



May 10, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As members of the New Democrat Coalition (NDC), we share the administration's commitment to repair and modernize our nation's infrastructure, grow the economy, create jobs, and combat climate change. You delivered on this promise with the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), and the implementation of this historic investment represents a once in a generation opportunity to improve the lives of Americans. New Dems recognize the unique challenges and barriers to accessing federal resources faced by rural communities, which is why we established the Rural Reinvestment Task Force last year. We write not only to shed light on issues in our communities and in rural areas across the nation, but to offer solutions the administration can take to lower barriers to federal resources and better coordinate infrastructure implementation in the rural districts we represent.

Over the last few decades, the U.S. has significantly underinvested in infrastructure development and place-based economic development. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in rural America. Not only are rural communities ineligible for certain direct entitlement grants such as Community Development Block Grants, but they are less likely to have the capacity to navigate the maze of competitive federal grants and loan programs, given that they have comparably smaller staff sizes.

To ensure rural communities can access these resources, including the opportunities of the bipartisan infrastructure law, we propose that the administration designate a Rural Economic Revitalization Coordinator within the White House to lead the administration's rural policy development, interagency coordination, and engagement with rural America. This role should be singularly focused on ensuring rural communities know what resources are available, assisting rural communities in accessing and successfully deploying federal resources, and working with all relevant federal agencies to address the unique challenges and needs these communities face. The Rural Coordinator should also serve on the Infrastructure Implementation Task Force to lead the rural implementation efforts under the bipartisan infrastructure law; doing so would further the goal of Executive Order 14052 by strengthening coordination with state, local, tribal, and territorial governments. Enabling one person to be the point of contact for the administration will help cut across agency boundaries and missions to better align federal

resources with community needs. This aligns with the clear vision you have had to establish similar roles for climate, infrastructure implementation, and more within the White House. Designation of a Rural Coordinator would elevate rural issues within the administration, show the administration's determination to empower the communities that have been left behind to invest in their development and lasting economic growth, and ensure every American can access opportunity, no matter where they live.

To support equitable implementation and meet communities where they are, federal agencies should also develop a “common application” concept to lower barriers to accessing federal funds. Under a “common application” model, a community would be able to submit one application which would be considered for all applicable programs for which the entity is eligible, such as those made available at the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. We are encouraged that this model is being discussed at DOT, and that a combined application was recently announced by DOT for three of its programs, including MEGA, INFRA, and RURAL grants. Moving forward we support DOT and other federal agencies in taking a similar approach to implementing programs and distributing funding, building upon this laudable progress.

The administration should also consider other policies that support rural access to federal programs. For example, the administration could consider making predevelopment funds available where possible to communities that otherwise would not have the resources or expertise to navigate the federal grant or loan systems. Such funds can be used for engineering studies, environmental reviews, site visits, hiring grant coordinators and economic development experts, and more to help them develop proposals, meet application requirements and apply for resources, and implement and oversee those programs to ensure success. As we begin discussion on the Fiscal Year 2023 budget, as well as the 2023 Farm Bill, the administration should also consider ways to partner with Congress to decrease regulatory burdens and enhance access to capital in rural areas, partner with local businesses and educational institutions to support workforce development, and further develop rural broadband as a critical driver for 21st century economic success.

We are grateful to you and the administration for being receptive to our ideas, joining our Coalition to discuss areas of collaboration, and working to build a better America. If there are additional funds from Congress needed to carry out implementation of these ideas, please know our Task Force stands ready to help. We look forward to continuing our partnership with you to ensure the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law fully benefits all parts of our country, including the rural Americans we represent.

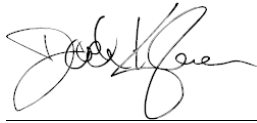
Sincerely,



Rep. Cheri Bustos
Co-Chair
New Democrat Coalition Rural
Reinvestment Task Force



Rep. Cindy Axne
Co-Chair
New Democrat Coalition Rural
Reinvestment Task Force



Rep. Derek Kilmer
Chair Emeritus
New Democrat Coalition



Rep. Jim Costa
Member
New Democrat Coalition



Rep. Angie Craig
Member
New Democrat Coalition



Rep. Ron Kind
Member
New Democrat Coalition



Rep. Tom O'Halleran
Member
New Democrat Coalition