federal highway safety grants, modifies the penalties for drunk drivers and clarifies the nature of preliminary funding for a magnetic levitation rail line from Las Vegas to California.

One controversial provision that was added by the Senate calls for a Justice Department investigation of a special $10 million project on I-75 in Collier and Lee counties, Fla. that some believe was improperly altered when included in the original legislation, and which both counties opposed. The bill changes this earmark back to the original purpose of the project.

The Senate passed the legislation by a vote of 82-2 on April 17. House passage occurred on April 30 with a 358-51 vote.
NACo announces 2008 Acts of Caring Awards winners


The annual Acts of Caring Awards program, now in its ninth year, honors community-based, government volunteer programs that enhance or preserve a community’s quality of life. The 2008 Acts of Caring Awards saw more than 70 applicants. From that field, 17 were selected as winners in six categories, segmented by population size: Children and Youth, Community Improvement, Criminal Justice/Emergency Management, Elderly Services, Health and Social Services, and Libraries.

Two counties also received special recognition for their programs as winners in the Youth Service Award and the Legacy Award for Excellence.

The Youth Service Award, presented to San Mateo County, Calif., recognizes the program that best identifies and addresses a critical need in the youth community by engaging young people in service.

The Legacy Award for Excellence and Innovation, won this year by El Paso County, Colo., is awarded to the program that most fully embodies the spirit of volunteerism by addressing a unique need and providing unparalleled service in its community.

The winners were chosen after careful review by judges from the American Library Association, the American Library Association and the National Association of Volunteer Programs in Local Government. The awards were presented by NACo Past President Colleen Landkamer and the ceremony was hosted by NACo Executive Director Larry Naake.


The Acts of Caring Awards are part of Counties Serve America, a long-term project of NACo in partnership with Freddie Mac, designed to raise public understanding and awareness about county government.

### 2008 Acts of Caring Winners

**Children and Youth**
- San Mateo County, Calif.’s Youth Commission
- Lycoming County, Pa.’s CAPPA Youth Development Project

**Community Improvement**
- Pinellas County, Fla.’s Environmental Lands Division Volunteer Program
- Arlington County, Va.’s Community Role Models
- Georgetown County, S.C.’s Visions for the Future

**Criminal Justice/Emergency Management**
- Pierce County, Wash.’s Citizen Corps Core Team
- New Hanover County, N.C.’s RSVP Special Needs Registry

**Elderly Services**
- Union County, N.J.’s Westlake Junior Runnells Volunteer Program
- Coconino County, Arizona’s Community Services Volunteer Program

**Health and Social Services**
- El Paso County, Colo.’s Center on Fathering
- Linn County, Iowa’s Sleep Out for Homelessness Awareness
- Caldwell County, N.C.’s The Wg Bank

**Libraries**
- San Diego County, Calif.’s L.E.A.R.N./Laubach ESL Program
- Cumberland County, Pa.’s Service to Adult Readers (STAR) Program

### Medicaid bill fails in House; focus now shifts to Senate

In the Senate, Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) put the bill on a procedural fast-track, bypassing the Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over Medicaid. Senator Tom Coburn (R-Okla.) objected to moving the bill on an expedited basis, while other prominent Republicans object to the House approach.

The bill’s opponents include Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), ranking minority member on the Finance Committee. They argue that states and counties have taken advantage of loopholes in Medicaid and that CMS is taking appropriate action to prevent fraud and abuse.

Senate floor time is very limited at this stage in the legislative year, and some observers believe that Reid and others will attempt to attach H.R. 5613 to another piece of legislation that must be passed, like the war supplemental appropriation bill.

HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt has indicated that the administration may be willing to postpone implementation on the regulation that limits payments to county hospitals and other public providers, and the one that eliminates payments for resident physicians and interns at teaching hospitals.

This compromise would let the other rules, including the rules on rehabilitation and targeted case management, go into effect. NACo is on record opposing all of the CMS rules which cut reimbursements and shift costs to counties, and urging Congress to put a moratorium on their implementation.

**Action Needed**

See if your House member voted for H.R. 5613, [http://clerk.house.gov/evo/2008/roll209.xml](http://clerk.house.gov/evo/2008/roll209.xml), and please join NACo in thanking them for protecting the local health care safety net.

Contact your senators and urge them to block the Medicaid cuts by placing a moratorium on these harmful CMS regulations.
Children join forces to fight child sexual exploitation

Every year, thousands of children fall victim to sexual exploitation. According to the U.S. Justice Department, approximately one in five girls and one in 10 boys will be sexually victimized before they reach adulthood.

Unfortunately, less than 35 percent of these cases are reported to law enforcement, often as a result of fear, shame or embarrassment. We can do more to protect the children in our communities.

In an effort to further educate the public on these issues, NACo and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) have partnered in support of the Campaign Against Sexual Exploitation (CASE).

CASE is a national public awareness campaign designed to bring attention to the many issues surrounding child sexual exploitation such as pornography, molestation and prostitution. It is one of NACo’s presidential initiatives, bolstered by the organization’s commitment to bringing the public as many invaluable materials and resources as possible. County officials are urged to convene local task forces, distribute vital safety information and provide critical resources to children and families.

To further engage local communities, NCMEC provides marketing materials that supply an overview of the issues and how CASE is working to resolve them. So far, more than 40 counties have signed on to participate in this initiative in a variety of ways.

Many counties have distributed literature and posters highlighting specific child safety issues, others have hosted town hall meetings to further engage the community, and several counties have passed resolutions demanding that their communities commit to protecting children.

Taking actions such as these sends a clear message to sex offenders that criminal and sexual victimization of children will not be tolerated. Communities’ involvement with CASE has prompted many of them to take a closer look at state and local laws, as well as policies that directly impact the safety and well-being of children.

Through CASE, NCMEC has developed effective strategies for local county officials to better safeguard children. With this increased knowledge of the necessary tools and resources, local counties are able to better protect children from being victimized and more efficiently identify services for those children who have been victimized in the past.

In addition to the resources offered through this campaign, a dedicated NCMEC staff person is available to assist in the planning of local campaigns. Current statistics, campaign materials and media resources are also provided to counties at no cost. Services such as these, coupled with the many resources offered through NCMEC, provide the foundation for a strong campaign that county officials can proudly stand behind.

In addition to bringing attention to the many issues surrounding child sexual exploitation, counties are also encouraged to recognize National Missing Children’s Day May 25. It serves as an annual reminder to the nation to revitalize efforts to locate missing children and to make child safety a priority. Through NCMEC’s Take 25 campaign, local communities are provided with important safety information, conversation starters, and other helpful resources that can aid in safety discussions with children.

