

Rural Policy Action Report Press Release

New rural policy report provides roadmap out of Washington deadlock

The Rural Policy Action Report shares popular policies to benefit rural America.

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Dysfunction in Washington is on full display this month. The government is shut down and is ignoring the upcoming deadline to prevent massive cost increases to healthcare.

But there is another way. Released today, the [Rural Policy Action Report](#) outlines policies that are popular with everyday Americans and provides practical steps Congress could take immediately to deliver for the American people. The report provides a positive agenda to improve rural people's lives and deliver lower costs, higher wages, and the freedom to make choices about our own lives.

Forty groups contributed to the report, which showcases the broad support for the tools and opportunities we need to build a good life. Brought together by the Rural Democracy Initiative, contributing groups include regional groups like New Rural Project, statewide organizations like the Wisconsin Farmers Union, and national organizations like the American Federation of Teachers. These groups represent diverse geographies, issue expertise, and constituents. Together, they form a cornerstone of a governing majority coalition, giving rural people power to influence the decisions that impact their lives.

→ [Rural Policy Action Report PDF](#)

→ [Rural Policy Action Report](#) Website

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RESHAPE GOVERNMENT FOR WORKING PEOPLE

The report recognizes that our country runs on the work and innovation of working people. But for decades, big corporations and the ultrawealthy have exploited government influence to gain special treatment and put up barriers for the rest of us. To reshape the government for working people, the report highlights 26 policy priorities, organized into four pillars.

1. Rein in corporate greed and support workers, small businesses, and farmers
2. Invest in foundational infrastructure for thriving communities
3. Everyone gets a fair deal - no one should be discriminated against or excluded from the benefits of pillars 1 and 2
4. Steward our land and natural resources for a prosperous and sustainable future

RURAL CASE STUDIES

The report also features four rural stories that illustrate how policy can either help or hinder rural communities.

1. Last year, Missourians organized a ballot initiative and voted to raise the statewide minimum wage and establish paid sick leave. This pro-worker ballot initiative was more popular than any statewide candidate and shows the broad support for populist economic policy. When rural people have a seat at the policy-making table, we build an economy from the bottom up and middle out, not the top down.
2. Yakutat, Alaska utilized federal funding to repair a failing municipal heating system. This investment kept the school in session and created energy efficiency that will save millions while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Yet the 2024 success story in Yakutat is much more difficult today, because politicians in Washington cut programs and diverted funds to the ultrawealthy and giant corporations.
3. Bishop Marcia Dinkins of the Black Appalachian Coalition shares how healthcare saved her daughter's life, but massive cuts to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act will raise prices, kick people off of insurance, cause hospitals and health care infrastructure to close, and disrupt rural economies.
4. The report also shares how immigrants, small business owners, and farmers near Marshalltown, Iowa, are working together to build up their community. And federal policy could supercharge their hard work or a cruel immigration policy could cause immense disruption and send them backwards.

HISTORY OF THE RURAL POLICY ACTION REPORT

The 2025 Rural Policy Action Report is the third publication of this report. Since the original 2021 Rural Policy Action Report, we've achieved major victories — proving that when we organize we can make change. However, many of those successes have been reversed in 2025, and new policies have added barriers and harsher obstacles. The report provides a detailed accounting of the progress and rollbacks of the priorities in previous reports.

QUOTES FROM CONTRIBUTORS

"This report is full of rural people and the policy actions they dream of for a better life for themselves and generations to come. Join this committed coalition of rural advocates taking action. With sustained engagement from political and nonprofit leaders, rural communities will help create this future for us all."

-Sarah Jaynes, Rural Democracy Initiative

"The backdrop to our report is that the majority in Congress has decided to shut down the government rather than make a deal with Democrats to pass a budget that extends affordable health care. Billionaires are getting tax breaks, but we're seeing rising costs and cuts to vital programs we utilize. We're sharing the Rural Policy Action Report so rural people can shape the decisions about the places we call home."

