

2023 RURAL POLICY ACTION REPORT



A Roadmap for Rural Progress

Contributors



Contributing organizations provided important ideas in their policy area of expertise but may not have positions on every aspect of the report.



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View the report online at
RuralPolicyAction.us

Our Call to Action



Rural America has great potential to lead in building a more just, sustainable, and broadly prosperous future for the entire country. But too many of our rural communities have been held back by a lack of attention to the unique circumstances they face, as well as the investment needed to meet those challenges and opportunities. And too many rural communities have been actively harmed by the policy choices of elected leaders, often from both parties, that have resulted in corporations exploiting our people, land, and resources, and moving our jobs to other countries.

In 2021, Rural Democracy Initiative helped convene a group of diverse rural leaders and advocates from across the country for the first-ever Rural Policy Action Summit to lay out a roadmap of popular policies that could renew our rural communities and help the country address existential shared challenges — from food security, to economic inequality, to climate change. And in the first two years of the Biden administration, with tireless work from rural advocates, we witnessed a dramatic change of direction for rural places as many of these policies were enacted, including the most significant investments in rural America in a generation.

Now, the country is at an important crossroads with enormous implications for the future of rural communities. Will we continue on the path of reinvestment, inclusion, and prioritizing working people? Or will forces of extremism and unchecked corporate greed block these efforts and keep us divided?

With this crossroads as a backdrop, we helped convene the second Rural Policy Action Summit in 2023 to renew a call for a more sustainable, just, and prosperous future for rural America. We hope this report will help provide a fresh perspective to those who want to better understand how rural communities can benefit from the policies we're lifting up, and take action.

In all corners of the country, we must redouble our advocacy to ensure that rural people can access tools and resources from the policy victories we already have won, like the Inflation Reduction Act, so we can build thriving communities for everyone. And we need to keep advancing a policy agenda that protects our democracy and core freedoms, and centers the needs of everyday working people, small businesses, and family farmers — the backbone of our communities and engines of our economy.

Working together, we can build an economy from the bottom up and middle out, not the top down. We can build an economy that doesn't leave rural communities behind. And we can end an era of unrestrained corporate power, level the playing field, and ensure people have the power to set a course toward clean air and water, better health, and a more prosperous future for everyone.

This report is full of rural people and policy recommendations that should inspire continued public, private, and philanthropic investment. Join this committed coalition of rural advocates taking action. With sustained engagement from political and nonprofit leaders, rural communities can and will help create this future for us all.

—Sarah Jaynes, Rural Democracy Initiative



Seeing Rural America

Across the country, people in rural communities work hard to take care of our families and our neighbors. We are passionate about the places we live and are deeply connected to the people, lands, and traditions that make each of our communities unique.

Yet many of us don't have the tools and opportunities we need to better our communities. Too many of us lack access to quality and affordable housing, healthcare, education, broadband, and other essential services. People in rural communities are [more likely to live in poverty](#), have [higher mortality rates](#), and have [higher rates of jail and prison incarceration](#).

Policymakers at all levels of government can help address these challenges by acknowledging the strengths of our communities and providing the tools rural people need to succeed.

WE ARE RURAL

[Rural communities look different across the country](#). While nearly a quarter of rural residents are people of color, there are majority Black and majority Latino rural communities around the country. There are sovereign Native American nations and various multicultural communities with diverse populations, including immigrants moving to rural communities seeking a better life.

After noting how rural Black people's contributions and even existence have been ignored, Black Appalachian Coalition (BLAC) highlights the "[...need for Black storytelling and participation as a precondition for policymaking](#)." Policymakers can't support us if they don't see us. Many rural and regional policies have failed to uplift communities because policymakers have overlooked who we are.

We need rural policies that recognize who actually lives in our communities, eliminate discrimination, and ensure everyone, regardless of what we look like, can thrive and participate in policymaking and implementation.

PEOPLE-CENTERED ECONOMIES

One thing thriving communities have in common: they successfully support small businesses, family farmers, and local workers to make a good life and participate in the decisions that impact their lives.

Yet, our rural local businesses and working families also need federal and state support, and for several decades have not gotten their fair share of federal and state resources. Too many of our communities are experiencing worse and more frequent devastation from climate-change-related disasters, corporate extraction of resources, privatization of public services, and discrimination. Policymakers should recognize our immense challenges and support ambitious, local-led initiatives for long-term success.

24% of rural residents are Black, Indigenous, and people of color

For example, the Ohio River Valley Institute and Appalachian Citizens' Law Center are calling for federal support to repair homes in southeast Kentucky damaged by the July 2022 flood *and* [ensure families are protected from future flood risks](#).

HEAL Food Alliance and the Union of Concerned Scientists also note the importance of [strengthening support for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color within the agriculture sector](#) and establishing paths toward long-term prosperity and resilient food systems. In the US, most farmworkers are people of color, yet they own and operate less than five percent of the farms. It's time for policymakers to provide tools to everyone in rural America.

 To learn more about rural communities, visit RuralPolicyAction.us/Rural



 Photo by Mike Kane, courtesy of RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund

Rural voters support ambitious policy and system change.

Polling shows rural voters support the Inflation Reduction Act, passing a new voting rights act, allowing Medicare to negotiate lower prices on prescription drugs, and closing tax loopholes on giant corporations. In a recent rural voter poll, 88% of young people and 82% of independents said they would be more likely to support a candidate who said, "A handful of corporate monopolies now run our entire food system. We need a moratorium on factory farms and corporate monopolies in food and agriculture."

Federal Investment in Our Renewable Energy Future

For years, rural communities and the rural electric cooperatives that serve them have been waiting for substantial new investment in rural energy systems. With the growing threat of the climate crisis and aging infrastructure, the need for investment is greater now than ever.

Rural electric cooperatives were created as a component of the New Deal through the Rural Electrification Act of 1936. The program made federal resources available for rural communities to self-organize cooperative utilities to electrify the countryside. Between 1936 and 1950, electric cooperatives brought rural communities from just 10% electrification to nearly universal electrification — one of the most successful federal projects in our nation's history. This historic project that improved the lives of millions of rural Americans and lifted many out of poverty was won by a national coalition of rural progressives pushing for investments in their communities.

Nearly a century later, in the midst of the simultaneous crises of COVID-19, climate change, and rural economic collapse, a national coalition once again rose to the challenge and demanded substantial investment in rural energy systems. The Rural Power Coalition, armed with a policy platform created by and for rural advocates, won the largest investment in rural electric systems since the New Deal. New programs and incentives extended by the Inflation Reduction Act will leverage tens of billions of dollars in investment in rural electric cooperatives and rural communities, creating 90,000 jobs, reducing energy costs by up to 20%, and eliminating 62 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions over the next ten years. This moment was accomplished by over a decade of on-the-ground organizing, movement-led research, and coalition building with a dedicated group of rural organizers.

