

NACo Legislative Bulletin

**ACTION
NEEDED!**

Executive Director: Larry E. Naake, Legislative Director: Edwin Rosado

June 17, 2011

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House Approves Ag Appropriations Bill – NACo Leads Coalition Effort to Oppose Cuts to Rural Development Programs ? Action Needed!

On June 16, the House passed the FY 2012 agriculture spending bill, H.R. 2112. The bill includes \$17.25 billion in discretionary funds. This figure is \$2.7 billion or 13 percent below the FY 2011 level of \$19.92 billion. The proposed cuts to USDA Rural Development programs would severely hamper the economic development efforts of rural counties. The bill provides \$2.1 billion for rural development programs, a decrease of \$338 million or 14 percent from last year's level. This level of funding is \$876 million or 30 percent less than the NACo supported FY 2010 enacted level of \$2.968 billion. The committee report language also denies authorization for the NACo supported Regional Innovation Initiative, which would give USDA the ability to target 5 percent of several rural development programs towards locally-led priority projects of rural regions.

The House considered numerous amendments over a three day period in which attempts to cut overall spending further were defeated. NACo in coalition with other partners worked to successfully defeat an amendment which would have cut \$11 million from USDA's Wildlife Services, which counties and other local partners utilize to establish wildlife damage management plans. Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.) and Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) put forward the amendment, which was defeated by a vote of 287-132. Rep. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), who gained the attention of the Ag industry with successful subsidy reform amendments at the committee level, was unable to maintain support for his amendments on the House floor.

The funding levels in the bill remain nearly identical to those outlined in the subcommittee markup levels, which are detailed in NACo's May 31 [Legislative Bulletin](#).

Action now moves to the Senate, which is expected to begin working on their Agriculture Appropriations bill in the coming weeks. NACo, through its Campaign for a Renewed Rural Development, organized a coalition letter that was sent on June 16, which asks the Senate to oppose the drastic cuts to rural development programs found in the House bill. The [letter](#) can be accessed at

Please call your Senators and urge them to oppose the drastic cuts to USDA Rural Development programs found in H.R. 2112 and instead to maintain level funding for USDA Rural Development Programs, which provide loans and grants to spur private sector growth in your rural county. More talking points are available by [clicking here](#).

Contact: [Erik Johnston](#) • 202/942-4230

Deficit Negotiators Weighing Medicaid Cuts – Action Needed!

[Reports](#) are circulating today that the high-level negotiations aimed at a deal to



CONTACTS

Larry Naake
NACo Executive Director
202-942-4201

Edwin Rosado
Legislative Director
202-942-4271

Jeffrey D. Arnold
Deputy Legislative Director
Telecommunications &
Technology
202-942-4286

Paul Beddoe
Associate Legislative Director
Health
202-942-4234

Michael Belarmino
Associate Legislative Director
Finance and Intergovernmental
Affairs
202-942-4254

Daria Daniel
Associate Legislative Director
Community and Economic
Development
202-942-4212

Bob Fogel
Senior Legislative Director
Transportation
202-942-4217

Deseree Gardner
Associate Legislative Director
Labor & Employment
202-942-4204

Dalen A. Harris

raise the debt ceiling, reduce federal spending and, ultimately, bring the deficit down are zeroing in on Medicaid. Apparently the negotiators, led by Vice President Joe Biden, are looking for big "savings" from the Medicaid program, in large part because cuts to Social Security and Medicare are off the table, politically.

Since counties rely on Medicaid funding to keep their hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and behavioral health programs afloat, this is a very serious risk. As you know, cuts to Medicaid do nothing to keep people from getting old or sick – counties will just be left holding the bag.

Negotiators include House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) and Senate Minority Whip Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.), Senate Appropriations Chairman Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), Assistant House Minority Leader James Clyburn (D-S.C.) and House Budget Committee ranking member Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.). In addition, ongoing talks continue among members of the former "Gang of Six" (now nicknamed "Five Guys"): Senators Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), John Warner (D-Va.), Michael Crapo (R-Idaho) and Saxby Chambliss (R-Ga.).

Email your senators and representatives to ask them to TALK TO their respective caucus's leaders and negotiators about the importance of protecting Medicaid in the deficit negotiations and to oppose all Medicaid block grants, caps – or any other scheme which will result in shifting Medicaid costs to counties.

If your senator or representative is in a leadership position or is one of the key negotiators listed above, it is particularly important that they hear from you today! Here is a sample letter:

Dear Rep/Sen XXXXX

I am alarmed by reports that the deficit negotiations led by Vice President Biden may result in deep cuts to the Medicaid program.

As you know, counties across the country are the payers of last resort for the health care of their indigent residents. Counties also rely on Medicaid to serve beneficiaries in a variety of settings, including county hospitals, clinics and nursing homes. We cannot sustain these services without Medicaid.

Please speak personally to the leaders of your caucus – and your lead deficit negotiators – and ask them to protect Medicaid from cuts, block grants, spending caps or any other mechanism that will only result in shifting its costs onto our county's property tax payers.