Please visit the CASE Web site (www.naco.org/case) or contact Dalen A. Harris, NACo associate legislative director, at 202/942-4236 or dharris@naco.org to learn more about the CASE initiative.

Also, county officials are encouraged to contact Ana Cody with NCMEC at 703/837-6434 or e-mail acody@ncme.org. She can assist local leaders in obtaining current statistics, campaign materials and media resources at no cost to your county.

(Profile courtesy of APCO)

Profiles in Service

Harvey Ruvin
Miami-Dade County, Fla.
NACo Board of Directors

Number of years active in NACo: 32, past NACo president
Years in public service: 40
Occupation: County clerk
Education: Bachelor of Industrial Engineering (University of Florida), juris doctorate (University of Miami)
The hardest thing I’ve ever done: is put my dog, Muffin, to sleep.
Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: Buckminster Fuller, Arthur Clark and Jackée Robinson
A dream I have is to: live to see the world conquer global warming.
You’d be surprised to learn that I: was ranked as high as 16th in the nation by the American Amateur Racquetball Association.
The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done is: spend one week in a remote Peruvian rain forest.
My favorite way to relax is: transcendental meditation.
I’m most proud of: my family.
Every morning I read: The Miami Herald, The New York Times and my e-mail.
My favorite meal is: salad and pasta.
My pet peeve is: people thinking the earth is flat and that global warming is a hoax.
My motto is: “If you’re not pulling your weight, you’re pushing your luck!”
The last book I read was: (reread) Critical Path by Buckminster Fuller and The Prophet by Khalil Gibran.
My favorite movie is: Five Easy Pieces and An Inconvenient Truth.
My favorite music is: jazz (Thelonious Monk).
My favorite president is: (tie) Abe Lincoln and Bill Clinton.

Keep up with NACo online...

www.naco.org

The Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) and NACo dedicated a new award to former NACo Board Member Marilyn Praisner. Praisner was a County Council member from Montgomery County, Md., for 17 years until her death in February. The award honors Praisner’s significant contributions to public safety communications and her commitment to clear and effective governance. Her husband, Don, accepted the award at a banquet held April 16 in Washington, D.C. Pictured here at the ceremony are: (l-r) Montgomery County National Night Watch Adams; Don Praisner; APCO President Willis Carter; and Jeff Arnold, NACo deputy director, legislative affairs.)
2008 National County Government Week celebrated coast to coast and beyond

By Joe Phillips
MEDIA RELATIONS MANAGER

The nation’s counties from coast to coast and beyond celebrated National County Government Week April 6 – 12 to promote the many ways their county government works to serve communities. Many counties took advantage of this year’s theme, “Protecting Our Children,” to share the important and innovative ways counties help meet the needs of young people and families.

In Washington, D.C., National County Government Week (NCGW) was celebrated with presentation of NACo’s 2008 Acts of Caring Awards to the top county volunteer programs in the country. Seventeen county volunteer programs received recognition as the top programs in the country during an April 10 ceremony in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill.


Outside of Washington, counties put their best foot forward to showcase their services to residents. Murray County, Minn. passed a resolution honoring NCGW and hosted a tour of county facilities for local students and the public.

A favorite attraction of the county Open House was the visit to the Law Enforcement Center. Sixth-graders were able to compare what they learned during a recent overnight trip to the state capitol. Hampton County, S.C. focused on the importance and proper use of child safety seats and passed a resolution as part of NCGW. The Sheriff’s Department reminded residents of the laws and regulations regarding child passenger restraint systems.

Seminole County, Fla. had several events planned, including child safety seat checks, a water safety-themed reading program for preschool children, an animal bite prevention program, a natural lands Open House and a nature night walk. Informational displays were set up at seven locations throughout the county, including the county services building, county libraries and a community services office. Many of the displays featured information available to enhance the safety of children.

Cumberland County, N.C. held a special recognition ceremony to honor county employees for their years of service. Many county workers wore Cumberland County items in the community to show their pride. Local high school students “shadowed” county department heads for one day to learn firsthand about county government operations. The county board adopted a NCGW resolution and appeared as guests on local radio programs.

Off the mainland, Kauai County, Hawaii passed a resolution in honor of NCGW and sent copies to the Hawaii congressional delegation, Gov. Linda Lingle, Mayor Bryan Baptiste and other governmental agencies responsible for the protection of children.

Lake County, Ill. raised public awareness about its services and programs that protect and enhance the health, welfare and safety of children — including the county’s Child Primary Care Clinic. It provides complete care to children from birth to age 18. The county also highlighted its Children’s Advocacy Center, which works to provide a safe environment for child victims of abuse by investigating and helping to successfully prosecute offenders of child abuse without causing further trauma to the children.

Austin County, Texas passed a resolution in recognition of NCGW as part of its Youth Government Day in cooperation with the local American Legion Posts. For the past 53 years, Youth Government Day has helped to acquaint local students with the roles and responsibilities of county government.

Monona County, Iowa held an Open House in conjunction with Public Health Week. The focus was on children and environmental health. The Monona County Sheriff’s Department made children’s ID kits available to parents and offered safety tips for families.

Johnson County, Iowa set up displays of local services in the administration building. Members of the county board made several site visits to local youth service agencies. County officials appeared as guests on local radio programs.

Berks County, Pa. celebrated NCGW with several community events, including “ID Me” programs at county libraries. The programs were sponsored by the Berks County Sheriff’s Department. Berks County Children and Youth Services, in conjunction with Berks Women in Crisis, held discussions with parents and educators about working together to combat domestic violence and child abuse.

Madison County, N.Y. passed a resolution recognizing NCGW. El Paso County, Colo. celebrated NCGW with a variety of events highlighting services provided to protect children and families.

The Board of County Commissioners approved a resolution honoring NCGW and hosted a forum entitled “Protecting our Children: A Community Collaboration.” The forum included presentations by County Commissioner Sallie Clark and Department of Human Services Director Barbara Drake.

Also, a public symposium was held to spotlight efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect. “Protecting Our Children: A Community United” featured presentations by Clark, and Commissioners Amy Lathan and Wayne Williams, as well as several community partners.

