



## REAL LEADERSHIP FOR RURAL AMERICA

Rural communities in America are at a critical point in history. For the past decade, rural America has not been well-served by federal policies, and if Republicans and Democrats in Washington continue these misguided policies, rural families will see their economic fortunes fall further behind those of other Americans. But we have the power to choose a different course. Innovative rural Americans have demonstrated they can compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But local initiative must be matched by federal policies that empower rural Americans and family farmers.

Rural America faces numerous challenges, but also economic opportunities unlike anything we have witnessed in modern history. Resolving these challenges and taking advantage of the opportunities will depend on electing a President who understands that rural America is important and is willing to provide the leadership and prioritize policies to improve the quality of life in rural America.

Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that together we can ensure a bright future for rural America. A senator from a rural, Midwestern state, Barack Obama has worked to ensure rural America's prosperity and vitality. As president, he will help family farms and rural small businesses find profitability in the marketplace and success in the global economy. He will:

- **Ensure Economic Opportunity for Family Farmers**
- **Support Rural Economic Development**
- **Promote Rural America's Leadership in Developing Renewable Energy**
- **Improve Rural Quality of Life**

In 1785, Thomas Jefferson said, "Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands." Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that more than two centuries later, family farmers are still the cornerstone of American democracy. They will stand with family farmers and help them thrive for generations to come.

Barack Obama and Joe Biden understand that America is not separated into two countries, one rural and one urban. Across the nation the concerns of Americans are remarkably similar: they want to end the war in Iraq and improve education, health care, and energy policies. Barack Obama will be a president who does those things – for all Americans.

### I. ENSURE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR FAMILY FARMERS

**Strong Safety Net for Family Farmers:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will fight for farm programs that provide family farmers with the stability and predictability they need. They will ensure that American farmers are protected from market disruptions and weather disasters. And they will ensure farm programs are strong and are targeted to support family farmers.

The lack of effective payment limitations has resulted in federal farm programs financing farm consolidation and the elimination of many mid-size family farms. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe we should implement

a \$250,000 payment limitation. And they will ensure those payments go to farmers who need them – not millionaire farmers who rely on American taxpayers to protect their multi-million dollar profits.

Most importantly, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will close the loopholes that allow mega farms to get around the limits by subdividing their operations into multiple paper corporations. They will take immediate action to close the loophole by proposing regulations to limit payments to active farmers who work the land, plus landlords who rent to active farmers. Both the Government Accountability Office and the Payment Limitation Commission have called for closing this loophole. Every president since Ronald Reagan has had the authority to close this loophole without additional action by Congress, but has failed to act.

**Prevent Anticompetitive Behavior Against Family Farms:** In an era of market consolidation, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will fight to ensure family and independent farmers have fair access to markets, control over their production decisions, and transparency in prices. Obama is a strong supporter of Senator Tom Harkin's (D-IA) legislation that protects independent producers by banning the ownership of livestock by meat packers, and he will fight for passage of the law as president. Today meatpackers produce more than 20 percent of the nation's hogs, and their share is growing. When meatpackers own livestock, they bid less aggressively for the hogs and cattle produced by independent farmers. When supplies are short and prices are rising, they are able to stop buying livestock, which disrupts the market.

The 1921 Packers and Stockyards Act prohibits price discrimination by meatpackers against small and mid-size farmers, but the law has not been enforced. Obama will issue regulations for what constitutes undue price discrimination and his administration will enforce the law. He will also strengthen anti-monopoly laws; change federal agriculture policy to strengthen producer protection from fraud, abuse, and market manipulation; and make sure that farm programs are helping family farmers, as opposed to large, vertically integrated corporate agribusiness.

**Regulate CAFOs:** Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), which raise more than 40 percent of U.S. livestock, comprise a larger share of the livestock industry every year. Barack Obama has worked for tougher environmental regulations on CAFOs. He has supported legislation to set tough air and water pollution limits for livestock operations, including limits on nitrogen, phosphorus, hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, and other pollutants. In the Obama Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency will strictly monitor and regulate pollution from large CAFOs, with fines for those who violate tough air and water quality standards. Obama strongly supports efforts to ensure meaningful local control.

**Limit EQIP Funding for CAFOs:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that we should help farmers find the resources to comply with environmental requirements. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides important financial support to farmers seeking to improve the environmental quality of their operations. Unfortunately, the 2002 Farm Bill lifted the cap on the size of livestock operations that can receive EQIP funding, enabling large livestock operations to receive EQIP payments and subsidizing big CAFOs by as much as \$450,000. Barack Obama and Joe Biden supports reinstating a strict cap on the size of the livestock operations that can receive EQIP funding so that the largest polluters have to pay for their own environmental clean up.

