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**Representative Matt Cartwright**  
**Eighth District, Pennsylvania**

2102 Rayburn House Office Building  
(202) 225-5546

March 5, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As you start your work as Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture, I write to bring your attention to an important matter regarding rural communities in the United States.

Rural communities are the backbone of America, providing our energy and food, serving as stewards of our natural resources, and helping drive innovation. Despite the important role rural America plays in our country, many rural towns and communities are struggling. Industries relocating, health care costs and crisis, deteriorating schools, and a lack of internet access have led to declining prospects for too many rural areas. These problems have only been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. It is time to write a new chapter for rural America.

As you are well aware, President Obama signed an executive order establishing the White House Rural Council in 2012. The core functions of this council were to streamline and increase the effectiveness of federal programs that serve rural communities, engage stakeholders on rural community issues and work towards viable solutions, and to promote and coordinate partnerships with the private sector.

The White House Rural Council was essential for helping families and communities across the United States. Policy initiatives helped rural families to lower their mortgage costs and avoid foreclosures during a precarious economic time. Investments in rural small businesses provided new training and counseling opportunities that helped these businesses grow, expand, and modernize. Initiatives connected families, students, and businesses in rural communities by accelerating the implementation of broadband internet, providing cutting edge technologies to rural classrooms, and delivering a new online community that linked educators to resources, colleagues, tools, and experts.

The council supported rural health care by helping hospitals recruit new staff, expanding health information technology to these communities, and reducing the regulatory burden on rural hospitals. Additionally, the council helped improve watersheds across the U.S., provided financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to help them provide cleaner water to their communities, promoted the purchase of biobased products, and helped restore forests around the country.

It is not only important that we reinstate the White House Rural Council, but we must make it a permanent part of our legal code. To accomplish this important task, I have introduced the bipartisan *Transforming Hiring in Rural Industries and Vital Economies (THRIVE) Act of 2021*.

The THRIVE Act capitalizes on the potential of rural America by establishing a permanent interagency council that maximizes existing federal investments and promotes public-private partnerships to revitalize rural economies and create family sustaining jobs. The THRIVE Act advises agencies on using existing dollars to assist rural small businesses, improve health care services, invest in rural schools, and expand access to broadband internet services. The interagency council serves as a voice for rural Americans and tackles the biggest issues facing these communities by spurring economic development and expanding access to funding.

While I work with my colleagues in Congress to pass the THRIVE Act, I urge you to work with the White House to use your executive authority to reestablish the White House Rural Council. I hope we can then work together to make the council permanent so that we can stimulate economic growth within our rural communities and unlock the enormous potential of rural America. We thank you for your consideration of this request and we look forward to working with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Matthew A. Cartwright". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Member of Congress