Our success is one of many major victories that rural leaders and rural communities fought for and won in the Inflation Reduction Act. Rural progressives are fighting in small towns and rural communities, state legislatures, and Washington, D.C., for the future we deserve. Sometimes we win, sometimes we lose, and sometimes we win BIG.



Erik Hatlestad
CURE

Two Years of Policy Progress

The first Rural Policy Action Summit convened virtually in February 2021. With communities reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic and still evaluating the 2020 election, a group of rural advocates gathered to outline an agenda for the incoming administration and Congress. The summit culminated in the [2021 Rural Policy Action Report](#), which provided a roadmap to ensure all working families, no matter where they live or the color of their skin, have the opportunity and tools to build a good life and strengthen their communities. That report has been shared widely with elected leaders and influencers. And, through Executive and Congressional action, our leaders have responded to enact key recommendations from the report and make the most significant investments in rural America in our lifetimes.

Building from that federally-focused 2021 report, two organizations — State Innovation Exchange and Rural Democracy Initiative — worked with rural advocates and organizations to develop the [Blueprint for Rural Policy Action in the States](#). That report provides detailed research and examples of strategic and popular policies that can be introduced and enacted at the state level.

There's more to do, but our country is making progress on critical priorities for working families everywhere, including rural communities: rebuilding our economy as we emerged from the pandemic, lowering costs, securing and rebuilding supply chains, promoting competition and more equitable opportunity, building healthier and more sustainable communities, and investing in the foundational infrastructure that all communities — especially rural communities — need to live, work, and thrive.



People's Action



Chloe Maxmin,
Dirtroad Organizing



Key Policy Wins for Rural America

KEY EXECUTIVE ACTIONS

- President Biden directed his administration to prioritize rural communities in funding decisions, issuing a [Rural Playbook](#) and piloting rural-focused programs at [rural.gov](https://www.rural.gov).
- The President's order on [Competition in the American Economy](#) directs agencies across the federal government to rein in giant corporations that have unfairly monopolized markets, hurting small businesses and driving up costs for America's families. The order encourages the Federal Trade Commission to issue rules for the right to repair, a key provision for rural communities.
- The [Federal Trade Commission](#) has also adopted [transparency rules](#) governing "Made in the USA" labeling and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) proposed new rules for the "Product of USA" label claim, requiring all meat and meat products to be 100% "born, raised, and slaughtered" in the U.S. to qualify for that label. That creates transparency for consumers and levels the playing field for farmers and ranchers.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

Real recovery and a foundation for all working families and communities

- [The American Rescue Plan Act](#) (ARPA) funded \$4 billion to bring food prices down and help family farmers and small businesses feed their neighbors. These resources are helping local businesses compete in the meat processing sector against the giant multinational corporations that dominate the industry and help local schools purchase local food to make the American food system more resilient, as outlined in [USDA's Framework](#).



- The critical law also directly supported millions of Americans, including working people in rural communities, in the form of payments, tax credits, and small business support.
- The ARPA also stabilized rural institutions. The State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds distributed \$350 billion to every state and local government across the country, providing much-needed capacity for rural governments. Additionally, \$122 billion was delivered directly to public schools to ensure they could reopen safely.

BIPARTISAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS LAW

Essential tools that small businesses, family farmers, and local communities need to thrive

- The Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Law includes \$65 billion to ensure that every household in America is connected to high-speed internet. These funds are added to unprecedented state and local government resources from the ARPA to support connectivity for school children, healthcare, and other institutions.
- The Infrastructure Law appropriated over \$11 billion to accelerate the clean-up of historically abandoned mines that are polluting communities and holding them back.
- Through both the ARPA and Infrastructure Law, the Administration is [investing over \\$31 billion](#) to ensure Tribal communities have the tools to be self-reliant and thrive, including land and water protections as well as high-speed internet.

POSTAL SERVICE REFORM ACT

A lifeline for rural America

- The [Postal Service Reform Act](#) made a down payment on ensuring the USPS remains an essential point of connection for families across the country, no matter where they live. The bill removed an onerous pension pre-funding mandate and other congress-created barriers to economic sustainability from a 2006 law. The Act also requires publicly accessible delivery performance data. It empowers local communities and states to collaborate with the USPS to secure access to even more essential services, everything from fishing licenses to WiFi in the parking lot.

THE CHIPS AND SCIENCE ACT

Bringing back manufacturing jobs to America to reduce costs and secure our economy

- The RECOMPETE Pilot Program, passed in the [CHIPS and Science Act in 2022](#), authorizes \$1 billion in new

investments to distressed communities, nine out of ten of which are rural. Tribal governments are targeted as eligible entities for this funding. Congress has appropriated the pilot phase of this program with \$200 million dollars for fiscal year 2023.

- The CHIPS and Science Act is also building on the ARPA and the Infrastructure Bill to expand work-based learning and apprenticeship that will help prepare more rural students for today's in-demand jobs.

INFLATION REDUCTION ACT

Lowering costs of healthcare and energy, securing a cleaner and healthier future for all communities

