

Opinion: The Consolation Prize and the Traveling Man Go to Philly and Lay an Egg

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In the inimitable dialog of modern TV advertising, I must ask returning Supervisors Valerie, the “consolation prize” Starkey and the traveling man Chris Howard, “where’s the beef?”

I could have told you before Supervisors Starkey and Howard departed for their eastern venture to National Association of Counties (NACo) in the city of brotherly love, reporting to the public at the July 22nd Board of Supervisor’s meeting, would reveal the abject waste of taxpayer funds by the two, Starkey and Howard, attending the NACo conference.

Perhaps a little refresher is in order. NACo is a national lobbying organization for counties to effect policy change at the federal level for the benefit of their respective county’s citizens. Del Norte County elected to join said organization in the spring of 2024. In the first year, Supervisor Starkey was the County’s chosen representative and was treated with an all expenses paid by the county’s residents to a luxury junket to Florida. What a deal!

In return, the county’s residents received no August 2024 report from Supervisor Starkey at a Board of Supervisor’s meeting, claiming in a gushing word salad just how wonderful and valuable the information she was bringing back to the County’s residents was. We are still waiting for what exactly the “valuable” information Starkey was to have returned with one year later. Way to go, Consolation Prize.

Just to be clear. Del Norte County has a long-standing agreement specifically with Mr. Greg Burns of Thorn Run Partners to lobby on behalf of the County in Washington DC. Suddenly, in 2024 it is discovered by the current Board of Supervisors there is a critical need to fund a national lobbying effort for the County. The County's 2024 theory must have been in spite of having a personal lobbyist at the federal level, it can't help but be a positive for the County to spend additional tax dollars to participate in an organization which purports to represent 3,143 counties throughout the United States for additional lobbying in the NACo organization. Over 2700 counties attended. Del Norte was one of the attending counties.

Naturally, the County's Board never considered the fact they may have said 3,143 counties might not be exactly rural, have the same concerns, and the idea Del Norte County population of 25,000 plus a few might not get the same kind of bang for its dollars expended than say a suburb county of Chicago. Far be it for me to point it out, but we will probably never know judging by the reporting from our illustrious representatives to the conferences, what the return was, or even will be.

So, after the first rather ignominious attempt by the County to gain some return for the money expended sending the "consolation prize" Starkey to NACo's Florida event in 2024 for the yet to be discovered return on her luxury vacation, the County's "brain trust" voted 5-0 to send TWO representatives to the 2025 gala event. Got money to burn after all, in the County's travel fund.

Apparently, one vacationing Supervisor at the event couldn't cover all "important" factoids to be gleaned from various meetings at the conference. Of course, neither does the public know about those valuable and important factoids either. After consecutive word salads by Starkey and Howard reporting out about their attendance at NACo in the July 22, 2025 meeting of the Board, will we be waiting for another year to learn why it was absolutely imperative to send the two to return with what?

It seems like it never fails to occur to our representatives or the County's employees who go swanning around California, the nation, or even further afield on the taxpayer's dime to ask the question, "Was this trip really necessary?" I suspect in many cases, the answer is "NOT REALLY!"

Clearly, the reporting by Supervisors Starkey and Howard left much to be desired. A few public comments were more than necessary after both reported their activities at NACo. Maybe some by specifics to discover why they were both there? Something which should have happened and did not. When the County's supervisors spend significant sums of tax dollars on vague reports of gain to the County's residents, the public deserves to know what those gains are. This has not happened! The "BEEF" remains a mystery! Yes, the Del Norte duo and its tepid report(s) lay an egg.