**Establish Country of Origin Labeling:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden support immediate implementation of the Country of Origin Labeling law, which will require meat products to indicate their country of origin. They believe that American producers should be able to distinguish their products from imported ones and that consumers deserve the right to know where their food comes from.

**Encourage Organic and Sustainable Agriculture:** Organic food is the fastest growing sector of the American food marketplace. Demand for sustainable, locally grown, grass-finished and heritage foods is also growing quickly. These niche markets present new opportunities for beginning farmers because specialty operations

often require more management and labor than capital. To support the continued growth of sustainable alternative agriculture, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will increase funding for the National Organic Certification Cost-Share Program to help farmers afford the costs of compliance with national organic certification standards. They will also reform the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Risk Management Agency's crop insurance rates so that they do not penalize organic farmers.

**Encourage Young People to Become Farmers:** Becoming a successful farmer is a lifelong endeavor. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will establish a new program to identify the next generation of farmers and ranchers and help them develop professional skills and find work that leads to farm ownership and management. They will help our land-grant university system and the cooperative extension services work closely with organizations such as 4-H and FFA to identify and prepare candidates for this program.

Barack Obama and Joe Biden will also provide a capital gains tax break for landowners selling to beginning family farmers, and a first-time buyers tax credit for new farmers. These incentives will make it easier for new farmers to afford their first farm.

**Make Disaster Assistance Permanent:** Farmers are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. Barack Obama and Joe Biden fought to expedite disaster assistance to farmers in Illinois and across the country during difficult times. They will make the disaster program permanent so that farmers do not have to rely on the whims of Congress to get assistance.

**Support Local Family Farmers with Local Foods and Promote Regional Food System Policies:** Farming is a vanishing lifestyle. Less than one million Americans claim farming as their primary occupation. Those farmers who sell directly to their customers cut out all of the middlemen and get full retail price for their food - which means farm families can afford to stay on the farm, doing the important work which they love. Barack Obama and Joe Biden recognize that local and regional food systems are better for our environment and support family-scale producers. They will emphasize the need for Americans to Buy Fresh and Buy Local, and he will implement USDA policies that promote local and regional food systems.

**Maintain our Export Competitiveness:** The United States is the world's largest exporter of agricultural products. More than 28 percent of wheat, 20 percent of corn, and 35 percent of soybeans grown domestically are exported worldwide. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will work to break down trade and investment barriers to maintain the American farmer's competitiveness around the world. They will devote more resources to research and technology development so that American farmers can maintain their technological edge in production and distribution of their goods. They will broaden export promotion programs to include export training and workshops. They will help producers develop global marketing networks through the use of new electronic transaction systems and special promotion programs. And they will work to ensure that all trade agreements contain strong and enforceable labor, environmental, and health and safety standards so American farmers are able to compete on a level playing field.

**Improve Food Safety:** The USDA and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) need more authority to issue and enforce recalls for contaminated food. Barack Obama and Joe Biden support efforts to improve federal food safety surveillance to better improve our ability to identify, contain, and prevent outbreaks. They are committed to expanding resources to inform the public when an outbreak happens so that they can make good decisions about food safety.

**Partner with Landowners to Conserve Private Lands:** Because most rural land is privately-owned, farmers, ranchers, and private landowners are the principle stewards of rural land and water. As a U.S. Senator, Barack Obama has supported conservation programs, such as the Conservation Security Program (CSP), that serve as a resource to farmers and assist them with sustainable environmental planning and best land management practices. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will put an unprecedented level of emphasis on the conservation of

private lands. They will advance legislation that works with landowners and follows in the tradition of the Wilderness Act, the Clean Water Act, and the Clean Air Act to focus federal attention and increased resources for this key environmental issue. They will also increase funding for CSP and the Conservation Reserve Program and will create additional incentives for private landowners for sustainable agriculture to protect and restore wetlands, grasslands, forests and other wildlife habitat.

**Encourage Farmers at the Cutting Edge of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency:** Farmers realize that they can help their bottom line and the environment by using more wind and solar to power production systems and sharing energy with other users. They are using new irrigation practices to conserve energy and water. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will encourage the use of methane digesters that are being used to produce power from animal wastes.

No till and other agricultural practices are reducing energy input and keeping the health of our soil sustainable. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will expand USDA projects that focus on energy efficiency and conservation.