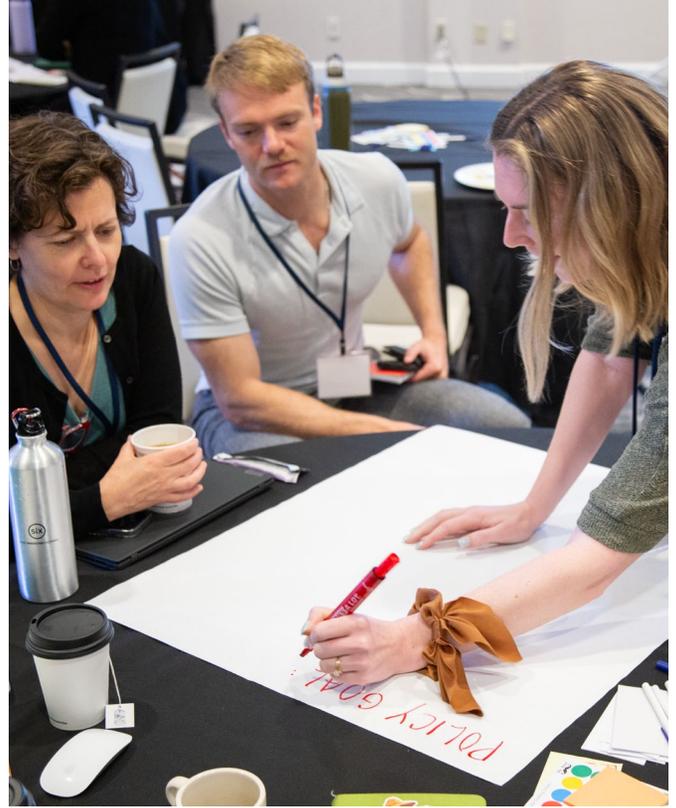
- The Inflation Reduction Act empowers Medicare to negotiate lower prescription drug prices, caps out of pocket costs for Medicare enrollees for the first time ever, penalizes drug corporations for raising their prices faster than inflation and saves people with Affordable Care Act coverage an average of \$800 annually on premiums
- The Act also strengthens rural electric cooperatives by making the largest direct investments in rural electrification in history, accelerating clean energy transition — saving rural people money, creating rural jobs, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- The historic legislation also invests nearly \$20 billion in voluntary conservation programs to reduce emissions and mitigate the harms of climate change. In a rare victory, these funds did not include the typical 50% requirement for livestock operations — an important step in reducing taxpayers' funding of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations.
- The act requires large corporations that make over \$1 billion annually to pay a corporate minimum tax and finally requires wealthy households making over \$400,000 annually to pay what they owe in taxes after years of tax-dodging.

Rural Policy Action Summit

Rural leaders convene to take action on federal and state policy to benefit rural America.

Over fifty rural advocates from around the country met in Omaha, Nebraska, in April 2023. The group set the basis for this report and discussed key federal and state policies to support rural people and the places they live.

In sessions ranging from “Workers, Small Business, and Credit” to “Care, Public Services, and Government Revenue,” participants recommended policies that would expand the tools and resources small businesses, family farmers, and local communities need to thrive.



Siena Chrisman of State Innovation Exchange, Kellon Patey of People’s Action, and Caitlin Cromwell of Northern Plains Resource Council discuss policy goals



Iowa State Rep. J.D. Scholten expressed the urgent need for affordable and accessible healthcare, and remarked that farmers frequently lament “having to travel further and further for less.” Good policy can help address affordability and lower costs for working families in rural communities.

Pictured above, left to right: Rural Workers and Small Business with Terrysa Guerra of United for Respect and Chandra Causer of Main Street Alliance // Rosemary Ketchum, Councilwoman of Wheeling City, West Virginia // Brandon Byrd, Georgia Ignite Lead Organizer for New Georgia Project



Federal Policy Action for Rural Communities

The federal government should pass policies that provide rural people the tools and opportunities we need to build a good life. Organized into four pillars, these issues include many of the most timely, popular, and critical policies for 2023 and 2024.

1 PROTECT PEOPLE'S FREEDOM TO LIVE AND WORK SAFELY AND WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION

ISSUES Democracy • Native Nations • Environmental Justice • Equitable Funding • Labor Protections • Health Access • Safety for All Communities • Equal Rights

2 INVEST IN FOUNDATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES FOR THRIVING COMMUNITIES

ISSUES Fair Taxes • Credit • Education • Healthcare • Child Care • Post Office • Housing • Local Capacity • Broadband

3 REIN IN UNCHECKED CORPORATE GREED AND SAFEGUARD THE POWER OF WORKERS, SMALL BUSINESSES, AND FAMILY FARMERS TO BUILD A GOOD LIFE

ISSUES Limit Corporate Power • Accountability for Pollution • Food Labeling • Prescription Drugs • Empower Workers • Good Jobs

4 ENSURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR A MORE SECURE, PROSPEROUS, AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

ISSUES Natural Resources • Public Lands • Build a Renewable Energy Future



RURAL SPOTLIGHT

Tools to Enact Change

Being Black and rural is a blessing. Having come from generations of Black Rural Georgians, I have witnessed and experienced the intersectionality of challenges we face. I was raised by a village of Black men and women who instilled a sense of perseverance, humility, and ambition deep inside of my heart. It has become a common misconception by national strategists and progressive organizations that “Rural America” is synonymous with white. That doesn’t happen to be the case where I come from and in other regions of Georgia, including the Georgia Black Belt. Black and brown Georgians are immersed and have heavy influences in Southern culture, and quite frankly, are the reason why the South, and the nation, have gotten this far.

Here at New Georgia Project, I am proud to lead Georgia Ignite — a program aimed at supporting local organizers and activists to lead their own campaigns. Urban areas are the constant targets of civic engagement and investment because it is perceived that these are the only places capable of progressive change. Georgia Ignite seeks to disrupt and disprove this narrative. This movement is about rural power building, giving folks the tools to enact change through community organizing and policy advocacy specific to their local communities.

This year, we have the perfect opportunity to target multiple small municipal elections. Voting locally is the basic building block of democracy. We are using this year’s municipal elections to organize people around voting rights in addition to local problems that affect their community. In doing this, we are able to create local culture around voting and holding their local governments and authorities accountable.

But we can’t truly address local problems without also addressing federal policy. We need people from around the country to fight for federal policies that defend voting rights, end discrimination, and remove the barriers that hinder our ability to improve rural Georgia.



Brandon Byrd

*New Georgia Project
Action Fund*



📷 Neilufar Naini, an Iranian American organic farmer, harvests garlic scapes at her farm in Sequim, Washington; Photo by Mike Kane, courtesy of RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund.

PILLAR ONE

Protect people's freedom to live and work safely and without discrimination

ISSUES DEMOCRACY • NATIVE NATIONS • ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE • EQUITABLE FUNDING • LABOR PROTECTIONS • HEALTH ACCESS • SAFETY FOR ALL COMMUNITIES • EQUAL RIGHTS

President Franklin Roosevelt once said the foundation of a healthy and strong democracy is rooted in equally shared opportunity and rising standard of living, as well as personal security and preservation of civil liberties. But too many communities have been treated unjustly. People are unfairly denied economic opportunities, excluded because of lack of language access, and subjected to discrimination and violence. There must be no greater priority for our country than ensuring every community has a voice in our elections, equitable economic opportunity, fundamental freedoms, and personal safety. The future of our democracy depends on it.

PROTECT DEMOCRACY AND ACCESS TO VOTING

Everyone, regardless of what we look like, should have a voice in our elections, policies, and government rulemaking. America is stronger when more people vote, and when people can cast ballots conveniently with confidence their ballot will be counted.