-Michael Chameides, Rural Democracy Initiative

"For too long, corporate consolidation and political inaction have left rural communities struggling to stay on their feet. Farmers, workers, and small-town families are paying the price while a handful of corporations reap the rewards. The Rural Policy Action Report points the way toward restoring balance with common-sense policies that support fair markets, protect our resources, and put decision-making power back where it belongs: in the hands of rural people. The challenges facing rural America are real but so are the opportunities when we come together. This report reflects what rural communities already know: when we invest in people, in fair markets, and in stewardship of our land and water, everyone benefits. Wisconsin Farmers Union is proud to stand with others across the country working for a future where rural prosperity and democracy go hand in hand."

-Danielle Endvick, Wisconsin Farmers Union

"We believe that every American — regardless of whether they live in small towns or big cities, have been here for decades or just arrived — should have what they need to succeed. The Rural Policy Action Report explores tools and policies to improve the lives of rural people, including policies like funding for our hospitals and access to reproductive health care. We look forward to working with rural community leaders and state policymakers together as we shape a new vision for Rural America that centers the needs of the people living and working here." **-Kendra Kimbirauskas, Senior Director of Food, Agriculture & Rural Economies at State Innovation Exchange**

"New Rural Project and other partners in North Carolina worked hard to expand Medicaid and ensure more people have access to affordable healthcare. Now, we're at risk of the federal government rolling back the progress with drastic cuts to health care which will have a disproportionate impact to rural hospitals in economically distressed North Carolina. But, it's not just North Carolina, the Rural Policy Action Report highlights that health care is an urgent priority for rural people across the country."

-Cynthia Wallace, New Rural Project

"Strong public schools are the beating heart of America's rural communities, but have been unfairly impacted far too long by inadequate funding, political distractions, and voucher schemes that siphon tax dollars to unaccountable private schools. The Rural Policy Action Report highlights the critical need for commonsense policy solutions like universal pre-K, full funding for students with disabilities, and support for recruiting and retaining teachers who love and live in the rural communities they serve. If we want rural America to thrive tomorrow, we must provide our students what they need to succeed and shine today."

-Heather DuBois Bourenane, Executive Director, Wisconsin Public Education Network

"Like rural regions across the country, the people of Northwest Wisconsin have a strong sense of identity centered in their rural places from small towns like Brule to growing cities like Superior, tribal communities like Bad River to tourist destinations like Ashland and the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. They are economic engines. They are cultural centers. They are healthcare and education hubs. They are situated amidst some of the state and nation's most precious natural resources from forest to farmland to the crisp, clean waters of Lake Superior. For too long, our agency in our futures has been stripped away by corporate greed - leaving our communities behind, excluding BIPOC and youth voices, and alienating our region from the rest of Wisconsin while taking advantage of our resources, labor, and money. The Rural Policy Action Report is our vision of reining in that corporate greed and returning power to the communities from which it was robbed as we take bold steps to rebuild a Wisconsin where we are all safe, healthy, and happy again."

-David Mettelle, Executive Director, Progress North

"The Rural Policy Action Report is a roadmap so people in every zip code in the United States have good-paying jobs, affordable healthcare, and accessible child care and elder care services so people can take care of their families, plan for the future, and contribute to their communities regardless of race, national origin, gender or geography."

-Shamaine Daniels, CASA

"Whether you live in Marquette or Monroe or somewhere in between, most of us believe that we all need lower costs, higher wages and the freedom to make choices about our own lives in order to thrive. The 2025 Rural Policy Action Report gives specifics for how our elected officials can make this a reality for everyone. As rural communities and small towns continue to feel the impacts of consolidation, lack of federal investment and rising authoritarianism, folks are looking for answers to deliver prosperity and fairness. We hope the 2025 Rural Policy Action Report can provide a roadmap for change while we face unprecedented challenges at the federal level."