In Mobile County, Ala., Commissioners Merceria Ludgood and Mike Dean met some of the county’s youngest residents at A.W. Holloway and Pearl Haskew elementary schools, where they read Duck for President to second-graders. The book focuses on a duck who works his way to become a farmer, then governor and eventually president. It simplifies voting, campaigning and the election process to children. Commissioners also adopted resolution recognizing NCGW.

First celebrated in 1991, NCGW was created by NACo to raise public awareness and understanding about the roles and responsibilities of the nation’s counties.

The “Protecting Our Children” theme coincides with President Eric Coleman’s two 2007-08 Presidential Initiatives: The Campaign Against Sexual Exploitation and Aging Out of Foster Care. Information about these initiatives is available on the NACo Web site under “About NACo” ➤ “President’s Initiatives.”

“I am proud of every county in America for reaching out to their communities as part of National County Government Week.”

— Eric Coleman
NACo President

“Protecting Our Children: A Community Collaboration”

“Protecting Our Children: A Community United”

“I am proud of every county in America for reaching out to their communities as part of National County Government Week,” Coleman said. “The more residents know what services are available, the better chance we have to make a difference in children’s lives.”

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The “greening” of America’s county buildings is proceeding apace on a number of fronts. From obtaining Energy Star ratings to green building certification, counties are pursuing various paths to more environmentally friendly government buildings.

Mohave County, Ariz. and Whatcom County, Wash. are two of the latest counties to have government buildings certified “green” under the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, rating system. In addition, Mohave County — working with NACo’s Energy Star Local Government Challenge — has six local government buildings that received Energy Star ratings from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency within the past month. Counties like Mohave that participate in NACo’s Energy Star challenge can get free help to obtain Energy Star ratings (see related story).

Whether it’s new construction or existing structures, greener county buildings are growing in number. In Whatcom, it was an existing courthouse that obtained LEED certification. Mohave started from the ground up to create a “green” county administration building.

“We’re seeing interest among the public sector and much of the growth of the green building movement has been driven by the rapid adoption of LEED in both the public and private sector,” said Ashley Katz, U.S. Green Building Council’s (USGBC) communications coordinator.

Various LEED initiatives including legislation, executive orders, resolutions, ordinances, policies and incentives are found in 77 cities and 24 counties, she added.

For Energy Star, to date, 57 counties have participated in NACo’s Energy Star Challenge effort — and help is available for many more.

Mohave County officials recently celebrated their sleek new administration building’s LEED certification and its Energy Star designation.

“These environmental honors from LEED and Energy Star aren’t just out of the blue,” said County Manager Ron Walker. “Conservation and energy efficiency have been part of our planning for years. Our Mohave County General Plan has a large section on conservation which includes planning for air quality, water quantity and quality, energy, and natural and scenic resource protection.

Whatcom’s courthouse in Bellingham recently become only the second county courthouse in the nation to be LEED certified in the existing buildings category (Ada County, Idaho is the first), and only the sixth existing building of any kind to be certified in Washington state, according to a county spokeswoman.

Whatcom County Executive Pete Kremen decided to pursue LEED certification in late 2006, recalling, “We wanted to reduce our energy consumption and demonstrate leadership in environmental practices and stewardship.” He attributed the success of certification for Whatcom County largely to its conservation resource analyst, Christina Reeves, who compiled most of the data for the LEED certification requirements.

Mohave County, Ariz.’s Administrative Building is one of the county’s six Energy-Star rated facilities.

Whatcom County, Wash.’s LEED-certified courthouse is one of the nation’s two LEED county courthouses.

By CHARLES TAYLOR

Senior Staff Writer

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Whatcom County, Wash.’s LEED-certified courthouse is one of the nation’s two LEED county courthouses.

NACo’s Energy Star Local Government Challenge

NACo has partnered with the EPA in the Energy Star Local Government Challenge. The program encourages counties to improve their energy efficiency by 10 percent or more and provides assistance to counties to accomplish their goals.

A free, Web-based tool is available through the program, to help counties track and assess the energy performance of their buildings. Certain buildings, such as county office buildings and courthouses, can receive a rating on a scale of 1 to 100. Scoring 75 percent or above puts a building in the top 25 percent of energy-efficient buildings nationwide.

To date, 57 counties have participated in the challenge, and data has been entered on at least 229 buildings. Of those, 19 have earned Energy Stars.

The challenge also provides counties with assistance in doing outreach to their broader communities, by promoting energy-efficiency to commercial offices, retailers, healthcare organizations, small businesses, congregations and others.

For more information, including the Energy Star Challenge Toolkit, visit www.energystar.gov/challenge, or contact Kelly Zonderwyk at kzonderwyk@naco.org or 202/942-4224.

One major highlight of the project is the county’s purchase of 100-percent green power for all buildings, in addition to the achievement of a 55-percent recycling rate at the courthouse. The building’s proximity to bus access, plus its bicycle storage and showers for commuting employees, helped to meet the strict criteria for certification. Additionally, the county’s purchase of “green” cleaning supplies, and low-toxicity paints and sealants also were contributing factors.

Mohave County pursued Energy Star designation through NACo’s free Energy Star Local Government Challenge program. Gene Helper heads Mohave’s Office of Management and Budget. He said the EPA evaluates a building’s energy efficiency the same way other rating organizations look at appliances.

“There is software involved that compares buildings nationwide for energy efficiency,” he said. “We worked with NACo and the EPA and put 39 of our buildings into this system. It takes a lot of information such as square footage, natural gas usage, how many people use a building, number of computers, lights, and parking information. That information is compared with similar buildings across the country and a score is issued.

“We got a 90 percent score for the courthouse administration building as compared to other buildings nationwide,” Hepler said.

Whatcom’s courthouse is more energy-efficient than 86 percent of comparable buildings in the United States, county officials said.

Conservation measures and the reduction in energy consumption have resulted in a savings of more than $160,000 annually in the courthouse alone.

Whatcom County’s Kremen said his county’s project wasn’t only about being green: “This is a real achievement because it was made possible through efforts that we already decided were good business practices. We had invested in things like energy efficiency and good indoor air quality to improve our operations. The fact that these ‘green’ practices helped us attain certification is an added bonus.”

For more information, contact Christina Reeves in Whatcom County at 360/676-6717 or Creeves@co.whatcom.wa.us, or Darryle Purcell in Mohave County at darryle.purell@co.mohave.az.us.

(Whatcom County staff and Mohave County staff contributed to this report.)
LUCC meeting showcases best practices in health care

By Dalen A. Harris
Associate Legislative Director

Health care reform and improving quality, care and access for residents in metropolitan communities were highlighted throughout the recent Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) Annual Meeting held in Maricopa County, Ariz.

