



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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COMMISSIONERS CONNECT COUNTY TO CONGRESS

Uniontown, PA – Fayette County commissioners Scott Dunn, Vince Vicites and Dave Lohr traveled to Washington, D.C., last week for the annual National Association of Counties (NACo) Legislative Conference at the Washington Hilton Hotel.

Each year, NACo brings together more than 2,000 elected and appointed county officials from across the country to focus on federal policy issues that impact counties and their residents.

While attending the conference, commissioners met with United States Senators Bob Casey and Pat Toomey, and Congressman Guy Reschenthaler of the 14th Congressional District to garner federal support and funding for ongoing county projects.

In a bipartisan effort, commissioners capitalized on their time with federal legislators by discussing their top priorities for 2020, including:

- Continued development of a new business park through the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority. Centrally located in Uniontown, the park will create space to host over 45 commercial, retail and professional spaces, similar to an existing, successful, job-creating project in South Union Township.
- Completion of the 34-mile Sheepskin Trail, which runs through the heart of Fayette County and is the missing link to a nationally-significant trail system.
- Extension of the main runway at Joseph A. Hardy Connellsville Airport through the Fayette County Airport Authority, to continue improving the airport as a vital regional asset to the county's modal transportation system and better serve community needs.
- Countywide expansion of rural broadband, creating more opportunities for technological advancements in daily life and a networked society with increased connectivity between communities, economic growth and innovation.
- Expansion and widening of state Route 21. As a vital Fayette County artery, its growth will bring countless benefits through connection to the larger region.
- Increased support for first responders. The county plans to apply for grants which will allow it to provide better resources for existing first responders, strengthen volunteer and staffing recruitment efforts, and offer quality care to residents in rural areas.
- Enhanced efforts for fighting the ongoing opioid crisis. County officials have worked with local and state legislators to slow overdose death rates, and grant funding, along with common-sense changes to existing laws, will continue to expedite the availability of treatment.

Vicites said meeting with federal legislators on Capitol Hill was the highlight of his D.C. experience.

"Our top priorities were the consensus of the board of commissioners, which we developed at the beginning of this administration," Vicites said. "I believe our meetings were very productive and

probably some of the best discussions I've been part of since I started our Washington, D.C. meetings in 2001."

Dunn agreed the most important thing commissioners did during the NACo conference was provide Toomey, Casey and Reschenthaler with updates on Fayette County's goals, needs, and ongoing progress.

"It was important to also meet their staffers who are in a position to help us out with grants, loans and other activities," Dunn said. "We chose these items to discuss, not only because they're our priorities, but because they're things we're actively working on. You don't send your problems up to the next level. We're in the middle of a lot of these things and congressional help might be able to push them over the top."

Chairman Lohr said the meetings will help him achieve his "vision for Fayette County," which extends more than 10 years into the future.

"To achieve that vision and lay the groundwork for this county to fulfill its potential, there are a number of initiatives that must move forward," he said. "Our legislators are our partners for the future and they were very receptive to what we had to present. Their support makes a difference on several levels, not the least of which is helping to build bridges between local and regional concerns, finding and securing funding for our projects, and assisting when roadblocks to progress arise."

Commissioners agreed the NACo conference was also extremely beneficial, because of its unique content and ability to connect leaders from across the nation.

"As a member of NACo, Fayette County is on the map when it comes to national county issues," Vicites said. "It's important for us to be part of this association and be recognized for our efforts to advance the county. I spent many hours networking and meeting commissioners from other states to discuss issues of mutual concern."

Lohr said meeting other commissioners showed him that Fayette County's concerns are the same everywhere.

"There's enormous value in getting together to address these concerns as a group and to learn from how concerns are being addressed elsewhere," Lohr said.

"The main thing I always like to see, especially from a rural standpoint, is that a lot of counties in this nation are in the same boat as us, especially with issues like rural broadband, which was the hot-button topic at the conference," Dunn said.

Vicites also said he enjoyed hearing about advancements with rural broadband, as well as the many U.S. Department of Agriculture funding opportunities available to counties like Fayette.

This year's speakers included U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; U.S. Reps. Gerry Connolly (D - Va.), Stephanie Murphy (D - Fla.), and John Katko (R - N.Y.); U.S. Senator Chris Coons (D - Del.); U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt; and President Donald Trump.

"There were some tremendous speakers, but easily the highlight of the conference for me was to hear President Trump," Dunn said.

“For me, there were two highlights of this conference,” Lohr said. “First, there was the abundance of information available from both informational sessions and networking. Second was hearing President Trump speak at the conference.”

Lohr said the conference also provided him with “so many important takeaways,” such as valuable insights into cybersecurity; information on budgeting and finances; and the need for a reasonable response to environmental concerns, as commissioners work to further develop Fayette.

“I feel honored to represent the people of Fayette County at a national forum,” Lohr said. “Listening to commissioners from all over the country talk about their counties, I am constantly reminded of what a treasure we have in our communities and residents right here at home.”

For more information about the National Association of Counties, visit www.naco.org.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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