



2026 National Association of Counties (NACo) Legislative Conference

WASHINGTON, D.C. - FEBRUARY 21-24



DANE COUNTY
BOARD of
SUPERVISORS

SUPERVISOR BARUSHOK, CHAWLA AND FURMAN

3/5/2026 – Executive Committee

NACo Legislative Conference

- Nearly 2,000 county leaders from across the country in Washington, D.C., from February 21-24.
- Multiple days of sessions and caucus meetings
- Two general sessions; featured speakers included senior administration officials along with members of Congress from the U.S. House of Representatives.
- Discussions at the conference addressed critical issues impacting counties, including surface transportation, federal disaster policy, housing and permitting reform, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, energy and data centers, workforce development, and more.
- Federal Agency Expo, with nearly 50 federal program offices representatives
- Capital Hill visit with Senator Baldwin and Representative Pocan



Conference Preparation

- Contacted Congress and Senate offices well in advance to schedule capital hill visits
- Analyzed the agenda to strategize on presentation attendance for maximum coverage in areas of interest to Dane County
- Registered for the new member breakfast and orientation
- Downloaded NACo conference app to create a personal schedule and have conference info at fingertips
- Worked with board office on travel, lodging, and trip reimbursements
- Stay tuned for the end of the presentation for future preparation suggestions!



Supervisor Furman: Topics At A Glance

- **Federal Immigration Policy:** What's Changing and What It Means for Legal Pathways
- **Counties for a Guaranteed Income (CGI)**
- **Rethinking Disaster Response:** Insights from the FEMA Review Council
- **Protecting the Judiciary:** A Bipartisan Effort to Safeguard State and Local Judges
- **Local Governance for AI and Cybersecurity**
- **Storytellers Workshop:** Building Your County's Storytelling Mindset



Federal Immigration Policy: What's Changing and What It Means for Legal Pathways

- **THERESA CARDINAL BROWN** - President and Founder, Cardinal North Strategies, LLC; DHS did not attend due to Federal Shutdown
- Reviewed Historic and Current Enforcement Actions
 - Judicial Warrant vs. Administrative Warrant
- Chaos surrounding enforcement = Comprehensive Reform?
- Changing/rapidly evolving enforcement tactics



Counties for a Guaranteed Income (CGI)

- Community, Economic & Workforce Development Steering Committee Meeting
- Emily Wielk, Senior Policy Analyst, Bipartisan Policy Center, Hon. Toni Preckwinkle, President, Cook County, Ill., Hon. Ryan Mello, County Executive, Pierce County, Wash., Hon. Toni Carter, Former Commissioner, Ramsey County, Minn.
- Focus: Who are you trying to serve?
- Improvement in Employment, Housing, Food, Education, and Debt repayment
- Storytelling



Rethinking Disaster Response: Insights from the FEMA Review Council

- W. Nim Kidd, Chief, Texas Division of Emergency Management
- Conference Theme: Faster FEMA Reimbursement and Greatly Transparency
- #1 Role: Warn the Public
- Importance of Tabletop Exercises



Protecting the Judiciary: A Bipartisan Effort to Safeguard State and Local Judges

- Matthew Vigeant, Counsel, Senator John Cornyn (R-Texas), Senate Judiciary Committee
- Bipartisan legislation focused on:
 - State Intelligence Sharing / Central Tracking
 - Physical Assessments
 - Best Practices



Local Governance for AI and Cybersecurity

- John Matelski, CIO and Managing Director, NACo, Mary Ellen Buzzelli, Director of State, Local, and Education Strategy, IRM Government Solutions, Adam Frumkin, CIO, Franklin County Data Center, Ohio, John Regula, CIO, Bucks County, Pa.
- Data Governance Policy before AI Policy
- Education / Training around data usage and leakage
- Follow-up: Met with Sam Olson, CIO, Dane County Information Management
 - Will work with leadership to discuss more about what Dane County is doing



Storytellers Workshop: Building Your County's Storytelling Mindset

- Importance of Storytelling
- Simple interviews / video explainers
- Valuable for people to understand what county does, especially during difficult budget seasons
- <https://vimeo.com/reviews/f3308cfd-6279-497a-abc8-09e4037791b4/users/120756547/folders/28228911>



Supervisor Barushok

- **Surface
Transportation
Reauthorization**
- **BASICS Act (H.R. 7437)**
- **Federal
Transportation
Grants**
- **Passenger Rail
Advocacy**



Surface Transportation Reauthorization

- Presentation by Ben Gilsdorf, Associate Legislative Director, NACo (former Legislative Aide to Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.))
- NACo advocating for more direct county access to federal surface transportation funds
- BASICS Act (H.R. 7437): Introduced with Reps. McDonald Rivet and Robert Bresnahan; goal is inclusion in a broader surface transportation reauthorization omnibus
- The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials is lobbying in opposition to direct county access to federal funds.



