

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

RENEWING US RURAL PROSPERITY:
FEDERAL POLICY IN THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, September 8, 2021

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. PIPA: Good afternoon. I'm Tony Pipa, Senior Fellow in the Center for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution. And I'd like to welcome you to today's event on renewing U.S. role prosperity, the federal policy in the Biden administration.

Thanks to all of you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to join us. And as the conversation unfolds, we encourage you to engage on social media using the #ReimagineRural. For today's program, we are honored to have the Secretary of Agriculture, Thomas Vilsack, who will be in conversation with the New York Times columnist, Nick Kristof. And then we'll have the privilege to continue with a panel discussion among Alejandra Y. Castillo who is the Assistant Secretary at the Department of Commerce and Ines Polonius who is CEO of Communities Unlimited, and Connie Stewart, the Executive Director of Initiatives at Humboldt State University.

Immediately after his election, you know, President Biden made a public commitment that as he seeks to enable an economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, rural America would not be left behind. Rural America feeds, powers and protects our nation at rates disproportionate to other places.

But employment and crime age linger forced participation in rural areas still hadn't recovered to pre-2008 recession levels even before COVID-19 hit. While in Metros, they did not only recovered, but grown. And this geographic divergence, some call it regional or spatial inequality has been a consistent feature over the recent past as our economy has increasingly become more globalized and more digital.

And in an increasingly interconnected society and economy, one that I would say makes the rural urban divide an outdated notion, this really poses challenges to the overall wellbeing of America especially as some places have been hit hard with addiction and what some call deaths of despair.

Just as we're seeing more welcomed attention to place based policies from federal policy makers including policies focused on rural communities to help the stress communities or communities that are facing this significant disruption or transitions to be successful.

There's also a racial equity component to this. Black and Native rural residents are at least two and half times more likely to live in an economically distressed county than rural white residents. In 86 percent of the counties that exhibit persistent poverty are rural. Many of the areas most effective by changes in the climate, weather, hurricanes or floods or fires are increases in temperature are also rural.

So if you think about federal rural policy, it's important to keep in mind that rural America is very diverse both demographically and economically. Communities of color make up more than 20 percent of the rural population and only five to six percent of the jobs in rural America are directly employed by agriculture. Sectors such as healthcare and education, outdoor recreation, manufacturing, retail, energy, these are all important to the rural economy with lots of differences in different regions of the country.

So throughout U.S. history, federal policy has played an important role in helping rural places thrive. But the legacy of this responsiveness has then resulted in a complicated array of programs that are available to rural communities as they try to advance social, community and economic development. Over 400 programs that span 13 departments, 50 offices and a myriad of Congressional committees.

Some of these programs are specifically for rural, most are not. And those that aren't often make it more difficult for world leaders and organizations to access their resources. So we're excited about the opportunity that today's program provides to explore how the Biden administration and Congress might seek to modernize and update rural policy as proposals to build back better, move forward in the bipartisan infrastructure bill and the budget reconciliation process.

How can these help rural America deal with the 21st century challenges, the disruption caused by COVID-19 and changes in the economy and society? And we'll start with the Secretary of Agriculture, Tom Vilsack, in conversation with Nick Kristof, an award-winning columnist for the New York Times. Typically known for his writing about global health, poverty, and gender issues in the developing world.

But his latest book, *Tightrope: Americans Reaching for Hope* written with his wife, Sheryl

Wudunn, chronicled the challenges and resilience of people in places across the United States. With many of the stories coming from Nick's friends and acquaintances in Ava where he grew up on a farm where he continues to be rooted.

And he's actually taken a leave of absence from the Times to explore or run for governor of Oregon for precisely some of the issues that I mentioned at the beginning. So, Nick, thanks so much for being with us and for hosting this conversation today. And I'll let you introduce the Secretary and take it away.

MR. KRISTOF: Thanks so much, Tony. And thanks for Brookings for hosting this conversation about an issue that is enormously important as I stand here on the family farm in an area that has been really hurt by some of the long-term trends. I appreciate the attention.

