

# the Courthouse Journal

[WACOUNTIES.ORG](http://WACOUNTIES.ORG)

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Courthouse Journal**

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Washington Association of County Officials  
Washington State Association of Counties

**Upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> Annual WACO  
Conference to be held at the  
Davenport Hotel and Tower,  
Spokane, October 6-10! Plan  
now!** *Look for the registration and a  
draft copy of the agenda to be sent out next week.*

**See you there!**



## **WSAC/WACO Members and Staff Attend NACO Annual Convention in Kansas City**



Eric Johnson, Fred Bowen, Bob Koch, Dave Gossett, Gary Rowe, John Koster, Paul Pearce, Lynda Ring-Erickson, Ken Dahlstedt, Mary Hunt, Don Munks, Judi Morris, Josh Brown, Mike Cooper, Dave Somers, Debbie Wilke, Troy Raber

**Want to post a job announcement on our website ?**

Visit <http://wacounties.org/>

**And click on the job pages for format & submission details.**

## The Courthouse Journal

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### Program Contractors

**Neil Aaland**, Columbia River Program Manager

**Tom Robinson**, Timber Program Manager

**Tonia Sugarman**, County Training Institute (CPO) and L&I Retro Project Manager

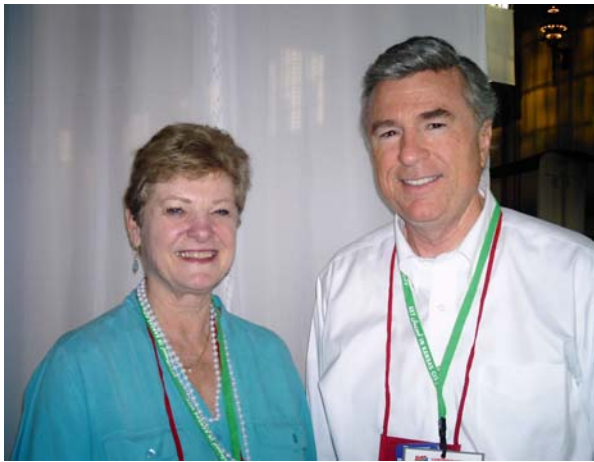
With a backdrop of good music and good food (mainly barbecued meat!) nearly 25 WSAC and WACO members attended the National Association of County Officials 2008 Annual Conference. Led by WSAC President and Douglas County Commissioner Mary Hunt and WACO President-elect and Jefferson County Treasurer Judi Morris the Washington delegation was well represented and active. Convention highlights included:

- King County Executive Ron Sims received the American City & County Magazine's County Leader of the Year for 2008;
- Snohomish County (who had four of their members present – Council Chair Dave Somers, Vice-Chair Mike Cooper, and Councilmembers Dave Gossett and John Koster) recognized for their outstanding leadership and participation in the NACo Prescription Card Benefit Program;
- Don Munks, Skagit County Commissioner and NACo Environment, Energy and Land Use Steering Committee member and Water Quality Subcommittee Chair, led the efforts to keep the word "Navigable" regarding waters within the US Act, assuring NACo's continued support for state and local control of other water quality issues;
- Skamania County Commissioner Paul Pearce and Mason County Commissioner Lynda Ring-Erickson attended the Public Lands Steering Committee meetings to assure that our views on PILT and Secure Rural Schools were incorporated into NACo Policy;
- All three Washington State members on the NACo Board of Directors were present and engaged in all NACo Board proceedings: Snohomish County Councilmember John Koster, Douglas County Commissioner and WSAC President Mary Hunt, and Benton County Commissioner Leo Bowman;
- Franklin County Commissioner Bob Koch, along with Councilmember Koster and Commissioner Hunt, attended the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee meetings. Discussion included implementation of the new Farm Bill. Skagit County Commissioner Ken Dahlstedt chairs the sub committee on Food Safety.
- Transportation Steering Committee Vice-Chair Leo Bowman, Benton County Commissioner, continues to represent Washington State, and is joined on this committee by Kitsap County Commissioner Josh Brown, Franklin County Administrator Fred Bowen, and Skagit County Administrator Gary Rowe. The focus is on future Federal funding for transportation investment.
- Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee member Rick Miller, Franklin County Commissioner, represents Washington, keeping us apprised of changes in federal issues affecting our local criminal justice systems.
- WACO President-elect and Jefferson County Treasurer Judi Morris and Clark County Treasurer Doug Lasher attended the National Association of County Tax Collectors and Financial Officers (NACCTFO) annual conference held in conjunction with NACo.