Hosted by NACo President-elect Don Stapley, the 2008 LUCC Annual Meeting focused on local innovation in health care, and showcased model programs that communities have implemented to provide quality, care and access for residents.

The April 9–11 meeting kicked off with a heated debate from two of the 2008 presidential candidates’ health care policy advisors. Russell Chick, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon and an advisor with Sen. John McCain’s campaign, and Laurie Rubin, executive director of Malaria No More and an advisor for Sen. Hillary Clinton’s campaign, squared off and discussed their candidates’ recommendations for comprehensive health care reform.

Each delivered passionate testimony of why their candidates’ recommendations were needed and highlighted the urgent need for access to affordable and quality care for all Americans.

Thereafter, the annual meeting moved to showcasing innovation in health care, and expert panelists discussed model health programs that they have implemented in their communities. They included the Maricopa County Employee Health Initiative Program, King County, Wash.’s Puget Sound Health Alliance; Howard County, Md.’s Healthy Howard Plan and the city and county of San Francisco’s Healthy San Francisco Plan.

Additionally, representatives from pioneering nonprofit organizations Bridges to Excellence and the Pima Community Access Program discussed comprehensive solutions they have advocated and coordinated to provide efficient, equitable and patient-centered care.

Perhaps the most enriching moment of the annual meeting was a group tour of the Central Arizona Shelter Services (CASS) campus. Mary Rose Wilcox, LUCC steering committee member and Maricopa County Supervisor, described how homelessness in Phoenix began to increase dramatically around 1982 because of poor economic conditions, high unemployment and local policy changes.

In 1984, the Phoenix community created CASS in response. In addition to the traditional services that many emergency shelters provide to the homeless, CASS also provides residents with case management, employment services, developmental childcare and dental care at a new state-of-the-art facility.

While most of the meeting focused on health care, the agenda did allow an opportunity for attendees to discuss two key legislative priorities that are important to counties nationwide.

During a panel session entitled “The Presumption of Innocence and the Loss of Federal Entitlement Benefits for the Mentally Ill,” panelists discussed the plight of providing care to persons detained in county jails prior to conviction.

This has been a key issue for many NACo members, and participants were glad to learn that Reps. Alcee L. Hastings (D-Fla.), Rush D. Holt (D-N.J.) and Michael C. Burgess (R-Texas) recently introduced in the House of Representatives H.R. 5698, the Restoring the Partnership for County Health Care Costs Act of 2008. This legislation would save counties hundreds of millions of dollars in medical expenses for individuals who immediately lose their federal health insurance benefits while being detained in county jails; all NACo members are strongly encouraged to contact their members of Congress in support of the bill.

Additionally, NACo Legislative Director Edwin Rosado led a short discussion on the need for Congress to fully fund the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program.

The caucus has not yet determined where it will meet next year, but a wealth of information on the 2008 event can be accessed on the LUCC Web site, www.urbancounties.org.

Third-party workers most at-risk for radiation overexposure

ZAPPED from page 2

Third-party workers most at-risk for radiation overexposure

- Counties need to be aware of the effect of RF radiation on workers
- Pilot database program underway to monitor RF antennas, warn employees and third-party workers
- Counties have liability within wireless industry as FCC licensees, employers, site owners and regulators
- The radio tower sites, used to relay two-way radio signals, have warning signs and the equipment is not hidden, however antennas in more densely populated areas are another story.
- “If somebody wants to build a power site in a dense area like a city, the [municipal government] will ask them to build a camouflaged tower or have them camouflage the antennas.”
- He said the county follows FCC standards and has a program in place to monitor RF emissions and to ensure the safety of employees and third-party workers. In addition to turning off RF antennas when third-party workers are onsite, Fung said the county uses selective radiation field meters, personal safety monitors and rooftop RF emissions analysis software to monitor radiation levels.
- “We provide NARDA meters that you put on your belt,” he said. “It works like a beeper and is based on FCC standards. It will give you 50 percent of the standard, but once you get to 100 percent it beeps [to warn you].”
- Fountian said that while some counties do spend the money needed to provide training and technology to protect workers, not everyone working on top of county buildings is aware of the risks. He said the health effects of overexposure to radiation are often behavioral instead of physical and may not be obvious right away. By the time monitoring equipment sounds the alarm to alert the worker of excessive radiation, the damage might already be done.
- “The RF badges and monitors can help,” Fountian said. “However they have severe limitations and often promote a false sense of security for the worker, while leaving the licensee, employer, site owner, equipment manufacturer open for liability.”
NACo's FREE e-mail subscription management service sends e-mail updates* whenever new information is posted on its Web site so you can be the first to know.

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- Cost Saving Programs for Counties
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- News Releases
- Library Resources
  (Publications, Surveys, Model County Programs)

* RSS FEEDS, TOO!
Some using superdelegate roles to raise awareness of counties

SUPERDELEGATE from page 1

about 20 delegates, according to CNN, CBS and the Associated Press.

Many county superdelegates attained their position because they were elected by their state party to the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

It’s a role some superdelegates, like King County, Wash. Executive Ron Sims, use as an opportunity to raise the profile of counties. He is a Clinton superdelegate.

“The key for all of us as superdelegates, whether we’re undecided, or whether we support Sen. Obama or we support Sen. Clinton, is to insert ourselves into this process so that everybody knows there are counties,” he said.

Peterson said she didn’t intend to commit to a candidate prior to North Carolina’s May 6 primary and probably wouldn’t endorse anyone before this summer’s Democratic National Convention in Denver August 25-28.

For her, it’s a delicate balancing act, since she is up for re-election this year and faces opposition in a run off on primary day.

vote as their states did in primaries and caucuses.

But Tinsley said that’s not why superdelegates were created. “We were put in place to make the best decision on behalf of the party,” he said regarding two points: who is most likely to win in November and whose coattails can best benefit other Democratic candidates.

“We can argue the merits of the superdelegate system, but the fact remains that that’s what we’ve got right now. And I think there should be a debate on whether we should continue it after this crazy primary season. But for now, these are the rules we’re living under.”

Not playing by the rules resulted in Florida and Michigan being stripped of their delegates for holding early primaries. But what of their superdelegates? According to the Associated Press, Florida lost 150 superdelegates and Michigan lost 28 superdelegates as punishment for holding early primaries.