**Protect the Rights of Sportsmen:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden deeply respect America's sportsmen and are committed to protecting their rights. Tens of millions of Americans hunt and fish. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that we can protect the rights of hunters and other lawful gun owners while still working to reduce gun violence and make sure that guns do not fall into the hands of criminals or the mentally ill.

Barack Obama and Joe Biden are fully committed to protecting the forests, fish, and game our sportsmen enjoy. They will provide full funding for a broad range of conservation programs. They also support a proposal by more than 25 national hunting and fishing organizations to help fish and wildlife survive the impacts of climate change.

**Reduce Air Pollution:** The adverse health effects of air pollution include premature death, lung disease, heart disease, and asthma. Because emissions from power plants and other sources can travel long distances, many rural communities experience air pollution. Barack Obama helped stop President Bush's attempt to undermine the Clean Air Act, which would have increased industrial emissions of mercury and sulfur. He also helped block attempts to roll back environmental regulations on oil refineries. As president, he and Joe Biden will restore the strength of the Clean Air Act. They will protect rural families from smog and soot, which harm lung function and may aggravate asthma.

**Combat Water Pollution in Rural America:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will work to improve incentives that help farmers prevent runoff pollution from soil erosion, pesticides and fertilizer. As a U.S. Senator, Obama has fought to reduce the amount of mercury that is deposited in our lakes and rivers from power plants and factories hundreds and even thousands of miles away. As president, he will sign into law tough legislation to ban the use of mercury in chlorine chemical plants.

## II. SUPPORT RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Small Business Development and Value Added Agriculture.** Small business creates most of the new jobs and self-employment opportunities in rural America. In addition, "value-added agriculture," the process whereby raw agricultural materials are processed into something more valuable, has always been a staple of the rural economy. The conversion of corn to clean-burning ethanol is an example whose development has been the most important economic event in rural America since the initiation of the Roosevelt-era farm programs. Creation of new industries and products based on farm products is one of the most promising strategies for rural economic development.

To spur the development of small business and value-added agriculture in rural America, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will:

- **Help Develop Value-Added Products:** The Value Added Producer Grant Program provides capital for farmers to create value-added enterprises, such as cooperative marketing initiatives for high-value crops and livestock and farmer-owned processing plants. These grants are the seeds of new rural business and provide capital for farmers to create value-added enterprises and cooperatives, such as onsite or farmer owned processing plants. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will increase funding for this important program.
- **Establish a Small Business and Microenterprise Initiative:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will support entrepreneurship and spur job growth by establishing a small business and micro-enterprise initiative for rural America. The program will provide training and technical assistance for rural small business, and provide a 20 percent tax credit on up to \$50,000 of investment in small owner-operated businesses. This initiative will put the full support of the nation's economic policies behind rural entrepreneurship.

**Support Payment in Lieu of Taxes:** Rural areas often have large tracts of land that are owned by the federal government. Rural counties depend on the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program to make up for property taxes they can't collect on federal lands that are located within their boundaries. A consistent supporter of this program, Barack Obama will ensure that our local governments are fairly compensated for losses to their tax base through PILT.

**Connect Rural America:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will ensure that rural Americans have access to a modern communications infrastructure. Our current telecommunications policy is not serving rural America. They believe we should continue providing universal service funding to wireless carriers that want to provide wireless services in higher cost rural areas but need universal service support to cover the cost of building the towers and networks to serve rural areas. They also believe we should overhaul the universal service program to provide the incentives to all telecommunications providers to invest in and offer affordable broadband services throughout rural America. Their plan will be attractive to the existing telephone companies and entrepreneurs who can bring new wireless and other technologies to bear to meet the needs of rural Americans.

- **Reform the Telephone Universal Service Program:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will direct the Federal Communications Commission to propose reforms changing the Universal Service Fund program from one that supports voice communications to one that supports affordable broadband.
- **Better Manage the Nation's Airwaves:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will manage our wireless spectrum in the public's interest. They will create incentives for more efficient and experimental use of government spectrum and new standards for commercial spectrum so that underserved urban and rural communities can enjoy affordable broadband and also ensure that we have enough spectrum for police, ambulances and other public safety organizations.

### III. PROMOTE RURAL AMERICA'S LEADERSHIP IN DEVELOPING RENEWABLE ENERGY

America's farmers have been on the forefront of the renewable fuels movement. Barack Obama has been one of the strongest proponents in Congress for increasing the national supply of home-grown American renewable fuels. He and Joe Biden will ensure that our rural areas continue their leadership in this arena. They will use some of the revenue generated from his cap-and-trade permit auction to invest in climate-friendly energy development and deployment. This will transform the economy, especially in rural America which is poised to produce and refine more American biofuels and provide more wind power than ever before, and create millions of new jobs across the country.

