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## Sen. Franken Pushes Back Against President Trump's Proposed Cuts to Rural Development

Senator and Fellow Senate Democrats Urge President Trump to Rethink Plan to Cut Farm Bill Programs by \$231 Billion; Eliminate Rural Development Programs; Abolish Under Secretary of Rural Development

WASHINGTON, D.C. [06/01/17]—U.S. Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) and his colleagues are calling on President Donald Trump to respond to the needs of small towns and rural communities in Minnesota and across our nation, instead of proposing drastic cuts to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) rural development and Farm Bill programs that help keep them strong.

President Trump's 2018 budget proposal, released last week, threatens the ability of local communities to support rural home ownership; provide clean drinking and waste water systems; and promote access to critical services such as rural hospitals, police, and firefighters. It would also do away with the Under Secretary of Rural Development at USDA.

"Small towns and rural communities embody many of our nation's greatest strengths, and the people of these communities deserve every opportunity to raise their families with well-paying jobs and a high quality of life," wrote the Senators. "Our small towns and rural communities, however, experience unique challenges in developing and maintaining infrastructure and providing high-quality health services and education. Understanding and responding to these unique challenges to help these communities create jobs and drive economic growth is the principal mission of USDA Rural Development."

The letter was also signed by Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), Joe Donnelly (D-Ind.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Bob Casey (D-Pa.), Michael Bennet (D-Colo.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), Gary Peters (D-Mich.), Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Tom Carper (D-Del.), Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Joe Manchin (D-W. Va.), Chris Coons (D-Del.), Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), Angus King (I-Maine), Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), and Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.).

Sen. Franken has long been a strong advocate for making investments in rural infrastructure. Last year, he held meetings in rural communities across Minnesota to hear firsthand the challenges some communities face in securing the infrastructure needed to support businesses, community members, and local economies. And this year, he met with ag producers and leaders from six counties—including Minnesota Department of Agriculture Commissioner Dave Frederickson and Deputy Commissioner Matt Wohlman—to discuss farm prices, as well as the effect that agriculture budget cuts proposed by President Trump would have on Minnesota.

You can read the full text of the letter below.

May 30, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20006

Cc: The Honorable Mick Mulvaney, Director of the Office of Management and Budget  
The Honorable Sonny Perdue, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

Dear President Trump,

We write today to raise concerns about your budget request to cut Farm Bill programs by \$231 billion and to dramatically reduce or eliminate rural development programs within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These proposed cuts, combined with USDA's reorganization plan, which would abolish the Under Secretary of Rural Development at USDA, would have significant negative impacts on rural America.

Small towns and rural communities embody many of our nation's greatest strengths, and the people of these communities deserve every opportunity to raise their families with well-paying jobs and a high quality of life. Our small towns and rural communities, however, experience unique challenges in developing and maintaining infrastructure and providing high-quality health services and education. Understanding and responding to these unique challenges to help these communities create jobs and drive economic growth is the principal mission of USDA Rural Development.

Unfortunately, the fiscal year 2018 budget proposes drastic cuts to USDA Rural Development that undermine its ability to serve rural America. Although we are deeply concerned with many other aspects of the USDA budget, the focus of this letter is limited to USDA's rural development mission. These reductions would undermine the ability of local communities to support rural home ownership; provide clean drinking and waste water systems; and promote access to critical services such as rural hospitals, police, and firefighters. If enacted, these cuts would have a damaging impact on rural communities throughout the country.

For example, zeroing out the USDA funding for water and wastewater infrastructure projects leaves small communities without access to the federal funds needed to address the \$2.5 billion backlog for clean and reliable drinking water systems, sanitary sewage waste disposal, and emergency water assistance. Eliminating USDA's small business programs leaves businesses with less access to capital, educational opportunities, entrepreneurial training, and technical support. These programs have been

credited with saving almost 800,000 jobs and have helped finance more than 107,000 businesses since 2009. And finally, the budget proposal jeopardizes critical rural broadband health service grants that provide communities with additional tools to help provide access to education and rural health care, including battling the opioid epidemic. Simply put, cuts to these programs hinder the ability of rural America to see economic growth and development.

These cuts, coupled with the recently announced USDA reorganization, deepens our concern that the decisions made by this Administration will harm small towns and rural America. While we applaud the establishment of an Under Secretary for Trade as required by the 2014 Farm Bill, we are concerned with the planned elimination of the Under Secretary of Rural Development. USDA officials have made it clear that there is no legal requirement to eliminate any of the Under Secretary positions at USDA in order to create an Under Secretary for Trade. Both agricultural trade and rural development functions at USDA deserve and require high-level, accountable, and singularly focused leadership to ensure their missions success. We do not believe that enhancing agricultural exports has to come with a demotion for the rural development activities.

Additionally, we are disappointed that USDA plans to implement the reorganization even before public comments are due, suggesting that USDA has no real plan to consider these comments and make any changes based on the comments. USDA must carefully consider all comments received before the proposed reorganization is actually implemented.

We will continue to fight for rural America by rejecting these budget cuts, and we ask that you reconsider USDA's plan and maintain the Under Secretary for Rural Development. We believe that if we can work together, we can find a better way to respond to the unique needs of America's small towns and rural communities.

We look forward to working with you and your Administration on these critical issues.

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