- Pass the [For the People Act](#), a bill that would expand Americans' access to the ballot box, reduce the influence of big money in politics, strengthen ethics rules for public servants, and implement other anti-corruption measures to fortify our democracy.
- The federal government should make significant investments in the safety and security of our elections. State and local governments currently shoulder the burden of keeping our elections safe, yet many, partic-

ularly rural governments, lack the necessary resources to take on the emerging threats to our electoral process.

- Rural voters are more likely to live far from their local elections office and their polling place. Pass the [Vote at Home Act](#) and allow all American voters to vote at home, provide pre-paid envelopes to return ballots, and automatically register citizens to vote at DMVs.
- Rural areas are home to many prisons and formerly incarcerated people. Laws preventing the formerly incarcerated from voting — holdovers from the Jim Crow era — disproportionately impact people of color and unjustly strip people of their most fundamental democratic rights. Restore the voting rights of formerly incarcerated people by passing the [Democracy Restoration Act](#).



RECOGNIZE NATIVE NATIONS AND HONOR TREATIES

The federal government should engage in nation-to-nation consultation with Tribal governments on federal projects and rulemakings in a manner consistent with the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples, acknowledging their right to “free, prior, and informed consent.”

In addition, federal law should be updated to negate the Supreme Court's ruling in *Carcieri v. Salazar*, which held that the U.S. Department of the Interior could not take land into trust for a specified Tribe because that Tribe had not been under federal jurisdiction at the 1934 enactment of the Indian Reorganization Act. Pass [A Bill to Amend the Act of June 18, 1934, to Reaffirm the Authority of the Secretary of the Interior to Take Land into Trust for Indian Tribes, and for Other Purposes](#) (S.563). The bill applies the Indian Reorganization Act to all federally recognized Indian Tribes, regardless of when a Tribe became recognized.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND SUPPORT

We must end the targeting of rural communities as sites for polluting industries, which disproportionately harm people of color. Pass the [A. Donald McEachin Environ-](#)

[mental Justice For All Act](#), which ensures that communities who experience environmental harms have legal avenues to hold polluters accountable, mandates federal agencies provide early and meaningful community involvement for all National Environmental Policy Act processes, funds health equity research, and supports equitable access to the outdoors.

EQUITABLE FUNDING FROM FEDERAL PROGRAMS

- Implement the [10-20-30](#) approach to future funding proposals. Rep. Jim Clyburn’s proposal would require agencies to invest at least ten percent of appropriated programmatic funds in persistent poverty counties where 20 percent or more of the population has been living below the poverty line for the last 30 years. [Eighty-six percent of persistent poverty counties have entirely rural populations](#). While some federal funding programs use this practice, passing Clyburn’s [Targeting Resources to Communities in Need Act of 2021-2022](#) would expand its use across agencies.
- Enact reforms to treat Tribal governments with equality and fairness. Provide funding for Tribal members to obtain better access to federal programs and increase available resources for Tribal infrastructure and economic development, consistent with the federal trust and treaty responsibility. This includes enacting reforms to explicitly include Tribal parity in all aspects of the Federal Farm Bill and expanding opportunities for Tribal communities to self-govern.

LABOR PROTECTIONS FOR FARMWORKERS, CHILDREN, AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

- Support farmworkers by passing the [Fairness For Farmworkers Act](#), a bill that would give farmworkers equal rights to overtime pay and minimum wage standards.
- Pass the [Child Labor Exploitation Accountability Act](#), which ensures USDA contractors comply with labor laws, expands child labor laws to independent contractors, and increases penalties for child labor law violations.



JUSTICE FOR BLACK FARMERS AND OTHER FARMERS OF COLOR

Passing the [Justice for Black Farmers Act](#) would establish a federal land grant and farm apprenticeship program to support a new generation of Black farmers, expand access to credit, and direct USDA to end historical discrimination. The [Increasing Land Access, Security, and Opportunity Act](#) would make permanent, expand, and authorize new funding for the Biden administration’s Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program at USDA.

ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE

People in rural communities have to travel longer distances for all types of medical care. Many rural counties don't have a practicing OB-GYN or even a healthcare facility. For this reason, restrictions that limit access to a full range of reproductive healthcare are particularly burdensome to rural women, creating negative [health and economic consequences](#) for women and their families. Federal law should support access to healthcare facilities, reduce the barriers that require additional travel and delays in treatment, enable virtual appointments, and ensure prescriptions by mail. Passing the [Women's Health Protection Act](#) would prohibit unnecessary medical visits that create barriers to abortion access as well as cumbersome cre-

dentiaing for providing abortion services. Furthermore, it safeguards all forms of abortion procedures prior to fetal viability, all medically necessary abortions, and the right to interstate travel for abortion care.

END THE CRISIS OF MISSING OR MURDERED INDIGENOUS PERSONS

Millions of Indigenous people live in or are our neighbors in rural communities and we cannot continue to let them fall through the cracks of a failed system. Fully fund work outlined in [Savanna's Act](#), which would improve the federal response to missing or murdered Indigenous persons (MMIP) by increasing coordination among federal, state, Tribal, and local law enforcement agencies.

END SEXUALITY AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

The millions of two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer people that live in rural communities are too often denied equal opportunities, [have less structural support](#), and don't have equal legal protections. The [Equality Act](#) would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, federally funded programs, credit, and jury service. The bill should be reintroduced and passed.

“

This movement is about rural power building, giving folks the tools to enact change specific to their local communities.”

—Brandon Byrd, New Georgia Project Action Fund



Photo by Mike Kane, courtesy of RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund

📷 Nevada state legislators on an agriculture tour hosted by State Innovation Exchange and local farmers.



PILLAR TWO

Invest in foundational infrastructure for thriving communities

ISSUES FAIR TAXES • CREDIT • EDUCATION • HEALTHCARE • CHILD CARE • POST OFFICE • HOUSING • LOCAL CAPACITY • BROADBAND

Rural people have an independent spirit and value self-reliance. We also understand that every family needs a basic foundation to build a good life for themselves and thriving communities for everyone. One of the most important things our government can do is ensure everyone, no matter the color of their skin or where they live, has that foundation — including access to quality, affordable healthcare, education, child care, and housing.

FIX THE UNFAIR TWO-TIER TAX SYSTEM

Corporations and the ultra-rich have manipulated the federal tax code to drain money from the economy, reduce investments in rural communities and look the other way as corporations get richer at the expense of clean water, air, and land. The wealthiest households and largest corporations have enjoyed years of tax breaks that have created a two-tiered tax system in which [billionaires](#) and [some corporations](#) pay lower tax rates than middle-class workers. It's time to fix the broken tax system and require everyone to pay their fair share of taxes to ensure sustained investments in rural communities for years to come. Congress should include a minimum tax for billionaires, raise corporate tax rates, and end tax breaks for offshoring jobs, as President Biden proposed in his [Fiscal Year 2024 budget](#).



