

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- The 46 million rural residents—14 percent of the total U.S. population—play an essential role in the overall economy, starting new businesses, and supplying many of our agricultural products.
- The demographics and defining characteristics of rural America are changing. Increases in new residents, including immigrants and people of color, have partially offset declines and an aging population.
- Rural families on average earn 25 percent less than their urban counterparts, but live in areas with some of the highest rates of upward economic mobility in the nation.
- Rural schools benefit from having small class sizes, frequent community engagement, and active parent-teacher interactions.
- Rural communities need a capital infusion to connect the nearly one-third of rural residents without access to high-speed internet.
- Rural communities are well-positioned to lead in clean-energy infrastructure. Ninety-nine percent of wind projects are in rural areas.
- The outdoor recreation industry generated \$374 billion in spending in 2016, supporting more than 4 million jobs and boosting rural economies.
- Rural residents enjoy higher homeownership rates than their urban counterparts, with more than 70 percent of occupied rural housing being owned instead of rented.
- The Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion are improving access to health care in rural communities. Nearly 1.7 million rural Americans have gained coverage through Medicaid expansion.
- The vast majority of farms are small and those households rely on off-farm income to support their livelihoods. Small farm households are increasingly turning to local marketing strategies and on-farm renewable energy systems to improve their farm income.

POLICY SOLUTIONS

Rural America offers a wealth of opportunities for economic growth and innovation. To seize this potential, we need policies that leverage rural communities' unique strengths and resources to address the challenges they face. The proposals below identify areas where targeted investments would help revitalize the rural economy and improve the livelihoods of many families.

FAMILY FINANCES

- Develop retirement solutions that empower rural residents to save early and often.
- Implement pro-family tax policies that keep families from slipping into poverty.
- Enact paid family leave solutions at the federal level.

EDUCATION

- Enhance school readiness by increasing early childhood education opportunities.
- Streamline funding and resource access for rural school districts and tribal lands.
- Expand college guidance services and middle-skills pathways.
- Expand scholarship, professional development, and other programs for teachers.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Maintain vital programs, like Essential Air Service, that rural communities count on.
- Expand broadband access through a one-time infusion of capital as well as targeted efforts to boost access on tribal lands and increase utilization by farmers.
- Invest to upgrade rural water and sewer systems and enable the efficient transport of renewable energy produced in rural areas.
- Create a new Infrastructure Financing Authority to meet the needs of rural America.

PUBLIC LANDS

- Resist attacks on protected lands by preserving protections and funding.
- Improve access to federal lands by passing the Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act.
- Integrate public lands into clean energy strategies.
- Engage local communities when making decisions that impact public lands.

HOUSING

- Boost non-profit groups' capacity to access federal capital.
- Invest in critical improvements to Indian Country housing conditions.
- Increase community bank presence for better mortgage access.
- Encourage local businesses to invest in housing stock revitalization.

HEALTH CARE

- Expand Medicaid and protect it against cuts and rollbacks.
- Strengthen and improve Medicare to better serve the needs of rural communities.
- Increase recruitment and retention efforts for the health care workforce.
- Embrace technologies by investing in broadband and expanding payment options.
- Lower the cost of health care by adapting value-based care to fit rural realities, lowering prescription drug prices, and increasing coverage options.

AGRICULTURE

- Pass a bipartisan, five-year farm bill with policies that give farmers, families, and rural communities opportunities to succeed.
- Use tax policy to support small or midsize farms that earn a living in agriculture.
- Expand access to capital and land to encourage the next generation of farmers.
- Provide certainty in trade policy so farmers know what to expect in the marketplace.
- Boost funding for safe and affordable agricultural worker housing.