### **Invest in the fastest, cheapest way to energy independence: Energy Efficiency**

Improving energy efficiency is the fastest, cheapest, most cost-effective method to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and it results in significant savings for our government, economy and consumers. Cost effective energy efficiency should take priority over the construction of new generation facilities. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will set a bold national goal of reducing the energy intensity of our economy 50% by 2030.

**Make Federal Buildings More Efficient:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will ensure that all new federal buildings are zero-emissions by 2025, and to help reach that goal, he will ensure that all new federal buildings are 40 percent more efficient within the next five years. They will also place retrofitting existing federal buildings at a top priority, and seek to improve their efficiency by 25 percent within 5 years.

**Build Biofuel Distribution Infrastructure:** As the share of biofuels in gasoline increases over 10 percent, conventional fueling equipment will need to be replaced with pumps and tanks capable of handling higher biofuel blends, like B20 and E85. Barack Obama has been one of the strongest proponents in Congress for increasing the national supply of home-grown American ethanol and biodiesel. Obama was the only Democratic presidential candidate to cosponsor and actively campaign to establish the nation's first federal Renewable Fuel Standard, which is now law. In the U.S. Senate, Obama introduced a proposal to create the first national Renewable Diesel Standard to increase our country's production and supply of American-grown biodiesel. He also led the successful effort to make gas stations eligible for a tax credit to cover 30 percent of the costs of installing E85 ethanol refueling pumps. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will build on those efforts to improve the production, supply and distribution of advanced biofuels like cellulosic ethanol and biodiesel.

- **Develop the Next Generation of Biofuels:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will work to ensure that advanced biofuels, including cellulosic ethanol, are developed and incorporated into our national supply as soon as possible. Corn ethanol is the most successful alternative fuel commercially available in the U.S. today, and we should fight the efforts of big oil and big agri-business to undermine this emerging industry. But it represents only a drop in the bucket of our energy demands and making ethanol from corn has some significant limitations. Today we produce about 5 billion gallons of corn-based ethanol per year while we use about 140 billion gallons of gasoline. Even if we are able to double – or even triple – production of ethanol from corn this will still offset only about 10 percent of our gasoline demand. There are also real concerns about bringing set aside lands into corn production as well as concerns about an increase in the use of pesticides, water use and upward pressure on the cost of food for people and livestock alike. These constraints reveal the scope and scale of our energy and environmental challenges. As we develop the next generation of biofuels we must be vigilant to insure that we do in a sustainable fashion so that land and water resources are conserved. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will invest federal resources, including tax incentives, cash prizes and government contracts into developing the most promising technologies with the goal of getting the first two billion gallons of cellulosic ethanol into the system by 2013. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will also work to improve the national supply of advanced biodiesel. From here the Clean Technologies Deployment Venture Fund will speed the deployment of multiple facilities.
- **Expand Locally-Owned Biofuel Refineries:** Less than 10 percent of new ethanol production today is from farmer-owned refineries. New ethanol and biodiesel refineries help jumpstart rural economies. For example, it has been estimated that a 40 million gallon ethanol refinery will add up to 120 jobs, expand a local tax base by \$70 million per year and boost local household income by \$6.7 million annually. The economic development opportunities for advanced cellulosic ethanol technologies hold potential to revitalize rural communities across the country. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe we must ensure that local investment continues to play a significant role as the biofuels industry continues to expand and evolve. They will create a number of incentives for local communities to invest in their biofuels refineries, including expanding federal tax credit programs and providing technical advice to rural communities that are in a strong position to open their own refineries. They will also provide an

additional subsidy per gallon of ethanol produced from new facilities that have a minimum of 25 percent local capital, and he will provide additional loan guarantees for advanced ethanol facilities with local investment.