CREDIT AND LENDING

Small business owners need access to credit to grow their businesses, but access to credit is more challenging than ever.

- Require the Farm Credit System to place a portion of profits in a community mandate fund for grants and loans to support rural small businesses, mid-tier food system businesses, and young, beginning, or historically underserved farmers and ranchers.
- Improve access to USDA farm loans by eliminating the cap on the number of times a borrower can receive a direct operating or direct farm ownership loan, increasing the microloan limit from \$50,000 to \$100,000, and revising the beginning farmer definition to include entities composed of non-related individuals. Furthermore, the USDA should stop subsidizing and unfairly propping up industrial livestock farms with guaranteed loans.
- Pass the [Small Business Lending Disclosure Act](#), extending federal Truth in Lending Act (TILA) disclosure requirements to small business loans and credit products to protect the most vulnerable small businesses from predatory lending practices. Small businesses and entrepreneurs are the backbone of the rural economy, and they are too often the target of predatory lenders.

SCHOOLS & EDUCATION

Rural communities depend on public schools so that students can acquire the skills and knowledge to be ready to seize their future. In the face of attacks on schools, teachers, students, and parents, we need to support our schools to be successful hubs for learning, care, and engagement for the entire community.

- **The Secure Rural Schools Program** provides critical funding for schools, roads, and other municipal services to more than 700 counties. Without action, its authorization will expire in the fall of 2023.
- Pass the [Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals \(PREP\) Act](#) and the [Preparing and Retaining All \(PARA\) Educators Act](#) to address the significant educator and school staff shortages in rural communities. These bills prioritize staff recruitment and

retention efforts in rural communities. They also support programs like Grow Your Own that encourage educators and staff to remain in their professions and communities. These bills ensure funding is equitably distributed so that students in rural communities have the same support and resources as their peers in neighboring communities.

- Schools serve more than just the students, and we can support schools to meet the wide-ranging needs of their community by passing the [Full-Service Community School Expansion Act](#).
- Early childhood education is critical for a child's development and their parents' freedom to work and provide for their family. But rural families have few options for day care and child care services. Provide Universal Pre-K, and set up families for success.
- Appropriate full funding for Act Q under title VIII of the Higher Education Act to provide rural development grants to rural colleges. To identify eligibility for these grants, the federal Department of Education should be directed to create a Rural Serving Institution designation for colleges.

HEALTHCARE ACCESS

- Rural hospitals provide essential healthcare, including emergency services, access to specialists, and alcohol and drug treatment. However [thirty percent of rural hospitals are at risk of closing in the near future](#). Pass the [Save Rural Hospitals Act](#), a bill that would preserve access to rural healthcare by ensuring fairness in Medicare hospital payments, create opportunities for rural critical care facilities, and invest in rural healthcare services.
- Ensure our nation's agricultural communities have access to critical mental health support. Pass the [Farmers First Act](#), which reauthorizes and expands the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN).
- Expand, implement, and create rural reforms of Medicaid for poor and working families. Expanding Medicaid and increasing Medicare reimbursement rates are important ways to deliver increased quality-of-care in rural communities. Additionally, reforms that give more healthcare access to rural people should be prioritized, such as making family elder and disability care reimbursable.



📷 People's Action event to Upgrade Medicaid

- Rein in [private equity's takeover of healthcare in rural areas](#) through the passage of the [Stop Wall Street Looting Act](#).

CHILD CARE

Access to affordable child care is critical for families' financial well-being, but child care in rural America is extremely limited. The [Child Care for Every Community Act](#) would increase access by subsidizing child care administrators — including small businesses, state, and Tribal entities — and capping the amount a family is required to pay for those services. Pass the **Expanding Child Care in Rural America Act** and direct USDA rural development to prioritize child care businesses and facilities in existing programs.

PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE (USPS)

The postal service is an essential part of rural life, delivering everything from prescription drugs to mail-in ballots. And yet, it could be so much more. The USPS could fill in gaps and provide banking services, check cashing, bill payments, global wire transfers, low-fee ATMs, and more. Pass the [Access to No-Fee Accounts Act](#), adopt language in the Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Bill directing USPS to meaningfully pilot non-bank financial services at scale, and repeal language in the 2006 Postal Accountability & Enhancement Act that prohibits USPS from offering new services, so it can grow and change with rural communities' needs.

SAFE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Pass the [Rural Housing Service Reform Act](#), to improve and build upon USDA rural housing programs by bringing the USDA's outdated method of determining income in line with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's practices. The bill would also better protect homeowners and ensure some USDA-owned properties stay affordable. Furthermore, the bill would update the rules for a home repair loan program to make it less burdensome to get smaller loans and fund the USDA's ability to process loans more quickly. The bill would also expand an existing USDA pilot program to provide home loan assistance to Native borrowers.

REBUILD LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Expand rural economic development and job creation by passing the [Rebuild Rural America Act](#). The bill establishes a \$50 billion grant fund, creates federal training and technical support, establishes a state-by-state rural innovation and partnership administration to coordinate efforts, and creates a "Rural Future Corps" to support essential development.

BROADBAND

Pass the [Rural Internet Improvement Act](#). This bill would streamline and bolster USDA Rural Development broadband programs and ensure their funding is targeted to rural areas that need it the most. The bill would merge and codify the Rural e-Connectivity Pilot Program — a program designed to target rural communities with no connectivity — with USDA's traditional broadband loan and grant program. It would limit funding to areas where 90 percent or more of households don't have consistent broadband access.



 Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement and People's Action



RURAL SPOTLIGHT

Small Businesses: Engines of Our Communities

As advocates that work with small businesses of all kinds, we know that small and independent businesses in rural America are a crucial source of innovation and provide distinct benefits that foster thriving local economies and communities. However, many rural communities have lost their local businesses and are struggling with poverty and despair. The decline of small businesses in rural communities is a key driver fueling this inequality by cutting off a long-standing pathway to the middle class, eliminating a crucial source of new jobs, and further concentrating wealth in the hands of the few.

“When we don’t support our small businesses in rural communities, our communities don’t grow,” said [Collen Bies](#), owner of Colleen Bies Photography in Neenah, Wisconsin. Colleen, who resides in Neenah, with a population of 27,000, describes a once vibrant main street in her youth that now has had a significant number of businesses close. The problem isn’t lack of customers, and there is mounting evidence that small businesses often outperform their bigger competitors, providing better services, higher-quality products, and even lower prices. However, misguided public policy has tilted the scales in favor of corporate concentration and monopoly power. Federal policy, such as special access to capital and advantageous tax rates, favors the big-box retailers and large chains leaving local businesses unable to compete at scale.