And, Secretary Vilsack, thanks very much for joining this conversation. You're an old hand at this having been a major in Iowa, a two-term governor in Iowa. Having been the Secretary of Agriculture the first time around in the Obama administration. The longest serving member of the cabinet then and then coming back for more as Agriculture Secretary now. So welcome and thanks for -- we look forward to this conversation.

Well, let me start by asking about the rural economy. I mean I think that there's probably some selection bias. And those of us who were tuning in and we all understand the importance of this issue. But there are, I think, millions of Americans who don't appreciate the importance. And they'd say, well, it's too bad what's happening in some of these backwaters like Yamhill, Oregon or in parts of Iowa. But at the end of the day as, you know, Brookings noted, frankly, you know, 72 percent of the jobs created between 2008 and the pandemic were in metropolitan areas where the population was more than one million.

And to the extent that the country's economic future will depend on some of these new technologies. That that should be the nation's focus and not these places in rural America. So how do we respond to those skeptics? Why does this matter?

MR. VILSACK: Well, it matters first and foremost because rural America is the place

where most of the food that we consume in this country is generated and produced, which makes us a food secure nation. We obviously produce more than what we need for our own people. And so, we are able to export which helps to create jobs in those cities and metropolitan areas that you just alluded to.

So it's an economic driver for the entire country. It's a national security imperative that we are food secure. It is a place where most of the water that we consume is impacted and effected. Certainly, in the western part of the U.S., a failure to pay attention to our forested areas in the way that we need to is now resulting in our inability to deal with catastrophic wildfires and can compromise the capacity to have adequate drinking water.

It is also the place where most of the energy -- when you flip on the lights, turn on your computer stop and think about where that energy is generated. Most of it is generated in rural places. And it is also a place that disproportionately provides the men and women who serve in our military.

At any point in time, the rural population might be 10, 15 percent of the country, but it represents as much as 30 to 40 percent of the military. And I think it's because there's a value system in which people grow up an understanding, you can't keep taking from the land. You have to give something back to it. The same is true of a country.

So I think for all those reasons, this is an important place. Having said that, I think our approach to the economy in rural America is upside down, is in need of transformation and change. And I'm happy to talk about that if it fits into the questions that you have today.

MR. KRISTOF: Yeah, I would like to come back to that and, you know, I agree. I do think that a lot of rural America isn't living up to its potential. And America cannot live up to its potential assuming any Americans are not living up to theirs.

So I'm thinking about following your footsteps. Many, many years ago and running for governor here in Oregon partly because of some of these issues. And that's why I have been talking to economists and other experts and looking at what can be done for those parts of Oregon in rural areas that really have been left behind and are struggling? And I've been struck that they often don't have very good answers for what the business model will be in places that are remote whether in Native

reservations that are a long way from cities.

You know, people talk about -- whenever you talk about cities, people talk about Pittsburgh as the model for a renaissance. But what is the business model for rural communities that aren't near a metropolitan area? They can't be part of food for table that, you know, can't easily develop recreational alternatives. What do you see as that business model going forward?

MR. VILSACK: Well, I grew up in Pittsburgh.

MR. KRISTOF: Oh, okay.

MR. VILSACK: So I'm pretty familiar with multiple generations of transitions that that city has gone through. Here's my take on this and there maybe disagreement about this, but I think the problem is that our rural economy is an extraction economy. It has been historically where we take things from and out of the land. We transport them to some place else. We value add them there. Someplace else creating the opportunity someplace else. And then we try to sell the value added products back to the rural folks at a higher cost.

We need to create a circular economy in rural America. One that plays to the advantages, the natural resource advantages that we have. Now, what does that take? It takes multiple avenues, multiple angles. Local regional food systems is one angle. Renewable energy, the ability to produce wind, solar, hydro that's an opportunity.

The ability to have carbon capture and sequestration and be able to create jobs and economic opportunity for farmers and landowners. That's an opportunity. The ability to have climate friendly production systems is a way of approaching it and biobased manufacturing.

As we transition from an overreliance on fossil fuels, we need to figure out ways in which agricultural waste and residue can be converted into chemicals, materials, fabrics, fibers, fuel, and energy. Now, you're creating new revenue sources for farm families both large and small. And you're also producing the jobs that are necessary for rural communities.

