



## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR RELEASE:**

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# **Commissioner James Hanning delivers *Why Counties Matter* message to Capitol Hill**

*Joins more than 1,500 county officials to participate in 2013 NACo Legislative Conference*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Commissioner James Hanning delivered a strong *Why Counties Matter* message to Capitol Hill during the National Association of Counties' (NACo) 2013 Legislative Conference, March 2-6, in Washington, D.C.

With talk of fiscal cliffs and sequestration cuts dominating the headlines, more than 1,500 county officials from across the country gathered in the nation's capital to demonstrate to Congress and federal officials that the nation's 3,069 county governments provide the essential building blocks to create healthy, vibrant and safe communities. This includes supporting and maintaining key public infrastructure, transportation and economic development assets; creating and sustaining a skilled workforce to meet the needs of private industry; ensuring public health and public safety needs to protect the public; and implementing a broad portfolio of federal, state and local programs in a cost-effective and accountable manner.

"Our message to Washington was to stop making it more difficult for county government to provide for our communities -- work with us," Hanning said. "They needed to hear us say that despite slow-recovering economy and the revenue challenges affecting all levels of government, counties are mandated by state constitution and federal law to provide essential services, and we do every day."

During the conference, NACo leadership and members met with dozens key Congressional and House and Senate committee offices on to deliver the *Why Counties Matter* message in person and offer to work collaboratively with their federal partners to meet the needs of the American people. Important federal issues affecting counties and communities discussed included: preserving the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds, replacing the sequestration -- or across the board budget cuts and protecting the federal-state-local partnership for Medicaid.

NACo President Chris Rodgers, commissioner, Douglas County, Neb., said counties are important because the programs and services provided by counties touch the lives of virtually every American.

More than 2,900 counties own a jail or participate in a regional jail and admit nearly 12 million people each year. Counties provide public health services, including flu shots and restaurant inspections through 1,947 health departments. Counties own and maintain 44 percent of America's roadways and 228,026 bridges and almost one third of the nation's transit systems and airports. Counties respond to all disasters and in most cases without assistance from other levels of governments. Counties run the nation's polling places to keep our democracy strong. Counties own 964 hospitals and spend \$68 billion on health care services annually.

"If you vote, drive to work, take the bus, get a flu shot, visit the library, go to the hospital, eat at a restaurant, play in the park, recycle, or call 911- you are interacting with your county government," Rodgers said.

Also during the Legislative Conference, participating county officials heard from national leaders on issues important to counties and communities, including U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, Agriculture Sec. Tom Vilsack, Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), Sen. James E. Risch (R-Idaho), House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb.), Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb.), Rep. James Clyburn (D-S.C.), journalist and author Bob Woodward and economist Mark M. Zandi. See summaries of their remarks below.

In addition to carrying the county government message to Capitol Hill, county officials participated in a variety of educational workshops. Technology Summit, as well as Environment, Energy, and Land Use Steering Committee were some of the workshops Commissioner Hanning attended.

At the conference, NACo also released a short video, *Why Counties Matter*, which shows many of the services counties deliver to communities. The video and infographic is available to view at: <http://www.naco.org/Counties/Pages/Why-Counties-Matter.aspx>

County News coverage of 2013 Legislative Conference speakers is available at:

<http://www.naco.org/newsroom/countynews/Current%20Issue/2-25-13/Pages/March-2,-2013-Legislative-Conference.aspx>

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*The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation's 3,069 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public's understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).*



## 2013 Legislative Conference

### **U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder**

Holder thanked NACO President Chris Rodgers and other county leaders for pursuing smart justice initiatives in their communities. He detailed how many grants the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has awarded to county governments for re-entry programs. The sequester will cost DOJ \$1.6 billion over seven months with grants to local governments taking a \$100 million hit.