Food Deserts as Big Box Retailers Proliferate in Rural Communities

Local grocers struggle to compete with big box stores like Walmart, Dollar Stores, and Kroger in rural communities. These chains leverage their power over suppliers to get to lower prices for the goods they put on their shelves. These discounts are not available to smaller, independent grocers. RF Buche owns several grocery stores, including the only store within an hour’s distance of the Pine Ridge Reservation. He [said](#), “I hope to have a more level playing field when it comes to cost. But probably more than that, I want access to the same foods that everyone else can get for my customers.”



The big box chains appear to seek out food deserts, and where those conditions do not yet exist, they often create them by pushing local grocers out of business. Dollar stores and other big box retailers, like Walmart, have overrun much of rural America. In many small towns, they are the only retailers left.

Randy George, the owner of Red Hen Bakery in Middlesex, Vermont, is one of just a handful of businesses of any size, in his rural town with a population of under 5,000. He and his wife have owned their business for over two decades. “We feel the impacts of corporate consolidation more and more,” he reflected. “We get the news that one of our suppliers bought our other supplier, and now we have one fewer option, and then just like that, the prices go up.”

The problem isn't lack of customers, and there is mounting evidence that small businesses often outperform their bigger competitors

Pharmacy Deserts and Vanishing Independent Pharmacies

Local pharmacies in rural communities are also vanishing across the U.S., feeding the spread of “pharmacy deserts,” or places with no pharmacies within an easy distance. The disappearance of these crucial sources of healthcare is afflicting a growing number of rural and urban communities.

The leading threat to rural community pharmacies are large healthcare conglomerates, such as CVS, which both compete against local pharmacies and control their insurance reimbursement rates. Like other local, independent retailers, research has found that independent pharmacies outperform the chains on several necessary measures. They provide more one-on-one patient consultations, shorter wait times, and lower prices.



Chanda Causer
Main Street Alliance



Katy Milani
Institute for Local Self-Reliance

 Mike Kane, courtesy of RuralOrganizing.org Education Fund



PILLAR THREE

Rein in unchecked corporate greed and safeguard the power of workers, small businesses, and family farmers to build a good life

ISSUES LIMIT CORPORATE POWER • ACCOUNTABILITY FOR POLLUTION • FOOD LABELING • PRESCRIPTION DRUGS • EMPOWER WORKERS • GOOD JOBS

Over the last forty years, the legal and policy structures that protect people from corporate abuse and limit corporate power have been systematically dismantled or ignored. That has had a devastating impact on rural America. Workers, especially in the agriculture sector, can be exploited by suppressed wages and exposure to dangerous conditions. Family farmers and ranchers in many areas have been forced by economic conditions to sell their farms, leading to the consolidation of land ownership. Main street businesses have been shuttered in small towns across America. This consolidation has allowed the proliferation of giant corporations that pollute communities with impunity. For the sake of our economy and democracy, we need to rebalance economic and political power.

PUT CHECKS ON CORPORATE POWER

- Rural communities are among the hardest hit by lack of fairness and choice in the market. Rural communities will benefit from passing essential reforms to update and strengthen antitrust policy for the 21st Century. These reforms should include many of the recommendations identified in the House of Representatives [report on competition in the digital sector](#) and Sen. Amy Klobuchar’s [Competition and Antitrust Law Enforcement Reform Act](#).
- Pass the [Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act](#), as an important step towards dealing with extreme levels of monopolization in the agriculture sector.
- Stop corporations from promoting profits over workers by passing the [Reward Work Act](#), which limits

stock buybacks, and the [Workforce Mobility Act](#), which prohibits most noncompete agreements that stifle entrepreneurship and trap workers.

- Stop funding corporate agribusiness lobbying groups that oppose rural priorities, and pass the [Opportunities for Fairness in Farming Act](#). The bill reforms Commodity Checkoff Programs and de-funds corporate agribusiness lobbying groups that stand in the way of independent producers.
- The right to repair is gaining momentum, and the [Agriculture Right to Repair Act](#) would empower people to fix their equipment and property without being restricted to an authorized agent. Corporations have used their market power to take away this right by creating restrictive contracts and denying independent repairers access to critical information.



 Village Farmstead, members of Wisconsin Farmers Union

HOLD POLLUTERS ACCOUNTABLE

- Pass the [Farm System Reform Act](#), a bill that would hold corporate agribusinesses accountable for their pollution, enact a factory farm moratorium, and help transition to more sustainable livestock production.
- Ensure polluters are responsible for the cleanup of PFAS, a dangerous forever chemical. Cleanup now falls on farmers and rural utility systems, who are already stretched to the breaking point. Congress and the administration must invest in robust testing and hold the companies who profited from PFAS accountable for the environmental harms to land and drinking water.

STRENGTHEN FOOD LABELING REQUIREMENTS

Multinational corporations use lax labeling requirements to manipulate and mislead consumers while taking advantage of American farmers and ranchers. Consumers have a right to know where their food comes from and should have transparent information so they can trust that their choices match their values. Passing the [American Beef Labeling Act](#) will reinstate mandatory “Country of Origin Labeling” on beef and pork.

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Pass the [Strengthening Medicare And Reducing Taxpayer Prices Act](#), the [Lower Drug Costs for Families Act](#) and reform rural-specific programs like **340B** to improve rural access to medication.

EMPOWER WORKERS

Rural workers earn less, are less likely to have benefits like paid leave, and are more likely to be injured on the job. We need to build an economy that respects rural working people.

- Pass the [PRO Act](#) and [Public Service Freedom to Negotiate Act](#), the most comprehensive worker empowerment legislation since the 1930s. The bills expand the definitions of unfair labor practices to include efforts that prevent collective organizing, whether by retaliation against an employee, contract agreements not to participate in collective or class action, or by coercion and intimidation. It further enshrines the right to collective organizing by permitting secondary strikes, broadening the scope of who fair labor standards apply to, expanding whistleblower protections, and other essential reforms for private and public workers.
- The [Workforce Mobility Act](#) prohibits using noncompete agreements in the context of commercial enterprises, except under certain circumstances.
- Create fair scheduling protections, including sick and family leave for all workers, by passing the [Healthy Families Act](#), which would create a national standard for earned paid sick days; the [FAMILY Act](#), which would create a national standard for paid family leave; [Schedules That Work Act](#), which would protect workers' rights to negotiate hours, location, and scheduling of their work; and the [Part Time Workers Bill of Rights Act](#), which expands part-time workers' opportunities for becoming full time and makes them eligible for family and sick leave.
- The [Protecting America's Meatpacking Workers Act](#) expands workplace safety and health requirements. It addresses dangerous workplace conditions and safety for meat and poultry processing facilities by hiring additional OSHA inspectors and expanding protections



for workers who exercise their rights under occupational safety laws.