## Legislative Committee Schedules and Agendas:

<http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/calendar.cfm>

**Bill Information:** [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov)



WACO President-Elect Judi Morris discusses NACo President Donald Stapley's upcoming trip to Washington State with him.



The Honorable Harry S Truman, former President of the United States, welcomes the widow of Wendell Wilke to Kansas City.



WSAC President Mary Hunt, Franklin County Commissioner Bob Koch, and WACO President-Elect Judi Morris in NACo General Session where the Counties' Platform is adopted and NACo officers are elected for the coming year.

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## ***Budget, Finance and Taxes***

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### **Ways & Means Committee Community Meetings**

*by Bob Carlton, WACO*

Senator Margarita Prentice, Chair of the Ways & Means Committee; Staff, and a variety of Senate members have been on the road presenting workshop committee meetings in cities around the state.

The most recent meeting, July 14 at Pacific Lutheran University, was well attended by Senators and Representatives. This meeting was the third in a series, and offered the public and other elected officials the chance to converse with Ways & Means members on a "one to one" basis. After attending the second meeting in Skagit County at Mount Vernon, and the third meeting in Tacoma at Pacific Lutheran University, two very important themes have occurred in both meetings.

First, Senator Prentice and other committee members have eagerly embraced hearing from the local elected officials. This is of prime benefit to both Ways & Means and local elected officials to have open discussions of issues. The hearings have

occurred in a much more relaxed atmosphere than in formal hearings on the hill. This gives both parties time and space to ask questions and give answers that in another venue simply wouldn't be possible.

Second, there does seem to be a theme emerging from the meetings: that perhaps we should try to adjust the property tax system to make it more user friendly and more standardized.

We all realize that with 39 separate counties there will be differences in the way the system works. One difference might be a more urban county versus a more rural county. Or one that is more industrialized versus one that is more agrarian in nature. Of course there is always the difference between the larger and smaller counties. But the one recurring theme that appears is that all counties are working under the same state constitution, and all counties, and cities too, are struggling to one degree or another to provide services and to meet what appears to be growing tax payer unrest and tax payer distrust.

Senator Pridemore made the statement at the Pacific Lutheran University meeting that it was hard even for him to fathom his tax statement from year to year. His example was that his own valuation increased one year but his taxes went down. The next year his valuation went down but his taxes increased. Now he has the wherewithal and experience to keep digging to find out what happened and why. A vast majority of our citizens simply do not have the same resources as a Senator. All of your Senate and House Members are inundated with information, facts and figures about property tax. They also have staff members whom they can call on to help ferret out an answer if one is not apparent. Most taxpayers do not have that luxury. Senator Pridemore's suggestion of a standardized method or form that each county might use or send out with their tax statements is probably a good one.

From personal experience I have observed over the years that very few of the public understand the property tax system. Counties and local officials and the Department of Revenue have expended thousands of hours of staff time and a considerable amount of money to try to educate the public, but the system is so complex and has so many variables. Annual revaluation or cyclical revaluation; statutory rate limits and LID lifts; temporary LID lifts versus permanent; code area changes and annexation; voted M & O levies from school districts and school construction bonds; Fire District levies and EMS levies; and exemptions that come into play at all times. Then you can always have a large industrial property valuation in dispute or in appeals. And we haven't even mentioned budget requests by all the taxing districts or new construction. Is it any wonder that the public is confused and even angry at times?