### **Sec. Tom Vilsack, U.S. Department of Agriculture**

Vilsack highlighted the effects of sequestration on rural America and the need for a new farm bill. He called the sequester “bad policy” but said the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will try to minimize disruption in its implementation of funding and program cuts. “It is a difficult, horrible process but it is the law,” Vilsack said. One of his major concerns is food inspection. He said “front-line” and support staff account for 87 percent of USDA’s food safety inspection budget. “There is no way, based on how the sequester is structured, that I can avoid furloughing food safety inspectors.” On the farm bill, Vilsack urged NACO members to use their Capitol Hill visits to discuss the “importance of getting this bill done.”

### **Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), Senate Republican Conference Vice Chair**

Blunt gave the opening general session a self-effacing assessment of Congress’ performance leading up to the implementation of sequestration. The first-term senator served seven terms in the House of Representatives and started his political career with 12 years as the Greene County, Mo. clerk. “The last time the United States Senate passed a budget, nobody had an iPad,” he said. “The continuing resolution, that’s something most of you wouldn’t try to get away with where you work.” He welcomed the budget cuts that have been part of sequestration. “We’re appropriating more money than the law says we’re allowed to spend,” he said. The key to keeping that under control, he said was recognizing what level of government is best equipped to handle a problem. “The common sense solution comes from the level of government that’s closest to the problem,” he said.

### **Sen. James Risch (R-Idaho)**

Risch decried the federal spending problem that he saw as a symptom of Congress’s distance from the taxpayers. “There’s a cavalier attitude about money. I don’t get it,” he said. “This isn’t Las Vegas, this isn’t make-believe money, it’s real money.” He said there was no proposal being debated in Congress that he felt could control spending. “The solutions are too common sense,” he said. “Congress is not designed to handle these things, he said. “It will rise to the occasion in a crisis, though.” He suggested a modest 1 percent decrease in spending over several years to return the federal budget to balance. “We can ease our way out of this, but it’s not likely going to happen,” he said, because the federal budget process is accustomed to growing. He compared the U.S. debt crisis to Greece’s with two main caveats — the U.S. is larger and can’t be bailed out by the rest of Europe, and the U.S. credit limit is higher.

### **Bob Woodward, Associate Editor, The Washington Post**

Woodward shared his views on Washington through the prism of his 40 years of covering U.S. presidents. “If we were to spend time asking what we should worry about most in this country... my answer to the question is secret government,” he said. Nixon tried it, and there’s an increasing tendency toward secrecy in the current White House, “with this concentration of power, with the shields up,” he said. Woodward’s comments come at a time when he has recently accused an administration official of threatening him to prevent a story critical of President Obama’s handling of the sequester. Woodward suggested the president could have shown more leadership. “I’m not sure that President Obama fully understands the power that he has, noting that Republican opposition has been obstructionist. “Color me baffled that these people cannot sit down and talk and figure out how to work together,” he said. Citing an example of presidential power and courage, Woodward recalled President Ford’s pardon of President Nixon, which may have cost Ford the presidency. In the early '70s, the pardon smacked of a deal, Woodward said. But in hindsight it was “an act of political courage that we so rarely see.”

### **Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb.)**

Terry spoke to the need for expanded broadband Internet access when he addressed the general session. “The digital divide in rural areas is truly a lack of infrastructure,” he said. “It’s difficult to incentivize businesses to spend millions of dollars to bring infrastructure to a few people. We need to acknowledge there’s a divide between rich districts and those experiencing

poverty.” He said part of the solution for expanding access in rural areas would be to equip more community centers with state-of-the-art technology. Terry cited his local cable provider’s success in expanding broadband access for children. “Those children who start using computers, their parents learn along with them,” he said.

**Check [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org) for summaries of the following:**

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Minority Leader, House of Representatives  
Rep. James Clyburn (D-S.C.), assistant democratic leader, House of Representatives  
Mark M. Zandi, Chief Economist, Analytics, Moody Corp.

**Summaries of other conference speakers, as compiled by *County News*, are available at:**

**<http://www.naco.org/newsroom/countynews/Current%20Issue/2-25-13/Pages/March-2,-2013-Legislative-Conference.aspx>**

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