



## **NACo meeting hears about more dollars & more attention for rural America**

**By Jon H. Harsch**

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Washington, March 9 – House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) told county government officials meeting in Washington Tuesday that all levels of government need to work together as partners. She noted that last year’s Recovery Act delivered “tens of millions of dollars in some counties, over \$100 million in some counties” to build infrastructure and keep “teachers on the job, cops on the street,” saving or creating over two million jobs nationwide. She added that the new jobs bill passed last week “will unleash tens of billions of dollars in infrastructure investment in your communities.”

Addressing the National Association of Counties (NACo) 2010 Legislative Conference, Pelosi called on NACo to support healthcare reform. She said passing health legislation is needed to lower costs, create jobs and “ensure that health care in America is a right not a privilege.” Stressing the need to “focus on the next generation, not the next election,” she predicted that “The final health care legislation that will soon be passed by Congress . . . alone will create 4 million jobs, about 400,000 jobs very soon.”

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius echoed Pelosi in saying the Obama administration is committed to working closely with county governments. “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.”

President Obama’s Domestic Policy Council head Melody Barnes told NACo members that the Obama administration’s new approach is people-based and place-based. She promised that “The days of the federal government thinking and talking and working in silos is over.”

Other administration officials outlined the new “Partnership for Sustainable Communities” being developed by the Department of Transportation (DOT), Housing & Urban Development (HUD), and EPA. The program is designed to support sustainable community planning and development by coordinating housing, transportation, water infrastructure, environmental impact, economic development, and land use policy, planning and investment. Stephen Cerny from HUD’s Office of Sustainable Housing and

Communities explained a HUD planning grant program which will be providing \$100 million for “regional visioning” efforts. For information on the program, go to: [http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program\\_offices/sustainable\\_housing\\_communities](http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/program_offices/sustainable_housing_communities).

Addressing the shortage of rural doctors, Health Resources & Services Administration Administrator Mary Wakefield explained that the National Health Service Corps offers \$50,000 in debt relief to doctors who commit to working in rural communities for two years and \$150,000 for a five-year commitment. “With an average med school graduate carrying \$150,000 of debt, this puts rural communities on even ground with larger urban areas,” Wakefield said. As a result, she pointed out that more than 2,000 doctors have entered the National Health Service Corps.

Agriculture Under Secretary Dallas Tonsager told the NACo meeting about USDA’s determination to revitalize rural America through supporting biofuels, local food systems, and new business enterprises helped by USDA’s guaranteed loan programs and by extending rural broadband. “We want to see rural America evolve and thrive economically,” he said, “to gain and grow throughout the country using resources we can provide.”

USDA Forest Chief Tom Tidwell warned that climate change is extending the forest fire season, likely through snow melting earlier and leaving trees drier earlier in the year. He said the situation calls for restoring public lands to make them more resilient not only to fires, but to drought, disease and invasive species through an all-lands approach to land management. “Knowing the conditions and knowing what is going on in adjacent land is crucial,” he said. “Pest, fires and invasives don’t recognize property lines.”

Among the policy resolutions approved by NACo’s Board of Directors at their meeting this week, the Board voted to support USDA’s Rural Innovation Initiative which it said “is designed to provide a new framework for promoting economic development and job creation in rural communities.” For summaries of resolutions passed by NACo’s Board this week, go to: [www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20100309H2.pdf](http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/20100309H2.pdf)

To read NACo’s 43-page 2010 Interim Policy Resolutions document, go to: [www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=Advocacy&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=33260](http://www.naco.org/Template.cfm?Section=Advocacy&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=33260)

For coverage of USDA’s new Rural Innovation Initiative, go to: [www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/Mar0310H3.pdf](http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/Mar0310H3.pdf) &

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