

Grant County Commissioners Attend Leadership Day at the White House

The White House has invited every county commissioner in the country to attend a series of 35 summits held at the Old Executive Office Building. In addition to county commissioners, other county officials, city mayors and tribal leaders totaling more than 2000 have participated over a two-year period.

During the latest State Leadership Day, twenty officials from Oklahoma attended including Grant County Commissioners Max Hess, Cindy Bobbitt and Steve Stinson. Oklahoma was joined by other leaders from Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska.

These events are not a meet-and-greet occasion but are meetings designed to build a strong federal-local partnership. The White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs agenda encompassed keynote speakers including Vice President Mike Pence; Secretary David Bernhardt, U.S. Department of the Interior; Deputy Secretary Stephen Censky, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and several others.

Commissioner Bobbitt along with a handful of others was also invited to the Oval Office to meet with President Donald Trump. She thanks the President for streamlining and improving federal regulations and minimizing unfunded mandates, especially for the ongoing regulation on Waters of the U.S important to counties and to the agriculture sector. Bobbitt also talked about infrastructure and how important rural county bridges are for economic growth and that off-system bridges need to be addressed in the infrastructure package.

Bobbitt said, "Grant County has over 3500 bridge and bridge-like structures with a population of 4500. We have almost as many bridges as we do people!"

The Trump White House is doing more than acting as a liaison between counties and federal departments. The administration has invited county commissioners to participate formally in the rulemaking process for rewriting regulations, including federal oversight of waterways.

"We've always had an open door at the White House with recent presidents," says Matt Chase, Executive Director of the National Association of Counties (NACo). "What is different about the Trump White House is they're sustaining the outreach. They're inviting any and all county commissioners to tap into the administration over and over again."

The Leadership agenda also included Disaster Recovery and Resilience Panel, which focused on building disaster resilient communities that was timely due to the spring flooding disasters in Oklahoma. And an Infrastructure Panel focused on meeting local infrastructure priorities and building for the future especially where counties are looking for relief from federal regulations and unfunded mandates.

"We've listened to state and local leaders where they think there's not smart regulation that's hampering opportunity and growth," says Doug Hoelscher, who directs the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. "We don't always give 'yes' answers, but I think we give answers on a lot more things than prior administrations."

Counties play a fundamental role in our intergovernmental system with significant policy, service delivery and administrative roles and responsibilities. Federal policy decisions impact counties and the residents we serve.

"From transportation and other infrastructure like rural broadband, to disaster preparedness and emergency management, to the opioid epidemic and substances abuse, to the mental health crisis, we need a reliable federal partner to achieve results for our communities," says Bobbitt. "We look forward to continuing important conversations about servicing our joint constituencies and achieving our shared goals – healthy, safe and vibrant counties across America."

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President Donald Trump and Grant County Commissioner Cindy Bobbitt meet in the Oval Office - Official White House photo by Tia Dufour

Vice President Mike Pence meets with local officials from Oklahoma, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska at the State Leadership Day – Official White House Photo by D. Myles Cullen