The mistake that's made, Nicholas, I think is people say, well, if you just have broad band. If you just improve the hospital. If you just make sure that school stays open, everything is going

to be fine. You need taxpaying organizations not tax supported organizations. If you have enough taxpaying organizations, you'll have plenty of people to support a hospital. You'll have plenty of people to support a school. And frankly, you might even have enough people to convince a private sector to expand broadband access.

You know, I realize that we have to do a lot more investing at the government level for broadband. But at the end of the day, it isn't about those quality of life, those infrastructure investments. To me, it is about having the right philosophy and the right vision for rural places. And I think it starts with a circular economy.

How do you take advantage? Recreation, tourism? That's also a big opportunity. Every single rural area in the country has one of those opportunities or more. We just need to basically assist them in understanding that vision.

The last point I'll make. There is an imitation of what I refer to as an imitation reflex in small towns. The folks want to do what they saw somebody down the road do. And they just figure, well, if we just have a business park. If we just expand broadband. If we just encourage Microsoft or Google or Facebook to have a big huge computer server center that will be fine.

No, no, no. Don't imitate. Figure out what is unique about your particular area and basically build from that, build out from that. I think that's the way to return some degree of prosperity to rural communities. And the Biden administration, I think understands that when it basically put down a marker. Net zero agricultural omissions by the year 2050. That is a transformational idea and one that can rebuild rural communities.

MR. KRISTOF: You alluded to the degree to which rural economies are becoming more complex and indeed I think Brookings says that only six percent of rural jobs actually derive from agriculture itself. We too much confuse agriculture and rural areas. Should we be thinking much more about developing rural areas in ways that, you know, that go far beyond agriculture?

MR. VILSACK: Well, you can except that -- I mean the reality is that people are now changing their attitudes about agriculture. You know, back 50 years ago, I talked to a group at George

Washington yesterday with Jose Andres (phonetic).

And I said, when I was back in college basically the message that we were sending to American agriculture was, produce, produce, produce and be efficient at it. Well, we've produced and we're incredibly efficient. The problem is that's lead to large scale production agriculture, which a lot of people have concerns about.

Now, what we hear from consumers. What we hear from the market is, well, we want you to sustainably produce. We want basically shorter supply chains. We want a more resilient food system. Well, that's all about local and regional food systems. That's about a focus on nutrient. That's about creating new opportunities for smaller sized operations.

That's about opportunities that the climate change discussion creates unlimited opportunities to increase revenue streams to farmers. So I don't think you would want to necessarily move away from agriculture. I think you want to redefine it. You want to transform that system so that it is in fact more profitable.

And then if you convert that agricultural waste into a variety of new products then you're talking about small manufacturing that has to be done in rural communities. It's not about transporting all that waste thousands of miles to a different processing facility. It's 25 miles. It's 50 miles. And you dot the landscape with these opportunities.

I think that's the future. And that plays to the strength of rural America. If you try to make rural America the next Silicon Valley of fill in the blank. I don't think you're going to get there. But if you say to them, you can take what God's given you. What the advantages you have and figure out how to add value to it right there, right at the location, right on the farmer. Right down the road from the farmer then all of a sudden, you've got a much different agricultural circumstances and situation.

If you link those local regional producers to local markets, schools, institutions, prisons, hospitals, institutional purchasers of food. They'll travel that food a thousand miles away in a frozen truck. You know, by it local. Create a whole series of supply chain jobs that are connected to this. I just think we've been approaching this in fundamentally the wrong way forever.

MR. KRISTOF: The dogs you heard barking in the background, those are the farm dogs. That's a local color that we inadvertently provided.

MR. VILSACK: They're barking approval.

MR. KRISTOF: Yes, indeed. I guess they were. You know, what has unfolded in my hometown is an economic challenge, but it's also been a human tragedy. And in the sense that a third of the kids on my old school bus are now dead from drugs, alcohol, and suicide.

And good jobs went away. They self-medicated. The social fabric disintegrated very quickly and very tragically. And so -- but I must say that I think the Biden administration gives me some real hope because of the talk about a broad range of initiatives that might make a difference that aren't limited to rural America, but they seem to me something of an echo of the New Deal which was transformative for my town.