- **Increase Renewable Fuel Standard:** As a leader in the effort to establish the nation's first Renewable Fuel Standard, Barack Obama understands firsthand the importance of continuing to increase the supply of biofuels in our national fuel supply. He and Joe Biden believe it is imperative that Congress adopt the Senate-passed proposal to increase the RFS to 36 billion gallons by 2022. They will seek to surpass these targets and establish a requirement to produce at least 60 billion gallons of biofuels, including cellulosic ethanol and biodiesel, by 2030.
- **Establish a National Low Carbon Fuel Standard:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will establish a National Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS) to speed the introduction of low-carbon non-petroleum fuels. The standard requires fuel suppliers to reduce the carbon their fuel emits by ten percent by 2020. The Obama-Biden plan will help incentivize increased private sector investment in advanced biofuels and has a sustainability provision to ensure that this boom in U.S. ethanol and biodiesel production does not come at the expense of environmental conservation. The standard will reduce lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions 10 percent by 2020. The LCFS is an important mechanism in ensuring that our efforts to reduce our oil dependence also reduce carbon emissions.
- **Increase Fuel Economy Standards:** Barack Obama has developed an innovative approach to double fuel economy standards within 18 years while protecting the financial future of domestic automakers. Their plan, which will save nearly a half trillion gallons of gasoline and 6 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases by 2028, will establish concrete targets for annual CAFE increases while giving industry the flexibility to meet those targets. Obama's innovative approach broke through a 20 year deadlock in Congress and is the basis for bipartisan legislation that passed the Senate this year.
- **Mandate All New Vehicles are Flexible Fuel Vehicles:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that all new vehicles sold in the U.S. should be flexible fuel vehicles, which means they can run on biofuel blends like E85. They will work with Congress and auto companies to ensure that all new vehicles have flexible fuel vehicle capability by the end of his first term in office.

## **Develop and Deploy New Renewable Technologies**

- **Require 25 Percent of Electricity to Come from Renewable Sources by 2025:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will establish a 25 percent federal Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) to require that 25 percent of electricity consumed in the U.S. is derived from clean, sustainable energy sources, like solar, wind and geothermal by 2025. This requirement will spur significant private sector investment in renewable sources of energy and create thousands of new American jobs, especially in rural areas. As an Illinois state senator, Obama cosponsored a measure to create an RPS in Illinois. And recently, Illinois signed into law a 25 percent RPS by 2025 measure modeled on Obama's state senate RPS efforts. As a U.S. Senator, Obama successfully fought regulatory efforts to put Midwestern wind projects on hold.
- **Extend the Production Tax Credit:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will also extend the federal Production Tax Credit for 5 years to encourage the production of renewable energy like wind and solar. This program will provide incentives to farmers and other local producers of renewable energy to boost rural renewable energy production.

- **Create a Clean Technologies Deployment Venture Capital Fund:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will create a Clean Technologies Deployment Venture Capital Fund to fill a critical gap in U.S. technology development. This Fund will partner with existing investment funds and our National Laboratories to ensure that promising technologies move beyond the lab and are commercialized in the U.S. The risks and associated costs of commercializing a new energy technology often prevent critically important technologies from ever seeing the light of day. The gap between the lab and the marketplace is sometimes referred to as the “Valley of Death,” because many technologies enter but few ever make it out the other side because of the prohibitive costs of building the first commercial-scale facility that processes that energy source. Currently, U.S. venture capital funding is doing an effective job promoting research and development stage, but far too often, technologies invented here in the U.S. such as wind turbines, solar panels, and compact fluorescent bulbs are commercialized overseas and then sold back to American consumers.

Coupled with an Obama Administration’s increased investment in renewable energy research and development, this Fund’s efforts to quickly deploy new technologies like cellulosic ethanol, carbon capture and sequestration, and other clean technologies like bio-based plastics will help ensure that the American economy and environment benefit from clean technologies in the next few years, as opposed to the next several decades. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will invest \$10 billion in this fund for five years, and reinvest profits back into the fund.

- **Invest in a Digital Smart Grid and Improve Rural Transmission:** Like other pieces of infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, our energy grid is outdated and inefficient, resulting in \$50-100 billion dollar losses to the U.S. economy each year. Like President Eisenhower did with the interstate highway system, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will pursue a major investment in our national utility grid to enable a tremendous increase in renewable generation and accommodate 21<sup>st</sup> century energy requirements, such as reliability, smart metering, and distributed storage. They will invest federal money to leverage additional state and private sector funds to help create a digitally connected power grid. Creating a smart grid will also help insulate against terrorism concerns because our grid today is virtually unprotected from terrorists. Installing a smart grid will help individuals produce electricity on their property through solar panels or wind turbines, which they will be able to sell back through the grid. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will direct federal resources, including tax incentives and increased bond authority, to the most vulnerable areas as well as rural areas where significant renewable energy sources are located, as well as work toward national transformation of our energy grid in partnership with states and utilities.