CREATE GOOD JOBS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

- Pass the [21st Century Civilian Conservation Corps Act](#), which expands upon provisions in the Climate Stewardship Act to resource a wide range of federal agencies to create good conservation jobs.
- Overhaul the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) to better support new and growing businesses, especially those in rural areas, the very small, and those owned by women and people of color. This means shifting a significant share of the SBA's loan programs to finance entrepreneurs in communities that have been left behind, as well as rethinking SBA's training programs to serve rural and minority entre-

preneurs better. Finally, the SBA's Office of Advocacy should be transformed to provide much-needed analysis and advocacy on the most pressing policy issues hindering independent businesses, including unchecked monopoly power and policies that spur corporate consolidation.

- Ensure that rural economic development and job training prioritize rural jobs. Too often, economic development and job training programs prepare workers and entrepreneurs to leave rural communities rather than create opportunities to stay and thrive. Development efforts must prioritize building strong rural communities. This is especially important as the rural workforce transitions away from fossil fuel-based industries.
- Create and fund “jobs of the future” and “industries of the future” apprenticeship programs. Job training and business development must envision the next generation of rural economies and focus on preparing and supporting the development of those industries, including information technology and new commodities like hemp. This focus on a just transition from extractive industries to local wealth creation

and well-paying jobs should be a critical part of rural economies.

- Reform federal procurement and contracting. Support the [Federal Good Food Purchasing Coalition's](#) request to President Biden to issue an Executive Order to expand the scope of federal procurement laws to a robust values-based procurement approach, which includes giving a preference to federal contractors who respect workers' rights. Procurement should not only include “Buy American,” but “Buy Local,” “Buy Rural,” and “Buy from Small Business” initiatives that channel the procurement power of government spending to create rural opportunities. “Stewardship Contracting” should be mandatory where possible to promote local business and economic development. Additionally, the federal government should be mandated to ensure that all food procurement contracts go to food processing companies that respect workers' rights to freedom of association, to organize a union, and to bargain collectively, free from reprisal, for living wages, and a safe workplace, while treating their workers with dignity.



 Kyle LaFond, owner of American Provenance in rural Wisconsin, courtesy of Main Street Alliance

“

Federal policy, such as special access to capital and advantageous tax rates, favors the big-box retailers and large chains leaving local businesses unable to compete at scale.”

–Chanda Causer, Main Street Alliance
& Katy Milani, Institute for Local Self-Reliance



PILLAR FOUR

Ensure opportunities for a more secure, prosperous, and sustainable future

ISSUES NATURAL RESOURCES • PUBLIC LANDS • BUILD A RENEWABLE ENERGY FUTURE

Rural America is vital to the health and wellness of our country, and rural communities can play a critically important role in developing more sustainable and resilient food and energy systems. We can accomplish these goals without extracting natural resources, polluting our drinking water, or exploiting our communities. Policy must prioritize protecting the health of our forests, grasslands, and rivers. And we must ensure that rural communities can take advantage of opportunities to transform our agriculture and energy sectors, growing our economy and helping fight climate change.

CONSERVE OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

- Pass the [Climate Stewardship Act](#), a bill that would provide increased funding for USDA conservation programs, renewable energy programs, ecosystem restoration, and a new Civilian Conservation Corps. The bill expands on USDA-identified conservation practices, farm and small business renewable energy, tree planting, and wetland restoration to make huge strides in using natural climate practices to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, while increasing farmer income and creating good jobs.
- Pass the [Agricultural Resilience Act](#), a bill that helps protect water quality and confront the impacts of climate change on American farms by funding climate change research, improving climate-related crop insurance, improving the strength of conservation

compliance, funding on-farm renewable energy, and other provisions.

- Pass the [EQIP Improvement Act](#). This bill would set lower payment limitations for Environmental Quality Incentive Program recipients, shifting conservation program subsidies away from large concentrated animal feeding operations, which often receive the majority of funding. The bill would also make more funding available for small farms across the country.

PUBLIC LANDS

- Pass the [Forest Management for Rural Stability Act](#), which would create a permanent endowment fund that offers stable and reliable funding for rural public lands, county services, and education. The bipartisan bill would appropriate initial money for the fund, and would be further funded by commercial revenue generated on national forests, Bureau of Land Management-administered land in Oregon and California, and Fish and Wildlife refuges. The bill would prevent underpayment or nonpayment of federal obligations to local governments through annual appropriations shortfalls, as well as preventing federal lands extraction due to county government shortfalls.

BUILD A RENEWABLE ENERGY FUTURE

- Ensure all future renewable energy tax credits treat electric cooperatives fairly. Allow tax-exempt rural electric cooperatives (RECs) to utilize the same direct payment option afforded to other utilities, as described in the [GREEN Act](#).
- Create rural jobs and retire fossil fuel plants operated by RECs. In order to transition 57,000 megawatts of power used by REC members, we must expand the **Empowering Rural America Program** (New ERA) and the **Powering Affordable Clean Energy Program** (PACE). The Inflation Reduction Act made historic investments in rural electrification that will rapidly accelerate the clean energy transition at rural electric cooperatives. However, this is only a down payment on the need for federal investment.



 Northern Plains Resource Council



RURAL SPOTLIGHT

Barriers to Policy Implementation

While we serve in different levels of government in different parts of the country, we see the same challenge. As elected officials we hear from our constituents that recent federal legislation promising a lifeline to our communities is more of the same from Washington because it seems just out of reach for our neighbors and the places we call home. These promises are empty without a commitment from federal officials to effectively implement these programs in rural areas and small cities.

We see the headlines that billions are allocated for communities. But how do school board members and staff members identify and apply for the best opportunities? Large municipalities hire full-time staff and high-powered consultants to navigate grant applications, reporting, and compliance across dozens of federal agencies. But what about rural communities and small cities like Florence, AZ?

Even when we find grants geared to rural communities, the funding rules frequently exclude many rural communities and small cities. Government leaders and residents in Meadville, PA were excited to take advantage of a USDA program to help families keep up with property maintenance and live in safe homes. The grant required significant staffing to manage the program and fulfill reporting requirements that could go on for years, and the grant wouldn't cover those operational costs. Without the staffing infrastructure, Meadville leadership made the heart-breaking decision not to apply.