Rural electrification transformed this town and vastly improved productivity. And, you know, bandwidth is maybe a modern echo of that. My school, my old high school, was built in 1935 with New Deal money and is still working today developing economic return on that investment in 1935.

And then the GI Bill of Rights got so many people around here. They're in education. Their first home. Is there a chance to do something that is, indeed, you know, the New Deal was just so transformative for so many rural communities and for the people in it. Can we now provide something that truly is a little bit like that?

MR. VILSACK: Oh, I don't think there is any question about it. Between the infrastructure bill that passed in a bipartisan way through the Senate and the House and the Build Back Better Reconciliation effort, you have a number of components.

Let's start with broadband that's the obvious one. You know, in the past, we put a billion dollars here and a billion dollars there and maybe five million dollars here. And bits and pieces. You can't do it in bits and pieces. You have to have a major infusion of resources. And these bills basically call for \$65 billion to be invested in expanding access to broadband. And not just being able to check a box and say, well, you know, you've got one in ten. You basically have to have uploaded, downloaded

speeds that make sense in the real world.

And so, what we're doing at USCA is we're sort of pushing the envelope here with our reconnect programs to try to get people to speed up the download and upload so that rural folks have the same level of access that you have in cities and suburbs, okay? So that's one element.

The second element, very important. Clean energy. Where's that going to be produced? Where is the opportunity there? Well, it's all rural. I mean, you talk about solar energy. You talked about wind energy and you talk about hydro. Where are you going to do that?

You're going to invest the contractor, the equipment, the installation, the repair, those are all jobs. Those are all new careers, if you will, that can get people excited about staying and living and raising their families in rural communities. And there's money in these bills to basically create that kind of opportunity.

You talk about renewal energy and biobased manufacturing, there's resources and tax credits to encourage that. We have a whole new opportunity in fuel, for example. People say, well, you know, I don't know about ethanol. I'm not sure about that. Well, how about this? I get the electric car stuff. I get that. But how confident do you feel about flying in an electric powered airplane?

You know, if the car battery runs out, you know, what do you do? You pull over to the side of the road. You take yourself on out and you ask -- you get somebody to call Triple A and the next thing you know you're back home or you're recharged.

If in an airplane the battery stops, what are you going to do? Well, you're going to need aviation fuel. And you need cleaner burning, potentially zero emission aviation fuel because you can sequester the CO2 from the production process and you can create an advance biofuel. That's a whole new industry that creates new opportunities particularly in the western part of the U.S. with forest residue, for example.

So I mean there's just -- in this bill, there are resources to do that kind of opportunity. Now, and then improving the transportation system links all of that up to where the markets are and allows for efficient transportation of goods and services. So tremendous opportunity here to transform.

And that doesn't even talk about the investments in climate smart agriculture and forest management. All of which can help create the kind of circular economy I talked about before. Combine that with the American Rescue Plan, resource in building the local and regional food system and all of a sudden you have that transformational momentum that overall will continue if you structure farm bills and future legislation to be supportive.

So I think you're right. This is a unique opportunity. We've got to take full advantage of it and we've got to do it quickly because we need to make sure these resources begin to be invested so people can actually see the results from their government reconnecting them, if you will, to the government that right now they may or may not fully understand what government does.

MR. KRISTOF: Well, so yeah. Let me hone in on that. There is a deep skepticism in many rural areas about the central government's efforts to help them. And, you know, it feels sort of paradoxical that, you know, from my point of view, the Biden administration is doing some things that would be enormously beneficial to my community.

And yet, most people in my community, you know, deeply resist those initiatives. And that's true in many rural areas. So do we win that trust back that government can actually do things that help people?

MR. VILSACK: Well, I think first of all, you've got to localize the message. You know, I don't think we do a particularly good job at the government level of -- we do a lot of doing, but we don't do a lot of telling.

And I think it's important and necessary for us to basically remind people and to showcase the things that are happening on the ground in their communities that make a difference. And make sure that they fully understand.