Federal Grants

- Presentation by Loren Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, U.S. DOT
- Trump DOT officials indicated backlog of local government grants is being cleared; stated, 'sanctuary jurisdictions won't get access to those funds.'



Passenger Rail Advocacy

- Meeting and tour with Amtrak government affairs staff
- Reiterated our continued support for an Amtrak Hiawatha extension station in Madison during meeting with Amtrak officials
- Amtrak staff says that a Madison station is under active consideration and that Madison is an excellent option for a Hiawatha extension



Supervisor Chawla

- Lessons from "**Data Center Alley**"
- **Continuum of Care Landscape**: Examining Shifts in Homelessness Response
- **Federal Agency Expo**



Lessons from “Data Center Alley”

- Low latency rates and high fiber optic availability makes for ideal location. Percent of all email traffic in the world flowing through this corridor = 75%
- Hyperscale data center expansion is a key issue, with significant impacts on local power grids, water systems, and long-term infrastructure planning.
- Rapid growth results in energy demand and emerging environmental concerns such as PFAS related to cooling processes.
- Recommendations at a glance (<https://tinyurl.com/muuzb369>):
 - Align planning and approvals with local policy and land use goals
 - Strengthen siting and buffering standards
 - Require rigorous noise controls
 - Set higher infrastructure and backup standards
 - Plan for energy integration and resilience
 - Promote sustainability and transparency
- Dane County can invite Loudon County officials to present in detail to Dane County Advisory Committee on Data Centers



Continuum of Care Landscape: Examining Shifts in Homelessness Response

- Long-term homelessness has fluctuated since 2007, with major pandemic-era disruptions; Homelessness looks different in every county.
- Homelessness rates and recent changes vary dramatically across major cities—rising sharply in places like Chicago and New York since 2019, while declining in Philadelphia.
- High homelessness risk among formerly incarcerated individuals, and rising unsheltered and vehicular homelessness
- Public concern about safety, disorder, and visible encampments often drives political responses.
- Federal funding is uncertain, shifting to faith-based organizations and treating homelessness as a personal rather than societal issue.
- Counties are positioned to act by building supportive housing, partnering with hyperlocal organizations for alternative crisis response, and collaborating regionally to address homelessness at the scale of the crisis.
- Staff will send copy of Brooking presentation.



Federal Agency Expo

- Representatives from most federal agencies were present.
- Talked with Department of Defense about PFAS funding programs for local airport contamination cleanup. Discussed pilots that are already underway
- Thanked Department of Transportation for investments in Madison Bus Rapid Transit
- Talked to Department of Health and Human Services about the impact of local measles outbreak including public health and economic impacts of quarantine
- Talked with Department of Agriculture about Farmland Preservation Program and other conservation efforts





Representative Mark Pocan



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Senator Tammy Baldwin



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Capital Hill Visits

- 30-minute joint meeting with Senator Tammy Baldwin and the Wisconsin Counties Association (Milwaukee, Kenosha and Sauk)
- 45-minute with Congressman Mark Pocan
- Dane County delegation discussed
 - Funding for airport PFAS cleanup
 - Concerns around instability of Continuum of Care funding and shifts in funding for homeless services
 - Supporting funding and laws modification to reduce communication costs for jail residents
 - Local community response to ICE



Suggestions for Future Conferences

- Previous attendees and board chair should meet with traveling delegation to help mentor and prepare attendees for a productive conference.
- Attendees should work collaboratively with Executive Committee to develop priority discussion topics for congressional visits.
- Attendees should prepare for post-conference presentation to Executive Committee and follow up with conference attendees and associations.
- Attendees can consider providing updates through their personal communication outlets or collaboratively with County Board staff for official updates before, during, and after the conference.