Furthermore, the taxpayer really only cares about one thing. Whether his or her own property tax bill went up, down, or stayed the same. Unfortunately, due to the timing of all the processes that need to be accomplished, things are always "a year off" for the taxpayer. 2008 assessed value for 2009 taxes, for instance. Years ago I helped work on a manual for Assessors and Treasurers titled, "The Simple Levy Process." The title was a little bit tongue in cheek, but the basic element was the same. The group sum of all levies that generate a tax liability is very simple. You divide one number by another and it generates an amount due. But, the processes that lead up to that point can be incredibly complex, and in all likelihood beyond the capability for most to understand. I have watched over the years as newly elected officials take office and try to bridge this gap with the public. Everyone tries and continues to try to educate and inform, but we don't seem to be getting the job done.

First of all, we need to analyze what information we can give. No elected official can predict into the future; that is simply guaranteeing that you will be wrong most of the time. But government is really good at collecting and collating past data. We literally have reams and reams of history somewhere on file. Perhaps there will come a day when we can provide enough meaningful data to taxpayers that they can understand and "track" their past and current tax liability. Some counties have websites that are trying to address the issue. Those are an excellent incremental tool, but not all of our populace has computer access or literacy.

So what can we do to help the public? Some how, some way, we have to correlate what they are paying for on a year to year basis, combined with their valuation changes if any, and couple that with levies that may have changed from a prior year. In all likelihood, it will take collaboration between at least two county offices, and maybe three, to accomplish this.

And yes, there will be some expense and staff time and quite probably computer software changes to accomplish this. The question is not can we afford to do it; the real question is can we afford not to.

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## ***Environment, Land Use & Resources***

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### **McKenna announces appeal of water rights decision**

Attorney General Rob McKenna announced on July 7, 2008 that the State will appeal a recent King County Superior Court ruling that suggests three sections of the Municipal Water law are invalid.

“We respectfully disagree with the Superior Court’s decision to strike down three of the eight challenged sections of the Municipal Water Law,” McKenna said. “We believe that the law as crafted by the Legislature is a constitutionally-sound way to protect our growing water needs while protecting the environment. I’m confident that our view will ultimately prevail in court.”

The Municipal Water Law was enacted in 2003 to protect water service for Washington State citizens. It requires water systems to plan for the future and use water efficiently. The law has been challenged by some Washington tribes and environmental groups.

On June 11, 2008, King County Superior Court Judge Jim Rogers ruled that three sections of the Municipal Water Law were invalid, suggesting they violate the constitutional separation of powers between the legislative and judicial branches of government. Judge Rogers said the Legislature had overstepped its authority by, in effect, setting aside an earlier state Supreme Court ruling on water rights.

Notice of appeal has been filed via mail to the state Supreme Court. The Court may choose to hear the case or send it to the Court of Appeals.

### **Department of Health – Drinking Water Web Page**

The Office of Drinking Water has created a Web page where all current policies and procedures are posted:

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/ODW-policy.htm>

We have also created a Listserv to allow interested parties to receive notice any time we create a new policy or update an existing policy. If you are interested in receiving e-mail copies of our new and revised policies, sign up at:

<http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?A0=WA-DRINKINGWATERPOLICIES>

### **Invasive Species Workday - Save the Date**

September 29, 2008 Tacoma

October 14, 2008 Pasco

Washington State has released a new plan to combat invasive species entitled **Invaders at the Gate**: Washington Invasive Species Council 2008 Strategic Plan. Join us at a workday to realize this plan. On these workdays, the Invasive Species Council will meet with experts from around the state to write its three-year implementation plan to combat invasive species in Washington.

Improve Washington's coordinated efforts by lending us your expertise. Together we will shut the gate on new invasive species and beat back those already here. Join us to:

- \* Learn about the **Invaders at the Gate** strategic plan.
- \* Hear about challenges faced and successes enjoyed by your peers.

\* Strategize on new approaches for early detection and rapid response, education and outreach, information clearinghouses, communication, and funding.

\* Network with others working in this field.

Clover Lockard, Invasive Species Executive Coordinator  
Phone: 360 902-3088, TDD: 360 902-1996  
InvasiveSpecies@rco.wa.gov

## Action Area Workshops On Through End of Month

This is a reminder that the Action Area workshops being held by the Puget Sound Partnership started this week. The remaining workshops by location are listed below. If you plan to attend please RSVP, indicating which meeting(s) you will attend, by sending an e-mail to [actionagenda@psp.wa.gov](mailto:actionagenda@psp.wa.gov).