**Invest in Rural Lands and Reduce Carbon Emissions by Promoting Carbon Sequestration:** As forests are cut down, burned and converted to other uses, carbon stored in wood, leaves, and soils are released into the atmosphere, making the global climate change problem worse. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe any domestic program to reduce carbon emissions must include domestic incentives that reward forest owners, farmers, and ranchers when they plant trees, restore grasslands, undertake farming practices that capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, or engage in no till practices that retain carbon currently stored in the soil. Encouraging these efforts will also provide improve water quality and restore natural areas for wildlife and recreation.

**Ensure Heating Assistance:** Barack Obama has been a strong supporter of increased funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) which helps low-income citizens pay their winter heating and summer cooling bills. Some 5.8 million households received energy assistance in 2006, and the program has proved especially critical to seniors, who are more vulnerable to hypothermia and heat stroke. As president, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will build on this important program to ensure low-income families receive proper assistance to pay their heating and cooling bills and receive support to weatherize their homes to reduce energy costs.



#### IV. IMPROVE RURAL QUALITY OF LIFE

**Combat the Scourge of Methamphetamine:** According to the 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 11.7 million Americans had tried methamphetamine (“meth”) at least once in their lifetime and an estimated 1.4 million Americans regularly used the drug. The number of Americans who have tried meth is up an incredible 156 percent since 1996. This epidemic has hit rural communities particularly hard.

Barack Obama has a long record of fighting the meth epidemic. In the Illinois State Senate, Obama fought for and passed legislation to increase penalties against meth manufacturers, particularly in cases where a child was exposed. In the U.S. Senate, Obama supported the Combat Meth Act of 2005, major parts of which became law in 2006. The bill puts federal funds into the fight against methamphetamine, provides assistance to children affected by meth abuse, and places restrictions on the sale of the ingredients used to make the drug. As president, he and Joe Biden will continue the fight to rid our communities of meth and offer support to help addicts heal.

- **Cracking Down on Importation of Meth Chemicals:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will cut off drug lab supplies by restricting global imports of precursor chemicals, and he will take on the Mexican drug cartels in partnership with Mexico and other nations in the region.
- **Help Mothers Beat Meth Addiction:** The meth crisis in rural areas is taking an especially severe toll on mothers and children. A survey of 500 county law enforcement officials in 44 states found that 61 percent of counties saw an increase during the last three years in the number of women abusing meth. Yet, when mothers in America’s heartland seek out treatment to heal from their addiction, they are often forced to make a choice between treatment and their children. Most treatment programs prohibit children or disregard children in the provision of services. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe we need to expand family treatment programs where mothers and their children are treated together, as a whole family.
- **Cleanup Meth Labs:** There are presently no federal standards to determine if a former meth lab is now safe and livable. Barack Obama and Joe Biden support the efforts to establish voluntary scientifically-based standards for former meth lab sites.

**Improve Health Care:** On many important measures of health, people in rural areas are in poorer health than their urban counterparts. Rural populations, including children, are less likely to have health insurance or good access to doctors and hospitals. The more isolated a rural community, the more difficult it is to ensure the availability of needed health care services. A fundamental challenge facing rural America is stabilizing, sustaining, and strengthening access to affordable quality health care.

- **Provide Universal Health Care and Lower Health Costs:** A basic problem facing rural America is access to affordable quality health care. Barack Obama and Joe Biden are committed to signing universal health legislation by the end of Obama’s first term in office that ensures all Americans have high-quality, affordable health care coverage. Their plan will save a typical American family up to \$2,500 every year on their health care costs.
- **Help Small Businesses Afford Health Care:** The rural economy is dependent upon small business, but small employers often struggle to offer health coverage to their employees because it is too expensive. The Obama-Biden plan will help small employers unable to offer health coverage to their employees by allowing small employers to participate in the National Health Insurance Exchange and purchase either a new public plan or a private plan for their employees. The Obama-Biden plan will also provide

subsidies for those who need them. Very small businesses will be exempted from the plan's requirement to pay into the system.