The Inflation Reduction Act allocates \$27 Billion to states to provide low-cost financing for projects that cut greenhouse gas emissions. These funds would generate great jobs and spur entrepreneurship. But here's the catch, the state must establish the financing project, called a Green Bank, and the majority party in Iowa doesn't want a "green" program. So before we can implement a program to strengthen local economies and accelerate rural-led climate solutions, we must address a superficial naming problem within a high-stakes political conflict.

We see people's frustration as they question whether good-sounding federal policy will translate into actually supporting our communities. A lot can go wrong, or never even get started, between passing a bill and the doors opening on a local-led program. But we still believe that if we all work together, we can get this right. We call on federal officials to lead a collaborative effort with all levels of government to ensure programs are accessible to rural communities. And we invite community leaders, stakeholders, and people who care about policy to make more noise about implementation to ensure rural communities get fair access to programs that will give people the tools and opportunities to live a good life.

J.D. Scholten, State Representative, Iowa

Jaime Kinder, Mayor, Meadville, Pennsylvania

Sherri Jones, Governing Board Member, Florence Unified School District, Arizona



Policy Implementation

Over the past two and half years, the federal government has made historic investments in rural communities, and many of these programs are scheduled to be implemented over the next several years. We must first protect this important progress from ongoing threats of repeal and defunding. Then we must ensure the rules, regulations, and outreach are designed to truly meet the intended goals and benefit people.

Working people rarely feel the effects of a piece of legislation on the day it is signed into law. It frequently requires complicated rulemaking and coordination between different parts of government — within the federal government and in partnership with state and local governments. Stakeholders and constituents play an essential role to shape decisions and improve outcomes. The real test of their success for rural communities will be if they give communities and working people the tools and opportunities they need to thrive.

As federal agencies and state governments continue the process of making decisions about critical investments and putting policy changes to work, they must consider the realities of the communities they are working with.

- ▶ Rural governments, nonprofits, and other institutions often lack the capacity to apply for and administer federal grants and other projects. Even if the demographics of the community would make it eligible for the grant, the grant process may require technical expertise, existing services infrastructure, or staff capacity that doesn't exist.
- ▶ Rural spaces have a unique set of challenges. Rural advocates need to have a role in creating rules, procedures, and engagement strategies.
- ▶ Too often, corporate special interests have an outsized influence and manipulate rules to increase their profit and limit the gains for rural people.

To better ensure meaningful improvements to rural communities, policy implementation should prioritize the following.

IMPROVE AND SIMPLIFY LOCAL ACCESS WITH CROSS-DEPARTMENT COLLABORATION

Fully empower the [Rural Partners Network](#) (RPN), an alliance of federal agencies and commissions working directly with rural communities to expand rural prosperity through job creation, infrastructure development, and community improvement. Successful implementation of the network will require connecting rural communities — specifically, the people who most need assistance — with available resources across federal government agencies. The RPN must effectively gather data to demonstrate the impacts of the work and track community outreach.

ACCELERATE THE PACE OF ACTION ON EXECUTIVE ORDER ON COMPETITION

[President Biden's Executive Order on Competition](#) took wide-ranging action to benefit small businesses, family farmers, and working families. It encouraged federal anti-trust agencies to enforce antitrust laws more vigorously, particularly in labor, agricultural, tech, and healthcare markets. It also established a White House Competition Council to monitor progress on finalizing the initiatives in the order. To fully empower the Executive Branch to conduct investigations, Congress should pass the [Meat and Poultry Special Investigator Act](#), which would amend the Packers and Stockyard Act to establish an Office of Special Investigator for Competition Matters. The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture should move expeditiously to implement USDA's pending rulemaking under the Packers and Stockyards Act (PSA). The order also required expanding Federal Trade Commission and Department of Justice budgets to increase enforcement capacity.

FULLY ENGAGE RURAL CONSTITUENTS IN DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES WITH FLEXIBLE FUNDING

The [Recompete Pilot Program](#) will provide distressed local labor markets, local communities, and Tribal governments with flexible, 10-year Recompete Grants to invest in various local economic development needs and increase employment rates. Grants could be used for infrastructure investments, brownfield redevelopment, workforce development, small business assistance, resources to connect residents to opportunities, and other investments to help communities rebuild. However, effective implementation of the RECOMPETE Program will require a robust rural strategy to ensure communities access the program.

PROVIDE RESOURCES THAT ENABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES TO PARTICIPATE IN ALL MAJOR PROGRAMS

Shortly after the Infrastructure Law was signed into law, the Biden administration issued a [Rural Playbook](#), providing a toolkit that shows how the legislation will support rural communities. As investments are deployed, the federal government should provide easy-to-use resources, available in multiple languages, describing which funds



 Ben Okafor, owner of two Family Pharmacies in rural Maine, courtesy of Institute for Local Self-Reliance

are available and how communities can access them. To the extent that states are responsible for implementation, states must provide comparable and transparent resources.

SUPPORT RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES TO TRANSITION TO RENEWABLE ENERGY

The USDA should do more to engage rural people in the opportunities created by the Inflation Reduction Act. Member-owners of rural electric cooperatives must have the information they need to transition their communities to renewable energy sources that will make their power cheaper and more resilient.

ACTION ON ADDICTION PREVENTION AND RECOVERY

Rural communities are seriously harmed by the opioid and addiction crises. The [2022 Rural Opioid Abuse Prevention Act](#) aims to “identify current gaps in prevention, treatment, and recovery services for those who interact with the criminal justice system in rural areas and establish new

“
Even when we find grants geared to rural communities, the funding rules frequently exclude many rural communities and small cities.”



📷 Hoopa Valley Tribe installs broadband with Institute for Local Self-Reliance

efforts to address the opioid crisis in that community.” An expected \$50 billion from recent court settlements will provide further funding for state and local governments to help communities lessen the harms of addiction. To ensure successful programs, rural practitioners and directly impacted communities must have a leading role in creating and implementing programs. Because Medicaid is the leading payer of mental health and substance abuse treatment, ensuring that rural people do not lose access to Medicaid coverage is essential to addressing addiction in rural America.

HOLD CORPORATE ACTORS ACCOUNTABLE

When funds are allocated to giant corporations to provide services, include provisions to ensure effective program implementation that meets the interests of the community served.

COLLABORATE ACROSS ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

Federal agencies must work collaboratively with state, local, and Tribal governments to ensure funds effectively address local needs and leverage local strengths.

“

Policymakers can help address the challenges by acknowledging the strengths of our communities and providing the tools rural people need to succeed.”