The agenda will focus on reviewing the Partnership's Strategic Priorities and discussing whether the draft Action Area profiles accurately reflect the each area.

For more information visit: [http://www.psp.wa.gov/pressreleases/070108\\_aa.html](http://www.psp.wa.gov/pressreleases/070108_aa.html) or contact Neil Aaland, WSAC Program Consultant at [naaland@wacounties.org](mailto:naaland@wacounties.org).

### San Juan/Whatcom

Friday Harbor  
Monday, July 21  
1 to 4 pm

### North Central

Silverdale  
Tuesday, July 22  
1 to 5 pm

### Whidbey

Mount Vernon  
Tuesday, July 22  
1 to 5 pm

### South Central

Tukwila  
Wednesday, July 30  
1 to 5 pm

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## ***Transportation & Public Works***

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### **ACTION: 2009 Environmental Excellence Awards Call for Entries**

Here is a great opportunity to get some high-profile recognition for your local agency's environmental efforts. The Federal Highways Administration 2009 Environmental Excellence Awards will consider nominations for any project, process, group, or individual involved in a project or process that has used FHWA funding sources to make an outstanding contribution to transportation and the environment. Nominations aren't due until October so there is plenty of time to think of a good nominee and to complete the form.

If you have ideas that you'd like to discuss, or would like help completing the nomination form, please contact Bill Leonard at (360) 705-7344 or [leonardb@wsdot.wa.gov](mailto:leonardb@wsdot.wa.gov). To be considered, the completed nominations must be submitted to FHWA by October 15, but we'd appreciate hearing from you soon if you have ideas for nominations in your regions.

These awards were established by FHWA to recognize the outstanding processes, projects and people who go beyond the traditional transportation projects and encourage environmental stewardship and partnerships to achieve a truly environmentally sensitive transportation solution. Nominations are being accepted in 12 categories.

We are seeking the country's best examples of projects, people and processes that fulfill, streamline and incorporate environmental stewardship into the transportation planning process. As part of the application process, we request that each office send the attached nomination form to their State counterparts and other interested parties who would be interested in applying for the award. For the first time this year, the applications will be submitted back to the Division offices for them to upload into the national database. We understand that this will take a little more effort, but the process will also help us ensure that the applications are complete and allow you to coordinate any efforts that may require the applicant to either supplement or resubmit their entry package. We appreciate your help and know your efforts will go towards acknowledging your State transportation agency for all the hard work they do in regards to environmental stewardship.

The application forms are due October 15th and, after reviewing the entry forms from your State, the packages should be uploaded into the national database by going online and using the attached information to get into the system. You will need to cut and paste some of the information from the entry form into the database. The database allows the judges to review all the entries on-line. If you have any concerns with any project submitted, please make note of it in the entry package on-line.

If you need more information, or have any questions, please contact Patricia Cazenias at (202)-366-4085 or e-mail her at [patricia.cazenias@dot.gov](mailto:patricia.cazenias@dot.gov).

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## ***Association News***

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### **Rashi Gupta moving to new position with WSAC: Policy Director - Health and Human Services**

WSAC Executive Director Eric Johnson and Association of County Human Services (ACHS) President Jackie Henderson are pleased to announce that current WSAC staff member Rashi Gupta will transfer to the position of Policy Director – Health and Human Services. Rashi joined the WSAC staff in January this year after serving for nearly five years as the Government Relations Coordinator for Pierce County. Rashi has a solid background in public policy and the Washington State legislative process including serving as:

- Legislative Assistant to Representative Patricia Lantz
- Research Analyst with the Local Government Fiscal Note Program (CTED)
- Program Assistant, Local Government Division (CTED)
- Planning Intern, City of SeaTac
- Planning Commissioner, City of Kenmore
- Master's in Public Administration, Daniel J. Evans School of Public Administration
- Master of Arts in International Studies, Henry Jackson School of International Studies
- Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration

Please join us in welcoming and encouraging Rashi as she takes on this new challenge with WSAC.

