



News Release

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Supervisor West dedicated to working toward jobs, economic recovery

Supervisor participates in NACO's 2010 Legislative Conference

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Milwaukee County Supervisor Peggy West participated in the National Association of Counties' (NACO) 2010 Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., to help ensure that the voice of the nation's counties is heard by Congress and the administration. The conference, held March 6-10, featured remarks from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and President Obama cabinet secretaries Kathleen Sibelius and Tom Vilsak.

One of the main objectives of the Legislative Conference was to bring county officials face-to-face with federal government officials to discuss key county government priorities and specific legislation, regulations and funding levels affecting essential services and programs.

“This conference opened many doors for Milwaukee County,” Supervisor West said, “Through my participation in the NACO Legislative Conference, I was able to attend workshops detailing additional funding sources and programs that other counties have implemented to create revenue and tax savings.”

During her productive visit to NACO Legislative Conference, Supervisor West attended several workshops like “Transforming America’s Workforce: Leveraging Local, State and Federal Investments in Training and Job Creation”, “From Reentry to Reinvestment: Lowering Recidivism and Reinvesting the Savings in Communities”, “Sustainable Communities Resources: Incentive Grants for Regional Planning and Development Projects”, and “Addressing Poverty Through TANF Reauthorization”. In addition, Supervisor West attended the Women of NACO luncheon, two General Sessions where she heard from top department heads. During the general sessions attendees also heard from President Barack Obama via video conference.

Jobs, economic recovery and Restoring the Partnership were the main themes of the conference for more than 2,000 elected and appointed county officials from around the country. Featured guest speakers included House Speaker Pelosi, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.) and TIME magazine columnist Joe Klein. (See summary of remarks below)

“NACo’s 2010 Legislative Conference was a tremendous success,” said NACo President Valerie Brown, Supervisor, Sonoma County, Calif. “Our members are fiercely committed to restoring the partnership between the federal government and America’s counties and this conference went a long way toward that goal. Especially in these tough times, it’s more important than ever that county officials pull together and speak with one voice to our federal representatives on the many critical issues affecting counties and communities.”

A priority of NACo leaders and fellow county officials at the conference was soliciting Congressional support for H.R. 3332, the Restore the Partnership Act of 2009. The bill, introduced by Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.), would establish the National Commission on Intergovernmental Relations to facilitate cooperation among all levels of government and to find solutions to the critical issues facing the country. It is a NACo key legislative priority this year.

In addition, several important policy resolutions were adopted by the NACo Board of Directors upon the recommendation of NACo’s 11 steering committees such as one opposing online travel agencies attempts to preempt local taxing authority. NACo’s steering committees consider issues such as justice and public safety, agriculture and rural affairs, taxes, environment and energy, telecommunications, economic and community development, healthcare, human services, education, labor and employment, public lands, and transportation. Resolutions adopted at the conference are available at www.naco.org in the Issues section under Issues and Interest Areas.

For more information about the conference, contact Jim Philipps at 202.942.4220 jphilipps@naco.org.

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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 3,068 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.

**National Association of Counties
2010 Legislative Conference
Washington, D.C.
March 6-10, 2010**

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi

Speaker Pelosi said Rep. George Miller (D.-Calif.) will introduce a bill tomorrow that “allows for county governments and municipalities to retain workers.” She offered no details.

Speaking at Tuesday’s General Session, Pelosi focused on her and the Obama administration’s priorities, particularly jobs and “health insurance reform.”

Highlighting jobs-specific legislation, Pelosi said the Hiring Incentives to Restore Employment (HIRE) Act, passed last week, will provide \$15 billion for infrastructure investments in local communities. She said the health reform bill is also a jobs bill that would create “4 million jobs in its life” and “about 400,000 jobs very soon.”

She said the health reform bill Congress sends to the president “will ensure affordability for the middle class, accountability for the insurance companies, and access for millions more Americans, tens of millions.”

In closing, she called on county leaders to lend their support. “The challenges that we all face are too great to face them alone. We need to form the partnerships, strengthen partnerships at every level of government.”

Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.)

U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly (R-Va.) addressed his former colleagues in county government during the Monday’s Opening General Session.