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Not so, says NACo President Ron Sims, an Oakland County, Mich. commissioner and an uncommitted superdelegate. He interprets party rules differently and contends superdelegates are not affected by the DNC penalty. He strongly believes Michigan and Florida will be seated.

“You can’t disenfranchise two states out of the 50; you just can’t do it and call an election fair,” he said. Taylor County, Fla. Commissioner Rudy Parker agrees: “I think it’s a damn shame we haven’t already been told we’re going to be seated.” He remains uncommitted and doesn’t plan to change that until the convention. “I don’t see any need to hurry with it.”

Meanwhile back in Montana, Tinsley has been trying to do a little persuading of his own. The state’s Democratic governor, Brian Schweitzer, lives across the street from Tinsley in Helena, the capital and county seat. “I’m still working on him,” Tinsley said of Schweitzer, who remains an uncommitted superdelegate.
Some lawmakers oppose funding shift from ag to non-ag programs

FARM BILL from page 1

funding for rural development and boosts nutrition spending by about $500 million to more than $10 billion for 10 years.

NACo and its partners in the Campaign for a Renewed Rural Development led the effort to call on conferees to restore mandatory funding for rural development, which had been reduced to zero during conference negotiations.

Also, the tax credit for corn-based ethanol processors decreased to 45 cents a gallon from 51 cents a gallon in exchange for new incentives for cellulosic ethanol, which is made from plant matter such as switchgrass rather than corn.

Roadblocks ahead?
The funding framework deal represents significant progress, yet obstacles remain. The immediate hurdle is some Republican conferees, who oppose the recent movement of funding away from agricultural programs and towards nonagricultural programs.

Negotiators must shepherd the final package through the full conference committee, composed of many members who have been left out of key negotiations, and they may try to oppose specific proposals that are critical to the fragile compromise. All conferees will also get an opportunity to debate the specific provisions of the massive bill, which could produce additional roadblocks.

If conferees can get past congressional infighting they still may face a presidential veto. It appears that very few agriculture subsidy reforms made it into the final agreement, and the Bush administration made subsidy reform a top priority for the bill.

As of press deadline, the administration had no comment on the tentative conference deal. The administration originally agreed to only $6 billion above baseline and opposes the Senate’s tax provisions that survived negotiations.
News From the Nation’s Counties

**CALIFORNIA**

Two HUMBOLDT COUNTY Department of Health and Human Services agencies are collaborating on a parenting program in an effort to prevent child abuse. The Social Services and Public Health branches are offering three-month Incredible Years parenting classes geared toward the parents of 3- to 8-year olds.

**INDIANA**

WRIGHT and HAMILTON counties have decided to share county engineer Dan Waid. He told the Wright County Monitor his has no hyphen or slash.

“I considered the county engineer for that county whenever I’m working in that county,” he said.

Shaping resources between counties is becoming more common as budgets get tighter. He said officials from the two counties have similarities in terms of size and environment, and thought a 50-50 sharing agreement for his services was a good idea. The agreement could also be the basis for cooperative construction projects, purchasing of materials, as well as sharing equipment, costs and materials.

**MICHIGAN**

MONTGOMERY COUNTY Council members approved legislation to ensure new homes would meet federal energy efficiency standards to much to the dismay of builders who are concerned the standards will increase costs.

The Washington Post reported the legislation is part of a broader green initiative, designed to decrease energy consumption by 15 percent — 30 percent. Although builders have been voluntarily including energy-efficient appliances, as well as heating and cooling systems in new construction, the legislation would require new single-family homes meet EPA guidelines.

According to analysts and developers, construction costs would increase from $2,000 – $20,000. Council member Roger Berliner told the Post that a newly constructed home would incur an additional $10,000 in overall costs, approximately 1.25 percent.

**NEVADA**

WASHOE COUNTY has big plans to become a “green region.” The Reno Gazette-Journal reported the goal is to spur environmental innovation, green business development and the renewable energy industry.

Assistant County Manager John Berchick said having a strategic plan would give the region a competitive edge. “This is one of the greatest economic opportunities for our region.”

**OREGON**

LANE COUNTY may have to cut its workforce 12 percent by July 1, as well as cut 24-hour sheriff’s patrols to 20-hours. County Administrator Jeff Spartz proposed those and other reductions to deal with the possible loss of $47 million in federal timber aid.

Jail beds and animal control are also on the chopping block, the Register-Guard reported. The sheriff’s office stands to lose one-third of its personnel, or 125 positions. Layoffs and cuts could begin May 29.

“I have been involved in preparing or approving governmental budgets for nearly 30 years,” Spartz wrote in a budget summary. “This one stands out for the number of difficult choices that have to be made.”

If Congress funds the timber payments, the Board of Commissioners would reconsider whether to keep the positions and services.

**NEW MEXICO**

Voters in SIERRA COUNTY have approved a 0.25 percent sales tax to fund construction of a $198 million spaceport for commercial space travel.

By a vote of nearly 2-to-1, voters turned out in record numbers to approve the tax April 22, the Las Cruces Sun-News reported. The county will soon become part of a tax district with DONA ANA COUNTY, which approved the tax by a narrow margin last year.

Jones Williams, a Dona Ana County spokesman, said the district could be formed “within 60 days.” “It obviously would have to go before both [county commissions].”

The summit included panel presentations by criminal justice and law enforcement officials, service providers and residents who have family members with mental illness.

“We do not need to do all we can to address this issue proactively,” said David Peiper, a Hamilton County commissioner. “As much as possible, people with mental illness need to get into treatment, and not spend time filling up our jails, which are ill-equipped to serve them.”

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**PENNSYLVANIA**

Four western Pennsylvania counties will benefit from $1.75 million from the EPA to clean up brownfields industrial sites.

The recipients were the Pittsburgh North Side Industrial Development Co. in ALLEGHENY COUNTY, the Washington County Redevelopment Authority, Johnstown Redevelopment Authority and Clearfield County Economic Development Corp., the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported.

“This funding will put Western Pennsylvania communities on a path to reclaim properties that have been unused for years and turn those sites into assets for the community, the environment and the economy,” said Donald Welsh, administrator of the EPA's mid-Atlantic region.

The money will be used to clean and update abandoned industrial and commercial sites.

**SOUTH CAROLINA**

CHARLESTON COUNTY has taken up a new program for several years, as do a number of counties in Colorado.

**TEXAS**

LOVING COUNTY, the state's least populous, has another superlative. It’s also the state's richest, according to a U.S. Commerce Department income study.

About 60 people live there, and, on average, each earns just over $38,500 per year. The Dallas Morning News reported the reason: The energy industry.