- **Promote Fairness in Medicare and Medicaid Reimbursement:** Medicare and Medicaid funding systems have historically penalized rural areas. Health care providers in rural states often get less money for the very same procedure performed in urban areas. These lower reimbursement rates make it difficult for rural areas to recruit and retain doctors. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will work to ensure a more equitable Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement structure.
- **Bring Doctors, Nurses, and other Health Care Professionals to Rural America:** Rural America faces shortages of providers, making it a challenge for those with health insurance to get the care they need. Two-thirds of the federally designated health professional shortage areas in the United States can be found in rural America. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will attract providers to rural America by creating a loan forgiveness program for doctors and nurses who work in underserved rural areas. Additionally, they will encourage the expansion of state-of-the-art health professional online education courses to reach students across rural America.
- **Expand Community Clinics:** To promote access to preventive, diagnostic and other primary care services, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will increase federal capital funds for the building and start-up costs of community health centers. They will also allow them to obtain reimbursement for a portion of transportation-related costs. Building networks among health care providers in rural areas is important to ensuring care coordination, particularly for the high proportion of elderly who reside in rural areas, often with multiple chronic conditions. Their plan to increase efficiency and quality of care includes planning grants for local health providers to coordinate care.
- **Improve Care for Rural Veterans:** Veterans in rural areas have poorer health and less access to care. In many rural parts of the country, the nearest Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) medical facility is hundreds of miles away. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will expand the number of Vet Centers so more veterans can access care more easily. They will fight efforts to weaken the VA by outsourcing critical competencies, but they will also give the VA the tools and flexibility to contract with other providers in any remote area of the country in which the VA determines there is inadequate access to a VA medical center or in which it is impractical to build one. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will strengthen the VA's telemedicine infrastructure to expand the delivery of high quality health care to veterans residing in rural communities.
- **Invest in Health Information Technology and Telemedicine:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden support increasing access to care in rural areas by promoting the wider adoption of effective telecommunications and health information technologies. They will invest \$10 billion a year over the next five years to move the U.S. health care system to broad adoption of standards-based electronic health information systems. They will phase in requirements for full implementation of health IT and commit the necessary federal resources to make it happen. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will ensure that these systems are developed in coordination with providers and frontline workers, including those in rural and underserved areas. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will also expand the use of telemedicine, using communications technology to bring important health care services to isolated rural communities.

**Improve Rural Education and Attract and Retain Young People in Rural America:** Public schools lie at the heart of rural communities. These schools educate children, serve as local employers and are social and cultural centers.

- **Support Rural Teachers:** Rural teachers face many unique challenges, including lack of access to professional development opportunities, preparation for multiple subjects and grade levels, and multiple extracurricular duties. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will support rural teachers at all stages of their careers. This means modifying the certification and teacher preparation process so that, for example, a biology major can avoid unnecessary and expensive coursework to become a teacher, and instead learn to teach through proven programs such as teaching residencies that pair up new recruits with master teachers in rural classrooms. Such a program was introduced by Obama and passed by the U.S. Senate. It also means giving successful teachers more control over what goes on in their classrooms, and more opportunities to advance through career ladders, where teachers may choose to take on additional instructional leadership roles.
- **Attract Teachers to Rural Schools:** Experts predict that we will need two million new teachers over the next decade to fill our nation's classrooms. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will provide incentives for talented individuals to enter the teaching profession, including increased pay for teachers who work in rural areas. They support making the teaching profession well-respected, well-paid, and results-based with real opportunities for lifetime career growth and development.
- **Support Entrepreneurship Education:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will create a Rural Revitalization Program to attract and retain young people to rural America. The program will make grants available to four-year and community colleges, the extension services, non-profit organizations and primary and secondary schools to provide access for rural Americans to entrepreneurship education.
- **Bring Farms to Schools:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will support providing locally grown, healthy foods to students as a part of the school meals program. This will both reduce childhood obesity and grow vibrant rural economies, supporting community-based food systems and strengthening family farms. They will support funding for farm-to-school projects for food, labor, equipment, and staff training. They also will allow schools to give priority to local sources when ordering food. Currently the USDA prohibits schools from requesting local products during the bidding process. Finally, they will expand commodity support to include the school breakfast program as well as the school lunch program.

**Expand Research at Land Grant and 1890 Schools:** The research and education provided by the nation's land grant and 1890 colleges played a pivotal role in establishing America's competitive advantage in agriculture. Today, these schools need more funding to respond to new challenges. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will increase research and educational funding for projects such as enhancing the profitability and competitiveness of small and mid-size farms, entrepreneurial education for adults and youth learners, and research on alternative energy production systems and how to produce conservation commodities efficiently.

**Support Community Colleges in Fulfilling their Mission in Rural America:** Studies show that community colleges graduates often remain in rural communities. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will provide funding to community colleges to reevaluate the types of skills and education that are in demand from students and local businesses in support of health careers, renewable energy initiatives, and other ventures to revitalize rural economies. This will lead community colleges to implement new associate degree programs that reflect the increasingly dynamic and technical skills required for rural America to respond to a globalizing workforce.

