

Councilmember Nestor R. Garcia

TRIP REPORT
National Association of Counties
Annual Conference
July 15 - 20, 2011
Portland, Oregon

Introduction

The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments. Founded in 1935, and celebrating its 75th anniversary, NACo provides essential services to more than 3,000 of the nation's counties.

The annual convention in Portland was my last as a Presidential at-large member of the NACo board of directors. I am pleased to report that Hawaii once again has secured an at-large post on the board, with new NACo President Lenny Eliason naming Honolulu City Councilmember Stanley Chang as an at-large member. I remain active with the national organization, serving as a vice chair on NACo's International Economic Development Task Force. During the convention, I shared with stakeholders the progress of our Sister Cities Summit, which will be held in Honolulu in September.

Also attending the convention were Councilmembers Ernie Martin (the new Council Chairman), Stanley Chang and Romy Cachola, as well as council staffers including Mark Segami of my office, Kimberly Ribellia, chief of staff to Chair Martin, as well as members of our Clerk's Office and the Office of Council Services.

July 17, Sunday

My first meeting was held in the morning at the Portland Convention Center, with members of NACo's International Economic Development Task Force. The group will be chaired by Valerie Brown of Sonoma County, California. We discussed various issues, including areas of focus (I will concentrate on tourism), possible partnerships with Sister Cities International and the U.S. Commerce Department, and how to reach out to our more than 3,000 member counties. We agreed to hold monthly conference calls to share ideas.

Our first General Session featured ABC News correspondent Bob Woodruff. He survived the explosion of an improvised explosive device while as an embedded reporter covering the war in Iraq. He shared with the convention delegates his near tragedy, in which he suffered traumatic brain injuries. Thirteen months after being severely wounded, he produced an hour-long primetime documentary on his incident and his remarkable recovery.

NACo outgoing president Glenn Whitley delivered his Presidential Report. He told the assembled that in his time, he witnessed NACo addressing policy issues "without getting personal and political – but somehow Washington has yet to hear that message!" He pushed hard this year to get more involved with Washington – which resulted in periodic meetings with White House officials (I attended such a meeting in May). His goal was to have Washington "talk with us – not talk at us."

One of his other achievements – besides supporting programs that assist veterans – was to establish a tool kit through the NACo web site that enables people to understand how counties service constituents. One of his other prouder achievements was witnessing the signing up of all of the nation's counties with NACo – all 3,068. But – there have been a number of counties that have since dropped their membership, most citing budget deficits and the need to cut costs.

Breakout morning session – “The Path to Zero Waste”

With the ongoing effort in Honolulu to determine how to handle the disposal of our municipal solid waste (the administration, during our conference, made public its desire to extend the life of the only landfill on the island of Oahu, the Waimanalo Gulch. Permits to allow disposal at the Gulch are set to expire in the fall of next year), NACo sponsored a workshop on how to deal with this issue.

Susan Robinson represented Waste Management (the company currently manages operations at Waimanalo Gulch). She shared with us that many of the materials found in our solid waste actually have energy potential. She claimed that her company generates more renewable energy from its solid waste business than the entire U.S.A. solar industry. The company provides energy to 1.1 million homes, displacing 14 million barrels of oil each year. She said of the 243 million tons of municipal solid waste generated each year by the USA – 54.3 million tons are land-filled.

Roadblocks to disposing of solid waste include the cost of conversion technologies, emission and other regulatory standards, and whether the technology has experienced several years of actual operation, which would help to make it an established and accepted practice of waste disposal.

Breakout afternoon session – “Getting the Public Involved: Raising Awareness of County Government”

This topic comes at a time when the Honolulu City Council is preparing to adjust to a new way of delivering broadcasts to our constituents with the advent of a new fiber optic cable that will be laid connecting city hall with Oceanic Time Warner Cable. This session actually focused on outgoing NACo President Glenn Whitley's priority to get the public to understand how county government works. Specifically, the session centered on a national competition between counties (three categories, more than 50 entries) with the central theme of promoting what county government does – and that it does work (there was an emphasis on how county governments service veterans). The National Association of County Information Officers oversaw this program, and judged the entries. This contest coincided with National County Government Month – held each April. Next year's theme will be communicated to interested entrants by this Fall.

July 17, Monday

This day was generally devoted to the meeting of the board of directors. Just before the board meeting, the delegation representing the Hawaii State Association of Counties hosted a breakfast

with incoming NACo 2nd vice president, Linda Langston. Our state was one of the first to endorse her candidacy.

At the board meeting, aside from the usual reports from the NACo staff and from various committees, of particular interest to me were the 2011 NACo Member Survey and the national survey of county elected officials.