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## ***Boards & Commissions***

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### **Statewide Boards and Commissions Interest Form Due to WSAC by September 12**

The following positions on statewide boards and commissions are available to WSAC members and, in some cases, county employees or representatives. To apply for any of the seats, complete the short online interest form **by September 12** at <http://www.wacounties.org/WSAC/boards.asp>

- State Council on Aging – Governor Appt – 3 yr term  
(Incumbent – David Sullivan, Jefferson County Commissioner)  
[http://www.agingwashington.org/state\\_council.htm](http://www.agingwashington.org/state_council.htm)

- Pipeline Safety Advisory Committee - Governor Appt – 3 yr term  
(Currently Vacant)  
<http://www.wutc.wa.gov/pipeline/ccops>

If you have any questions please contact Michelle Zahrly at (360) 586-4219 ext 112 or [mzahrly@wacounties.org](mailto:mzahrly@wacounties.org)

## **Recent Appointments to Statewide Boards and Commissions**

Governor Chris Gregoire recently appointed Councilmember Dow Constantine, King County, to the Municipal Research Council. The Governor also reappointed Commissioner John Austin, Jefferson County, to the State Board of Health for another term.

The WSAC Board of Directors, at their June 17, 2008 meeting, appointed King County Councilmember Kathy Lambert to the newly created Office of Public Defense Advisory Committee.

The WSAC Executive Committee appointed Commissioner Josh Brown, Kitsap County, to one of the County seats on the Climate Change Policy Advisory Committee.

Congratulations to all of these WSAC Members! Thank you for your willingness to serve County interests on these statewide bodies.

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## ***Training & Upcoming Events***

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**Washington Counties** – [wacounties.org/Calendar of Events](http://wacounties.org/Calendar%20of%20Events)

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## ***Courthouse Ramblings***

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### **WSAC Past President Everett Fourre Passed Away**

Everett “Ev” Fourre, 90, died in Olympia on June 19, 2008. He served as a Thurston County Commissioner from 1964-1968, and as President of WSAC in 1968. A World War II veteran, Mr. Fourre was active in community affairs and the Democratic Party. He was a business owner and was an active realtor at the time of his death. We extend our condolences to his family.

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## *Good Things*

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### **Ron Sims named County Leader of the Year by national magazine**



King County Executive Ron Sims, American City & County Magazine Editor  
Lindsay Isaacs, NACo President Eric Coleman

Calling the King County Executive's collaborative, holistic approach to problem solving "the genius" in his leadership style, American City & County Magazine today named Ron Sims the County Leader of the Year for 2008. Sims received the prestigious award Monday at the annual meeting of the National Association of Counties in Kansas City, Kansas.

The magazine features Sims' work to expand transit service in King County; his public-private partnership to get coverage for uninsured children; the regional Puget Sound Health Alliance; and his local and national leadership on climate change, including a green transit fleet, funding a new flood control program and construction of a reclaimed water system for agriculture and industry to reduce demand on drinking water.

"This award is really about the excellent work of the employees of King County," said Executive Sims. "It also represents the public's support for the work we're doing to ensure the highest quality of life for the people of King County."

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## ***Attachments***

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### **Welcome to the U.S. Communities Purchasing & Finance Agency (U.S. Communities) website <http://www.uscommunities.org/>**

The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO), the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National Institute of Governmental Purchasing (NIGP), the National League of Cities (NLC), and the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM), jointly sponsor the

#### **U.S. Communities Government Purchasing Alliance (U.S. Communities)**

Designed in cooperation with an Advisory Board of local government purchasing officials, U.S. Communities pools the purchasing power of public agencies, achieves bulk volume discounts on behalf of public agencies, competitively solicits quality products through a lead public agency and provides a purchasing forum for public agencies nationwide.

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"Results from our internal customer satisfaction survey show that our customers want two things from Purchasing. First save us time in the procurement process and second save us money. When Kansas City, Missouri uses a U.S. Communities contract we save both time and money for our customers."

**Ray Burnett,  
Commissioner of Purchases and Supplies  
Kansas City, MO.**