**Protect the Financial Security & Health of Seniors:** Rural communities are significantly older than their urban counterparts. Across America, 20 percent of rural Americans are older than 59 compared to 15 percent in cities.

- **Protect and Strengthen Social Security:** As the cornerstone of America's social compact, Social Security has lifted millions of seniors and their families out of poverty. Social Security is particularly

critical to our rural communities. In fact, one study found that rural communities depend on income from Social Security nearly twice as much as non-rural communities. The full measure of Social Security's value for its recipients – as well as for those who look after and love them – is incalculable. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will preserve Social Security by working in a bipartisan way to maintain its solvency for future generations.

- **Secure Pensions:** Barack Obama and Joe Biden will insist that companies keep the promises they have made to their employees. They will amend bankruptcy laws to keep companies from filing for Chapter 11 in order to avoid obligations to their workers. In the Senate, Barack Obama voted for new rules to force companies to properly fund their pension plans so taxpayers don't end up footing the bill. Obama has also voted to shore up funding of the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, the federal agency that guarantees retirees receive at least some of their pension monies if their companies go out of business.
- **Eliminate Income Taxes for Seniors Making Less Than \$50,000:** Since the New Deal, we've had a basic understanding in America: If you work hard and pay into the system, you've earned the right to a secure retirement. But too many seniors aren't getting that security, even though they've held up their end of the bargain. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will eliminate all income taxation of seniors making less than \$50,000 per year. This will provide immediate relief to 22 million American seniors who will not need to file an income tax return, and will eliminate all income taxes for nearly seven million seniors at a savings of roughly \$1,400 each year. For many seniors, this will eliminate the need to hire a tax preparer, resulting in even larger savings.
- **Provide Cheaper Prescription Drugs:** Our seniors pay the highest prices in the world for brand-name drugs. To help lower the cost of pharmaceuticals, Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that the federal government should negotiate for lower drug prices for seniors in the Medicare program, just as it negotiates to obtain lower prices for our veterans. They also support efforts to allow seniors to import prescription drugs from Canada.

**Upgrade Rural Infrastructure:** Much of the public infrastructure in rural America has fallen into significant disrepair. This has hurt the long-term competitiveness of our rural communities. Barack Obama and Joe Biden believe that America's long-term competitiveness depends on the stability of our critical infrastructure. They will invest in the core infrastructure that rural communities need to thrive.

- **Improve Transportation Options:** Rural America depends on reliable, cost-effective and efficient transportation - whether by barge, truck or rail - to deliver its products to market. Nearly half the cost of U.S. grain is accounted for by transportation costs. These problems are made worse by increasing rates for rail service, aging locks and dams and congested roadways. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will make strengthening our transportation systems, including our roads and bridges, a top priority.
- **Improve Water and Sewer Systems:** Rural areas often depend on federal funding to maintain their water and sewer systems. Recently, however, budget cuts and reduced grant funds have combined to cut down on the number of new projects. As a result, these important infrastructure areas have been neglected and allowed to degrade. Barack Obama and Joe Biden will ensure these programs are adequately funded.
- **Modernize Infrastructure on the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers:** Obama strongly supported the Water Resources and Development Act, which provided funding to modernize the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers' system of locks and dams. The bill will also provide funding for environmental restoration along the upper Mississippi. The decay of existing locks and dams has led to stagnating economic development for areas along the river because of the decreasing ability of farmers and other

producers to ship their goods both domestically and internationally. Obama's efforts to pass the Water Resources and Development Act have been praised by the National Corn Grower's Association and the American Soybean Association. As president, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will continue to ensure that the federal government invests in upgrading our national transportation infrastructure for agricultural and commercial goods.

- **Target Rural Development Aid to Truly Rural Areas:** Since 2001, the USDA has distributed more than \$70 billion in grants and loans through its Rural Development program. Unfortunately, less than half of those funds have gone to truly rural areas. Instead, USDA has awarded the bulk of these benefits to metropolitan regions, recreational and retirement communities, and businesses that hardly qualify as contributing to the quality of life in rural America. In one particularly egregious example, USDA awarded \$4.5 million to the Black Dog Tavern on Martha's Vineyard to refinance a mortgage and to expand its clothing stores. One key cause of this distorted allocation of funds has been the Bush Administration's decision to shift much of the funding from grants to loans, pricing out the lower-income, truly rural areas that most need the funding but can least afford to repay the loans. As president, Barack Obama and Joe Biden will rationalize USDA funding rules to ensure that these funds are provided to truly rural areas, with preferences for areas that have a harder time attracting private investment.

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