

Hansell, NACo officers, meet with House & Senate Leadership to urge passage of Secure Rural Schools b

by Bend Weekly News Sources

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Leadership of the National Association of Counties (NACo), including Immediate Past President Bill Hansell from Umatilla County, met with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s office and other members of Congress last week to discuss the association’s legislative priorities (listed below). Special emphasis was placed on reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act.

The 7-year authorization, which provided millions of dollars to thousands of communities across the country – especially forest communities – expired at the conclusion of the 109th Congress. The new legislation (H.R. 17), which would continue stable safety-net payments to counties and schools struggling with the loss of historic revenue sharing from federal timber sales, was introduced Jan. 4 – the first day of the 110th Congress – by Reps. Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) and Greg Walden (R-Ore.).

In addition to the NACo leadership meeting with the Speaker’s Office, Hansell separately joined representatives from the Nevada Association of Counties in a face-to-face meeting with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) to discuss enhanced appropriations for communities through the Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program. While at this meeting, Hansell initiated a discussion on the Secure Rural Schools reauthorization with Sen. Reid.

Secure Rural Schools reauthorization and adequate PILT funding are both legislative priorities for NACo for the First Session of the 110th Congress.

“These were important and productive meetings,” said Hansell, Commissioner, Umatilla County, Ore. “We stressed how critical it is that this legislation is enacted and funded adequately to ensure uninterrupted federal payments to communities. Without these federal funds, many counties and schools will be forced into a needless budget crisis with layoffs and reductions of services.”

All this week Hansell led a coalition of Secure Rural School bill supporters, including county and school district officials from several western U.S. communities, to meet with nearly 120 Congressional offices to help secure cosponsors and support for H.R. 17. Hansell, who served as NACo’s president in 2005-06, also met separately this week with White House budget officials on these federal funding issues.

“We are working hard to communicate to Congress just how important these funds are to communities and encourage them to reauthorize H.R. 17 sooner rather than later,” Hansell said. “It’s our goal to make sure everything is on track as Congress prepares for the appropriations process, which is when the actual dollar amounts are determined.”

“I was encouraged about the response we received,” Hansell said. “However, there are some legislative and budget obstacles to overcome. So we as local officials and NACo as a national organization need to work diligently to see this through.”

Other NACo leaders in the Speaker’s Office meeting were President Colleen Landkamer, Commissioner, Blue Earth County, Minn., President-elect Eric Coleman, Commissioner, Oakland County, Mich., First Vice

President Don Stapley, Supervisor, Maricopa County, Ariz., Second Vice President Valarie Brown, Sonoma County, Calif. and Executive Director Larry E. Naake.

Landkamer and the other NACo officers discussed NACo's legislative priorities during the meeting, such as reauthorization of the Farm Bill, repeal of the withholding tax, health and human service reforms, aviation reauthorization, assistance to counties to combat methamphetamine abuse, fighting unfunded mandates and preemptions of county government controls.

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 3,066 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.

Legislative Priorities First Session of the 110th Congress

Farm Bill Reauthorization Support a comprehensive Farm bill reauthorization that provides opportunities for rural counties through increased funding for rural development, renewable energy and new ways to attract young people to production agriculture.

Repeal of Withholding Tax; Other Federal Tax Changes affecting counties Oppose tax preemption and seek changes in federal tax law. Support efforts to ease the burden of the Alternative Minimum Tax while preserving the deductibility of state and local taxes and interest on tax-exempt bonds. Oppose preemption of county telecommunications and other taxing authority and efforts to deputize county employees to administer federal taxes. Seek repeal of the government contractor withholding requirement in Section 511 of P.L.

Health & Human Services Reforms Reform Medicaid, reduce the County share, and control the costs of health care without harming beneficiaries. Restore funding and programmatic flexibility to child support enforcement, foster care and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant. Maintain local authority in the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act.

Secure Rural Schools & PILT Seek reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act and enhanced appropriations for the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program.

Aviation Reauthorization Support the reauthorization of the federal airport and aviation programs, including a well-funded Airport Improvement Program with guaranteed funding from the Aviation Trust Fund, and increased funding for rural and underserved communities through the Essential Air Service program and the Small Communities Air Service Program.

Support Efforts to Assist Counties with Methamphetamine Crisis Support a comprehensive and intergovernmental strategy to assist counties dealing with the methamphetamine epidemic. Necessary components include prevention, education, treatment, law enforcement, precursor drug control, research and cleanup. In particular, NACo calls on Congress to fully fund the Justice Assistance Grant program to assist counties with the methamphetamine crisis. Oppose Unfunded Mandates/Preemptions Oppose unfunded mandates from Congress and the Administration, such as those imposed by the lack of adequate immigration enforcement, and oppose legislation or regulations that preempt county authority, such as land-use regulatory authorities, and control of rights-of-way and other locally-based functions.

NOTE: NACo's Large Urban County Caucus and the Rural Action Caucus have priorities that are consistent with the key legislative priorities listed above and will be advocating these priorities on behalf of urban and rural counties throughout America.

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