“There’s so much oil and gas wealth out there right now,” said Ray Perryman, a Waco economist, referring to West Texas. “The joke out there is that the oil business is so good, they can afford to be in the cattle business again.”
**Program Helps Frail Elderly to Remain Independent**

*BY ELIZABETH PERRY \STAFF WRITER*

Rex, an elderly diabetic man with kidney failure and heart disease, and his wife Mary, were beginning to have difficulty coping with his health problems. Montgomery County Senior Services Network Office (MCSSNO) contacted one of its service providers to help the couple so they could continue to live independently in their Ohio home for as long as possible without having to go into a nursing home.

Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley sent a respite volunteer, Morris, to stay with Rex so Mary could get out of the house for a few hours each week for her own doctors’ appointments and to shop for groceries. Shortly after the couple’s daughter, Jackie, and her family moved back to Ohio to help care for them, Mary was diagnosed with cancer. Morris continued to provide much-needed support through her illness and death. Rex died a month later.

“He was a godsend for us,” says Jackie. “He empathized with our family and helped us cope with the grave situation both of my parents faced. I really don’t know what we would have done without his help.”

Patrick Bailey, project coordinator of MCSSNO, said the program was one of the recommendations that came out of a 2001 task force convened by the Board of Commissioners to study issues affecting the frail elderly in Montgomery County. The task force found an organized, collaborative approach was needed to meet the needs of a growing population of seniors who were living longer than advances in medical care.

The office was established in 2004 with a start-up budget of $94,000 under the county’s Department of Job and Family Services. Its main purpose was to provide services to frail elderly people, ages 60 and older, based on individual need. The office defines “frail elderly” as those who are at least 60 years of age who are “at increased risk for death or functional decline.”

“A significant number of people were not getting home and community-based care the way they are today,” Bailey says. “For instance, the agency’s largest service provider now serves 790 individuals on an ongoing basis per month. Before this program, 113 people received services monthly,” he adds.

Bailey estimates there are some 100,000–120,000 senior citizens living in Montgomery County. His office concentrates on serving the needs of some 5,000 frail elderly clients each year. Services are offered on a client-by-client basis depending on how frail an individual is, and can include respite care and home visits, adult day care, home meal delivery, housekeeping, transportation, medical equipment and emergency response systems.

There are currently 15 service providers that receive Human Service Levy funding, including Catholic Social Services. Funds are divided among the MCSSNO, the Area Agency on Aging—a largest provider, which provides the Com-Care program—as well as ongoing programming, one-time initiatives and short-term interventions.

The results of the program indicate it is a success, according to Bailey. “[In 2006] 695 residents were provided services costing just over $5 million from the Human Services Levy. If these same residents received nursing home care, it would cost taxpayers close to $40 million.”

MCSSNO also serves as a central information resource for senior information and services, monitors service contracts funded through Human Service Levy Funds, solicits bids for services, and coordinates with providers to make sure services are not duplicated. It also coordinates the Frail Elderly Service Network and provides fiscal oversight and monitoring to make sure services are being performed, surveys are distributed and results tabulated. In addition, Bailey’s office performs home visits, calls clients and asks about the quality of services.

“All of our providers are mandated to come to a quarterly meeting, where they share updates on their programs,” he says. “We also make sure agencies are making the right referrals. Not the ones they think are right, but the ones they know are right.”

Bailey advises counties that are interested in starting similar programs to collaborate with others who are willing to “think outside the box” and are willing to look at best practices. He suggests talking to those who are “willing to come together, talk about the hard issues and be willing to make some major changes.”

For more information on the program, contact Patrick Bailey at 937/225-4948.

In January 2008, the Vermillion County, Ind., commissioners invited county residents to be a part of history and participate in the race to create the new county seal. Of the 42 entries received, the design from interior architectural designer Eliza Porter of Dana was selected by the Vermillion County commissioners as the winner. The symbols were selected to represent Vermillion County as a whole. Symbols were also selected to show the county’s connection to both the state of Indiana and to the U.S. The year shown at the top of the seal is the year in which the Indiana legislature created Vermillion County.

The courthouse, an architectural monument that is associated with Vermillion County, was selected as a symbol of the county seat and center of legal operation.

The bald eagle was selected not only as a symbol of the patriotism of the county’s residents and its connection to the national bird, but because Vermillion County is one of the few counties in the country these birds call home.

The seal also features the Vermillion River, the source of the county’s name, because it played a significant role in the settlement of the county and continues to be vital today.

The corn that forms a laurel crest around the seal represents the role that agriculture has always played in Vermillion County. The outline of the state of Indiana at the center serves to show the location of Vermillion County, and identifies the state in which the county is located. The banner at the bottom of the seal showing the words “In God We Trust” ties our county to the stronghold of our national motto.

*(If you would like your county’s seal featured, please contact Matthew Fellows at 202/942-4236 or e-mail mfellows@naco.org.)*
Consequently, pre-purchase counseling programs don’t only focus on the end-point of foreclosure. For example, many homebuyers have difficulty understanding various loan options. Consequently, pre-purchase counseling is an important first step that also complements a county’s efforts to encourage homeownership.

Dakota County, Minn., through its Community Development Agency (CDA), takes on the mortgage prequel and provides pre-purchase counseling programs, focused on credit repair, household budgeting and loan products and documents. For owners facing financial difficulties, counties focus their counseling more specifically on foreclosure. Arapahoe County, Colo., with its community partner, has workshops focused on important deadlines that occur during the foreclosure process and the options available to homeowners facing foreclosure. In Arapahoe and other counties with such programs, referrals are also an important part of the effort.

Dakota County, through its CDA, employs a “homeownership coordinator” to assess homeowners’ foreclosure situations and determine possible solutions. The coordinator works one-on-one and provides counseling assistance to help homeowners with referrals and, in some cases, the county provides financial assistance.

Summit County, Ohio has established a broad partnership incorporating government agencies, banks and nonprofit organizations with the goal of providing prevention education and assistance to homeowners. As with the other county examples above, themes that are addressed by the program include foreclosure timelines and signs of predatory or fraudulent lending practices. The county also has materials explaining loan modification options such as workout-payment plans leading to reinstatement, mortgage modification plans, or a pre-foreclosure short sale. Some referrals made through the partnership include the Ohio Housing Finance Agency, which has a refinancing program that features a fixed rate. Summit also refers homeowners facing ARM interest rate resets to government-insured mortgages through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA).