The NACo member survey was conducted in March as a benchmarking survey to measure members' needs, perceptions and level of satisfaction with NACo benefits, programs, services and communication. The survey was sent to 38,889 members and more than 5,600 responded (a 15 percent response rate). Nearly 58 percent of those who responded said they were extremely or somewhat satisfied with NACo – slightly less than in previous years. However, that number may have been skewed by the fact that many of the members and staff who responded are new to the organization, and many have never responded previously to a NACo survey.

NACo itself is in a strong financial position, with more than \$30 million in assets. The projected income for 2011 is \$308,649 – which is \$40,838 more than budgeted previously. These numbers enabled NACo to keep dues at the same levels for member counties this year.

In May of this year, the finding of the National Survey of County Elected Officials (a random sample of 508 officials) revealed the following: although a plurality of county elected officials (48 percent) still rate the national economy as poor, they are slightly more optimistic than those surveyed in 2010. Given the focused concern with the economy, the general mood of county elected officials is negative, but the trend is now heading in the right direction. The survey also revealed that county elected officials are concerned that partisan politics is a greater problem today than in the past. And while county elected officials are very concerned about the rising level of federal spending and the resulting federal debt – they are also concerned about cuts in federal block grants.

In the afternoon, the NACo International Economic Development Task Force had a private meeting with Commerce Undersecretary for International Trade Francisco Sanchez (who apparently was suffering from a bad cold!). He brought along with him Courtney Gregoire, who heads the President's National Export Initiative for the Commerce Department's International Trade Administration. The two expressed support of, and interest in, the Task Force. The NEI is currently working with strategic partners to help companies shipping only to one market expand to new ones, expand the availability of credit to small and medium sized businesses, make available only tools to make it easier to find and faster to use, and reduce trade barriers for those who wish to export overseas. Undersecretary Sanchez told the Task Force, and the NACo general assembly, that 95 percent of the world's customers are outside the U.S.A., and 85 percent of economic growth will occur outside of our country, with 1 billion new people entering the middle class over the next 15 years.

Later in the day, the NACo delegates also heard from Aron Ralston, who also survived a harrowing incident. During a climbing adventure in a canyon in southern Utah, his arm was pinned by a half-ton boulder for nearly a week. He survived only after he used a dull pocket knife to cut his forearm away from the boulder, applied a tourniquet, and proceeded to rappel and

hike for another five hours before he was rescued. His story was later portrayed in the movie "127 hours."

July 18, Tuesday

NACo, through its International Economic Development Task Force, held its first session on exports, entitled "Think Globally, Act Locally: The National Export Initiative and Your Local Economy." It was moderated by the Task Force Chairman, Valerie Brown, and featured Courtney Gregoire, the director of the National Export Initiative with the Commerce Department's International Trade Administration, and Mark Calhoon, Senior Managing Director, Business Services Division, Washington State Department of Commerce.

While I have earlier reported what the NEI is doing, Calhoon outlined an interesting program entitled the Washington Export Initiative, which I will want to emulate for Honolulu. I came away with an idea to seek a Memorandum of Understanding with our Hawaii State Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, and perhaps with our respective economic development boards, to collaborate and combine resources to enable businesses who wish to export to be able to avail themselves of government resources in an easier and faster fashion. We also heard from a representative from Riverside County, who shared with us that his county established its own trade ministry – similar to what countries do – to really focus on international trade relations. I also floated the idea after the session to have the U.S. Commerce Department's Intergovernmental Relations director, William A. Ramos, to work with his counterpart at the White House, David Agnew, to host a summit meeting of local and state government organizations like the National League of Cities, the National Governor's Association, the Conference of Mayors, and NACo, so that we all can collaborate on an export initiative, and share ideas.

Respectfully submitted,



Nestor R. Garcia
Honolulu City Councilman
District 9

City Council
City and County of Honolulu

CLAIM FOR TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT

Date: 26 July 2011

Traveler: Nestor Garcia
 Event: NACo Annual Conference & Expo 2011
 Location: Portland, OR
 Dates: From 15 July 2011 To 20 July 2011

Description	Amount	Notes:
1. Registration Fee	465.00	Reimbursed (Check no. 11432785)
2. Airfare	600.81	Reimbursed (HSAC check no: 1060)
3. Hotel	1285.15 = 1175.65	receipt attached
4. Meals	202.32 = 311.82	receipts attached
5. Ground Transportation	79.00 = 74.00	receipts attached
6. Tips	4.00	on meal receipt attached
7. Other	100.00	Airline baggage fees
Other		
Other		
8. Adjustment	- 1065.81	See 1 and 2 above
TOTAL REIMBURSEMENT	1670.47 1665.47	

This is to certify that the above data, based upon receipts submitted to Council Administrative Support Services via a CCLTRVL02 form, is accurate. Further, I am claiming reimbursement for expenses associated with a trip in which City business was conducted and personal funds were used to advance payment.



Signature of Traveler

26 July 2011

Date