-Levi Teitel, Communications Coordinator, Progress Michigan

"In the Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan, my neighbors and I are proud to call this place home. But with fewer job opportunities, a housing crisis, and unaffordable health care, folks

are struggling to make ends meet. Wealthy corporate interests stoke fear and division to distract us from the real challenges facing rural communities across the UP and the country. The Rural Policy Action Report lays out a roadmap for how we can reinvest in our people and ensure everyone has a fair shot at economic success.”

Kalvin Carter, Program Director, Up North Advocacy

“Rural justice means protecting the water, lands, and treaties that sustain Native Nations. When our sovereignty and sacred sites are respected, every community—Native and non-Native alike—has a fair chance to prosper.”

-Cherilyn Yazzie, Council Delegate, Navajo Nation

“The Rural Policy Action Report charts the path so people in every community can have good-paying jobs, affordable healthcare, and accessible child care. This report is full of policy proposals aimed at supporting local officials in rural communities across the country, not only so they can better govern for their constituents, but deliver results for them as well. Local Progress is proud to partner with the Rural Democracy Initiative to ensure rural policy makers have the tools they need to be bold and bring real change so their communities can thrive.”

-Ivan Luevanos-Elms, Executive Director, Local Progress

“Like so many others in rural places across the country, we have been asking for the same things: lower costs, better jobs and wages, and a real chance at a good life. The Rural Policy Action Report helps us move beyond the myth of a single type of small town and understand what rural America truly wants and needs - in all its diversity. This benchmark helps us see how we’re veering off track. For policymakers who care about rural America, this report gives you the step-by-step guide to show you mean it.”

-Annie Contractor, the Associate Manager of Government Affairs, RuralOrganizing.org.

“I’ve got family in Albany, Georgia — farmers through and through — who’ve worked the land for generations but have never once been invited to shape the policies that determine whether they make it. That’s the reality in too many rural places: democracy and the economy keep moving, and Main Street is just expected to take whatever comes. Efforts like this are about changing that — because families like mine, and millions across rural America, should be defining the future, not just living under it.”

-Richard Trent, National Executive Director, Main Street Alliance

"Although rural businesses serve as the driver of many local economies throughout the United States, they face unique barriers that have not been adequately addressed for far too long. We hope that policymakers will use this report on rural policy actions as a roadmap when they consider solutions to the systemic challenges limiting the growth of many rural small businesses."

-David Chase, Vice President, Policy & Advocacy, Small Business Majority.

"Rural people, and Americans from all walks of life, are tired of attempts to divide us and distract us from daylight robbery of our futures at the hands of billionaires and big corporations. This essential new resource outlines a common sense policy agenda that reins in corporate greed, puts power back into the hands of our communities, and offers bold, concrete steps to build a better future where workers, small businesses, and families can not only survive but thrive."

-Tope Folarin, Executive Director, Institute for Policy Studies

"As Congress continues to kick the Farm Bill can down the road, farmers are forced to navigate this turbulent farm economy by themselves. We are now decades into a farm crisis that has not only stripped farmers and rural communities of their economic resilience, but has also stripped the land of its health. This report shows a path forward so the federal government can be there for our farmers and help them stay afloat, care for the land, and thrive rather than just survive."

-Michael Happ, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy

"In communities across Montana, extractive corporations and political dysfunction are harming all of us. Corporations continue to reap record breaking profits, while farmers and ranchers, teachers and families are not just paying more for everything from energy to healthcare, they are getting less. The Rural Policy Action Report highlights a key contrast to what we're seeing now: when we invest in fair markets, the stewardship of our land and water, and in our people, everyone benefits. The report shows the pathway for common-sense policies that would allow our communities to flourish." **-Edward Barta, Northern Plains Resource Council**

About

Rural Democracy Initiative supports and connects rural leaders working to transform their lives and communities. It is a unique funding collaborative building power toward a thriving democracy and shared prosperity across diverse communities in rural areas and small cities. Rural Democracy invests in year-round civic engagement, issue advocacy, community organizing infrastructure, and rural leadership in statewide and national coalitions. In addition to grantmaking, Rural Democracy also supports rural leaders and organizations through convening, research, and communications. More at RuralDemocracyInitiative.org.