The former 14-year Fairfax County supervisor, now in his first congressional term, extolled the virtues of local government, along with the frustrations of working with legislators who are unfamiliar with how local government works.

“We have a mission to communicate clearly between different levels of government because not everyone has experience in a level of government where things have to get done,” Connolly said. He stressed that county commissioners and supervisors were often on the front line of the ire and complaints about other governments’ jurisdictions.

Specifically, he opposed a U.S. Senate proposal to tax municipal bonds, a change that would add costs to most debt-financed government improvement projects.

Connolly has introduced H.R. 3332, the Restore the Partnership Act of 2009, a bill to establish the National Commission on Intergovernmental Relations to facilitate cooperation among all levels of government and to find solutions to the critical issues facing the country.

Connolly praised the recovery act’s part in staving off teacher layoffs and opposed a change to a competitive grant system for funding schools, rather than the current formula-driven allocation process. He said the

national economy was poised for recovery, but doubted it would be swift, and decried the crumbling transportation infrastructure and eroding transportation funding mechanisms.

Joe Klein, Columnist, *TIME Magazine*

Time magazine columnist Joe Klein offered his diagnosis of what ails Washington in the current era of Congressional gridlock and “hyper-partisanship.” Handicapping the odds of Republicans picking up seats in midterm elections, he said of Washington, “No matter what happens in this election, the city will still be broken.”

Conventional wisdom has the party in power, the Democrats, losing seats. Klein said historically the president’s party has lost control of Congress if his approval rating is 50 percent or less. In recent polling, President Obama’s favorable ratings have hovered around 50 percent, plus or minus.

Klein looked at government dysfunction through the prism of the health care reform debate, in which each side has dug in its heels. Why try to reform health care when 80 percent of Americans are happy with what they have? He cited two arguments in favor — one economic, one moral: to remain competitive with countries that guarantee or subsidize health care, and the “short-term moral problem” that at least 30 million Americans have no health care, and a large percentage fear losing what they have.

Kathleen Sebelius, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services

The Secretary Sebelius, speaking at Tuesday’s General Session, praised counties for stemming the spread of the H1N1 virus. The vaccination campaign depended on county governments’ work, which was complicated by budget cuts necessitated by the recession.

As governor of Kansas, Sebelius herself cut the state health and human services budget, admitting it is often the first department to see cuts, and her successor has continued on that path. She said the Recovery Act has helped fund safety net services, but they may not last until people get back on their feet.

Sebelius stressed the importance of counties’ close relationships with residents in guiding health care policy creation.

“Rather than figuring out strategies in Washington, we want your input,” she said. “You’re the laboratories and we can help take the solutions to scale.”

Melody Barnes, Director of the Domestic Policy Council

Barnes, speaking at Tuesday’s General Session, started off her speech by thanking Linn County, Iowa Supervisor Linda Langston; Santa Clara County, Calif. Supervisor Liz Kniss and Tarrant County, Texas Commissioner Roy Brooks for their leadership in health care reform. She then focused on the Obama Administration’s commitment to governing differently. “The thinking needs to be different. It has to be people and place-based,” she said. “The days of the federal government thinking and talking and working in silos is over.”

She acknowledged that “we cannot approach problems at a city-state level -- counties deliver many services and must be involved.”

Tom Vilsack, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

Vilsack, speaking at the Tuesday luncheon, stressed the importance and resilience of rural counties during his luncheon address at the Legislative Conference.

“People talk about the recession, but the rural communities have been dealing with conditions like this for years,” he said.

Despite rural America's experience dealing with difficult economic circumstances, Vilsack said the current loose confederation of small towns would likely not survive. "Many small communities won't be able to tackle this alone," he said. "They must combine forces to create a vibrant economy."

He advocated any program that encourages a regional approach to rural planning.

The Agriculture Department will address rural issues through a variety of programs, including expanding broadband access, optimizing bio-fuel energy production and food supply capacities, and expanding ecosystem markets and natural habitats.

The challenges rural Americans face tempers them into a resource for the county as a whole. "The value system of the country is at stake, more than jobs, poverty rates and income levels," he said. "We undervalue farmers and ranchers, when if we paid them for the work they did, they'd get contracts like professional athletes."

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