Summit also recently included incentives for participation in counseling as part of its Foreclosure Prevention and Rescue Program. Participants may be eligible to receive up to $5,000 if they meet income requirements, receive counseling and also develop a financial plan. Lucas County, Ohio has a similar incentive in place.

Foreclosure counseling and prevention may also extend to property tax assistance. The Washtenaw County, Mich. treasurer has programs in place to support social worker interventions to assist families with referrals. The program has helped to radically reduce the potential number of foreclosures that might have resulted from delinquent tax payments. Summit County also has a tax delinquency program where delinquent balances are frozen into a special account and no further interest is assessed against that balance. Homeowners are provided with an installment plan to pay the frozen amount; however, they must pay current taxes, as they are due, to remain in good standing.

Early warning systems As foreclosure problems have grown more acute, some counties have also begun to work more proactively with the information available in property records. For example, a county recorder in Montgomery County, Ohio has taken steps to identify the most acute subprime lenders in the county to alert their customers of potential problems before interest rates are reset. A Hennepin County, Minn., foreclosure task force similarly recommended contributing data to the Minneapolis “Early Warning System.” These kinds of efforts could help counteract a central problem encountered by prevention specialists at Dakota County’s CDA. The specialists report they often receive foreclosure calls only at the point when nothing can be done to help the homeowner. More information and improved access to that information could lead to more timely application of prevention initiatives focused on both homeowners and lenders.

In addition, good information and quality processing affects the prosecution of mortgage fraud, which is also a prevention strategy. Mortgage fraud can be detected by checking certain types of filings for authenticity and capturing trends among filers. In addition, some county recorders’ offices have established or are proposing prosecution units.

For example, the Cook County, Ill. recorder recently proposed a mortgage fraud unit composed of sheriff’s police officers trained in financial crimes and at least one full-time prosecutor, according to the Chicago Tribune. A similar deed fraud unit exists in Wayne County, Mich., where suspicious documents are flagged for investigation. In Cook County, the flow of documents reaches a pace of 5,000 per day.

For more information, visit www.co.summit.oh.us/consaffairs/Foreclosure.html and www.dakota.cda.org/homeowners.htm.

(Research news was written by Alex Welsch, associate research director)
H.R. Doctor Is In

Hurricanes, Earthquakes and Floods, Oh My!

Attending a professional conference is an important part of career learning and growth. It offers networking opportunities. It offers chances to hear from subject-matter experts. It also offers thoughtful opportunities to consider your own situation in light of what you hear from other attendees about what is going on in other organizations. Then, of course, there is the chance to meet vendors and collect dozens of stress balls, pens and other toys.

The HR Doctor has just returned from the National Hurricane Conference in Orlando, Fla. and everything described above applies. But, the most significant “take-aways” go far beyond how to mitigate disaster and manage critical incidents such as floods, hurricanes and earthquakes.

They are the gleanings of quiet moments in the back, generally near the exits, considering what was said in one context, such as dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, but realizing that the themes were more universal and apply in many areas of public administration. Here are some of my key observations. Perhaps some of them will save unnecessary travel expenses, even if it means not adding to your stress ball collection.

Federalism at issue
Like many national conferences involving government, one of the key issues was the reconsideration of federalism. The National Hurricane Conference, as you might expect, was full of chatter about the role of FEMA, the Corps of Engineers, the National Guard and the private not-for-profit sector.

State governments used to be the center of the universe in the development of the United States.

Many of the presenters were retired FEMA employees who have found a new avocation in teaching seminars and putting up with the constant barrage of local government officials discussing their many “crawling over broken glass” experiences with FEMA.

In the variety of conference sessions, there was relatively little mention of state governments. In fact, this is really one of the HR Doctor’s major themes in recent years — the re-direction of federalism away from what the founding fathers intended.

State governments are suffering from a serious identity crisis. They don’t know what they want to be when they grow up. They don’t quite realize that they’re not in the 18th century anymore. State governments used to be the center of the universe in the development of the United States. Now that local governments, and especially counties and cities, are active “go-to” places where direct citizen services are provided, states are having an increasing problem with determining what role they should play.

Perhaps this is the reason why every session of a State Legislature makes cities, counties and professional associations such as NAaCo go on maximum alert. Legislatures seem to be searching for ways to inflict additional burdens and obstacles on local governments which already have a difficult role providing direct citizen services.

States are often quick to attack local government revenue sources, especially property taxes. They seek to show that they completely support the understandable frustrations of taxpayers by hacking away at a source of revenue which is not anywhere near as vital to their own level of government as it is to others.

Unfunded mandates continue to roll downhill from the halls of state government, landing in piles of conflicts and service delivery problems at the feet of local government administrators.

States — who needs them?
The new reality of federalism is that state governments are too small to have the kind of impact they secretly wish they could have on large problems. Examples include regulation of multinational corporations, improving a deteriorating climate and degraded environment, creating a separate foreign policy and handling problems such as terrorism, pandemics and other issues which do not line up in sync with political boundaries.

Just as the state is too small to deal with large problems, it is increasingly too large to deal with smaller problems such as helping particular individuals improve specific qualities of their lives. It is simply not the state level of government that provides the day-to-day ongoing interaction with medically indigent adults, the mentally ill, the homeless and the economically disadvantaged, for example — nor the huge variety of other programs which are at the core of what local government is all about.

The HR Doctor spent half of his career in California as a chief administrative officer and a human resources director. It was occasionally necessary to travel to the state capital to attempt, usually in vain, to help turn aside some zealot state legislator’s efforts to torture local government. That experience made me understand better why many state capitals seem to be tucked away as far as possible from the large centers of the state populations.

Local government — best for some.
The larger examples include Sacramento, Calif.; Tallahassee, Fla.; Albany, N.Y. and others. Local government is the level closest to the people. It is the level where a frustrated citizen can seek direct help from having a responsible decision maker in-person. The location of state government capital represents a metaphor for the fact that travel, frustration and large commitments of time, money and energy are required to try to maneuver through a state government bureaucracy. The location of some of the state capitals may, in fact, also be a metaphor for the increasing “distance” separating the state level of government from its local affected citizens.

Hurricane Conference blows off state governments
At the Hurricane Conference, much of the discussion seemed to skip over state levels of government. It was direct local-to-federal contact and vice versa. Apparently, when the most acute and dangerous moments in the life of the citizens takes place, the local government is the champion, the federal government is the source of hope and help, and the states are in the hallway trying to find members of the press to pose for photos.