I also ask you to reject calls to repeal the Medicaid maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements. This additional flexibility for the states will result in hundreds of thousands of people losing coverage and seeking county assistance.

Respectfully,

Contact: [Paul Beddoe](#) • 202/942-4234

Pesticides Bill (H.R. 872) Up For Senate Agriculture Committee Vote ? *Action Needed!*

The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee plans to mark up, H.R. 872, the Reducing Regulatory Burdens Act. The House passed H.R. 872 in March by a vote of 292-130.

H.R. 872 was introduced as a bipartisan response to a court ruling on the National Cotton Council v. EPA (6th Cir. 2009), which instructed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to move forward with regulating pesticides under the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. The EPA program, as proposed, includes increased reporting and monitoring requirements, which in turn will create unfunded mandates, without necessarily ensuring clean water. H.R. 872 aims to reduce the regulatory burden as imposed by this ruling.

*Justice and Public Affairs
Homeland Security and Large
Urban County Caucus
202-942-4236*

Erik Johnston
*Associate Legislative Director
Agriculture and Rural Affairs
and Rural Action Caucus
202-942-4230*

Marilina Sanz
*Associate Legislative Director
Human Services and Education
202-942-4260*

Julie Ufner
*Associate Legislative Director
Environment, Energy and Land
Use
202-942-4269*

Ryan Yates
*Associate Legislative Director
Public Lands
202-942-4207*

Matthew Fellows
*Legislative Grassroots
Coordinator
202-942-4205*

H.R. 872 is especially important for county governments who serve as primary service providers for their residents. As originally proposed, the pesticide regulations would have a huge impact on county government activities associated with public health, land use, forest and park management, flood control, transportation projects, air and water programs, invasive species control, and endangered species protection. Unless addressed through Congressional oversight, the permit will have devastating effects on county programs, particularly mosquito abatement and noxious weed control efforts, while creating huge unfunded mandates for both urban and rural counties.

Pesticides are currently regulated under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). It is the principal law that authorizes EPA to regulate the manufacture, distribution, sale, and use of pesticides in the United States. FIFRA has been extremely effective in regulating the use and sale of pesticides to protect human health and preserve the environment. More importantly, FIFRA does not fully preempt state or local law, allowing state and local governments to also regulate pesticide use. NACo supports using pesticides in accordance with the instructions on the label and supports strong penalties for those who misuse pesticides in FIFRA.

[NACo urges you to call your Senate in support of H.R. 872.](#)

Contact: [Julie Ufner](#) • 202/942-4269

Enhanced Transparency and Accountability Bill Introduced

This week, Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) introduced H.R. 2146, the "Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2011", the "DATA Act" for short. The legislation was introduced to address the perceived lack of common standards that impeded transparency in government spending.

Among other things, the bill seeks to establish a universal standard of recipient reporting for money received from the federal government to an independent database that will be overseen by a newly designated Federal Accountability and Spending Transparency Board (FAST Board), a board closely modeled after the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board created in ARRA. The FAST Board will also be charged with establishing consistent data elements and standards for the database.

Under the bill, any state, local, or tribal government that receives federal funds pursuant to a federal award, either directly or as a subcontractor or subgrantee will need to report the receipt and use of the funds to the FAST Board.

Contact: [Mike Belarmino](#) • 202/942.4254

NACo Ag Chair Speaks at the National Press Club about NACo's Rural Development Priorities

On September 14, Donald Larson, commissioner, Brookings County, S.D., told a national forum that cuts in federal rural development programs would hand-cuff county governments during a most difficult period of declining local revenues and increased demand for public services

Larson, who chairs NACo's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee, made his remarks during a Farm Foundation national forum, "Rural Development in a Time of Fiscal Constraints," held at the National Press Club. ([Click here](#) to read full remarks)

Larson emphasized that rural development efforts – the roads, water systems, broadband and the other key infrastructure necessary for economic growth – are in serious jeopardy due to the current fiscal situation. He also offered ideas for improving existing programs. He said the current structure of federal community and economic development programs for rural communities does not provide enough flexibility to encourage and assist communities with their regional economic development efforts. He made it clear that NACo will continue to work with Congress and the Administration to protect and improve key rural development investments in the appropriations process and the upcoming reauthorization of the Farm Bill.

Contact: [Erik Johnston](#) • 202/942-4230

Farm Service Agency County Committee Nomination Period is Open

The nomination period for local Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees began on June 15. Relevant forms and other information about FSA county committee elections are available online at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/elections>. Nomination forms for the 2011 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by close of business on August 1, 2011. Contact: [Erik Johnston](#) • 202/942-4230



About

National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the U. S. 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.

NACo

Executive Director: Larry E. Naake

National Association of Counties
25 Massachusetts Ave NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20001 | Phone: 202.393.6226

www.naco.org | [NACo Staff Contact List](#)
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