This analysis may be overly dramatic, and is certainly one with which many of our state friends

FS NEWS from page 13

has a separate budget so it is harder for some to comply with the green initiative.

Office Depot has a Green Book that purchasing agents can use to eliminate the hassle of figuring out what is green. The company is about to launch a new called Office Products Green so customers don’t have to ask if it’s environmentally friendly.

Paper is one of the biggest products the company sells, and green is the norm. Although the company sells virgin paper, it must come from a sustainable forest.

Herman Miller, which has a U.S. Communities contract, uses its design for environment team to create products that can help a county earn LEED points. Chairs, tables and storage cabinets are part of the mix.

The company spent $3 million on equipment to get its veneer GreenGuard certified, which it hopes to accomplish soon.

Herman Miller’s first chair built by the green team was the Aeron in the 1990s. More than 90 percent of it could be recycled. The Mirra chair that was introduced in the early 2000s was the first to use cradle-to-cradle technology and thinking.

Innovation points are given under LEED for using cradle-to-cradle products.

Another U.S. Communities contract that Hennepin County uses is with Graybar. The county has begun using more lower wattage, green bulbs. “[W]e worked with Graybar to purchase the materials for that,” said Nathan Reinbold in the county/environmental services department.

Haworth, an office systems company, also works with counties to be green. Its philosophy is to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Haworth creates removable walls and work stations that can be reconfigured to accommodate counties with different needs — whether it’s downsizing or moving into a different space.

An advantage for counties to use U.S. Communities contracts is there’s no need to go out for bid. That part of the process is done. This saves time and money.

Los Angeles’ green agreement says, “By including environmental considerations in our procurement decisions, along with our traditional concerns with price, performance and availability, we will remain fiscally responsible while promoting practices that improve public health and safety, reduce pollution and conserve natural resources.”

(Kathryn Reed writes for NAaCo.)
Citizens, disaster first responders need realistic expectations

HR DOCTOR • page 14

would take great issue. However, for the many local government officials attending the Hurricane Conference who have direct experience dealing with one-on-one with the residents affected by catastrophe, the state government’s search for an identity becomes quite apparent.

Expectations conflict

The second clear theme to emerge as an underlying issue was a very strong series of conflicts over expectations. A large number of citizens seem to feel that despite all of the pre-disaster warnings issued and mostly ignored, all the chatter about having a personal hurricane plans or stocking up on water, three days of food, extra medicine, finding escape routes, etc., it is just easier to abdicate personal responsibility because we expect others to take care of us. Those are unrealistic expectations in time of mass disaster, but they are widespread and strongly held by the citizenry.

Local government will fail if it doesn’t get the electricity back up, my streets cleared, my trash service restored. I don’t miss a single episode of Jerry Springer or Dancing With The Stars. It doesn’t matter whether it is not even within local government’s authority, as with power company or cable or satellite television services. Citizens have expectations and make demands which local governments, whether they are the huge city of New York, or tiny Ascension Parish, La., can not meet.

The same is often true for local government expectations about the behavior and responsibilities of their own insurance providers or FEMA itself.

The purpose of insurance is not to build the new courthouse. It is to provide some but not all of the help to bring that flooded police station back to the condition it was prior to the flood. FEMA’s job is not to provide a new community infrastructure. It is to be an asset for local governments to return, as much as possible, to a functional civil society as existed before the earthquake or hurricane struck.

Yet some in local government expect FEMA to build that new courthouse or to replace the vehicle fleet that was damaged. They expect FEMA to manage the process by which a city like New Orleans, with much of it below sea level in a flood zone, can again return to a situation where replacement buildings are put up at the wrong place with few if any mitigation measures taken. FEMA also labors under some unreasonable expectations. It expects that local governments will correctly fill out all of the massive quantities of federal paperwork, take GPS readings and digital photos of every single tree, and be ready to meet, head-on, with no complaints and total subservience, all of the requirements of the hordes of federal auditors before any money flows into the area.

Even then, months, or, as residents of Florida can testify, years can go by before actions are visible. In some cases, this clash of expectations results in a situation analogous to the meeting of elephants in mating season. There is a high level of trampling and much contact but nothing happens for two years. FEMA is in a fundamentally no-win situation just as local governments are. The situation represents a disaster within a disaster.

We live in a society of unreasonable expectations that give rise to full employment for lawyers, credit cards available for all, subprime mortgages available on the Internet and on television, and the rise of companies willing to help manage the debts and shatter dreams and hopes that go along with the clash of expectations. That clash was very evident in the discussions at the Hurricane Conference just as it might be around your dinner table on those increasingly rare evenings when you and people you love, such as your children and your spouse, get together to discuss your family situation.

Search for scapegoats

Another theme to be covered in this article is a common component of every crisis and every disaster in our society. It is the search for a scapegoat. When individuals fail to plan properly for their own safety and things go terribly wrong, there is an immediate chorus of whining and of finding someone, some organization or something to blame.

Our imperative to find a scapegoat is driven and accelerated by the frenzy generated by a mass media industry run amok. It thrives on the reporting of the creation of crisis, chaos and apparent public policy failures. Author Finley Peter Dunne’s notion that the job of the press is to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable, needs some 21st century amending. The role of the media appears now to be to create the affliction and then report on the effects as they were not in any way responsible.

The final strategic point orbiting over the Hurricane Conference and, in a larger sense, hovering over the entire role of local government administrators was the fact that this conference was attended by hundreds of highly dedicated, very knowledgeable, and, likely, very undervalued professionals. They sacrifice time with their families for the sake of their commitment to public service.

They enjoy camaraderie and a sense of fraternity and sorority. America is in good hands during these moments of high drama and catastrophe because of the undertaking dedication of the people encountered by the HR Doctor at the Hurricane Conference — even if we make our jobs more difficult by the way we behave and present our expectations.

Phil Rosenberg
The HR Doctor • www.hrdr.net
A “Big Thank You” to the following counties who let us know about their activities during this year’s National County Government Week.

Allen County, Ind.
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Austin County, Texas
Berks County, Pa.
Benton County, Ore.
Boone County, Mo.
Blair County, Pa.
Blue Earth County, Minn.
Boone County, Ind.
Angelina County, Texas
Arlington County, Va.
Austin County, Texas
Berks County, Pa.
Benton County, Ore.
Boone County, Mo.
Blair County, Pa.
Blue Earth County, Minn.

Caddo Parish, La.
Cape May County, N.J.
Caldwell County, N.C.
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