You know, I used to joke as both a mayor, a state senator or governor. I took credit for all that federal money that was coming in to Iowa. You know, I was at the ribbon cutting. You know, maybe the city had a little money into it, but most of it was federal money. Maybe the state was advancing some resources here, but most of it was federal money. But everybody saw me there and

they thought, well, golly. You know, the state is really doing a good job.

The federal folks weren't anywhere to be seen. So you have to, to a certain extent, you have to tell people. You have to market what you're doing. And then you have to show results. And you have to be transparent about it. With the digital economy, I mean we now have the ability and should have the ability to allow citizens to go on line and basically better understand where their resources are being directed.

And then finally, we need to be sensitive to some of the challenges that rural places have. You mentioned the drug use and opioids. Well, you know what? It's a lot harder in rural areas to overcome something like that than it is in an urban or suburban area where there are multiple services available a stone throw away. In rural places, it's harder. It's tougher. The services aren't there and the attitude that people have. You know, you kind of keep quiet.

You don't want people to know because it's a small town. And you know, people talk kind of thing. And so, it's important for us to, you know, sort of deal with this issue out in the open. So there are a lot of ways in which we have to reconnect with people. But first and foremost is -- and this is really important point. Nicholas, a really important point.

We have to connect with people emotionally. We have to understand what really, really moves them in this. We can talk about the economy. We can talk about jobs, which we have. We can talk about the infrastructure, very important. But here's really what gets to us. They see their kids leaving. They see their grandkids growing up someplace else because their kids have assumed and believe that there's a better opportunity someplace else.

And Facebook is great. Skype is great. Zoom is great. But you can't hug. You can't have that physical contact. So we have to recognize that folks in rural communities have seen for far too long a hallowing out of their community culminating in their kids leaving. And we need to put that out front. And we need to say, look, we understand the pain of that. And we need to do something about it. And the way we do something about it is to make sure that people understand that the future is in rural places.

The future of clean energy, of zero admission industries, of recreation outdoors, of better health. You know, all of that is tied directly to rural places. And you, young person, can be part of that new transformational American economy that leads not just the country but the world.

I mean all of a sudden, you've got an inspiring story to tell your youngsters that maybe some of them come back. And, you know, when I was governor, I remember a censors person coming into my office one day and saying, congratulations, Governor. You've done something that hasn't been done in the state of Iowa for 70 years. I said, what is that? You've reversed the out migration where more people were leaving than coming. And so, our population is just stagnant.

Part of the reason we did that was because we provided resources to communities across the state and we challenged them to think boldly about that future. And all of a sudden there was excitement. There was interest. There was something going on in town and that made it easier for kids to make the decision to stay.

So I think it's important to your point about trust. You've got to understand emotionally where these people are and you've got to be sensitive and compassionate about it and connect to them on that level. And then say, here's what we're going to do together. Not that we're the government. We're going to come in and we're going, you know, we're going to tell you what has to be done.

Here's what we're going to do together. Let's build a community. Let's build an economy that just inspires your kids and overwhelms your kids with the possibilities. And then let's see what happens. My guess is a lot of those kids stay and some of them come back.

MR. KRISTOF: We're getting toward the end of our time, but I want to maybe ask you one last question about the forest service and forest fires which are part of your domain. And very much a topic out here in the West. The outside there is some smoke on the horizon here as there is, you know, often these days.

So I mean obviously forest fires are a huge challenge in the area. Does this create a huge new burden in terms of, you know, recreation in rural areas because it's going to be harder for people to go hiking, et cetera, in the summers when there's fire? Or does it create an opportunity in that

there will have to be more forest treatment, for example?

More efforts to deal with this problem? How does the fire risk out West change the equations we've been talking about?

MR. VILSACK: Well, I hope it ultimately motivates everybody who has a stake in this to understand one simple proposition. You can't do forest management on the cheap. You can't nickel and dime it. We've allowed a tremendous build up of hazardous fuel over a long period of time.

You combine that with dry climate, which in an incredible drought, heat waves that exacerbate the problem and lightning strikes and human carelessness. And you combine all of that and you have a toxic situation. The only way you can get around this is by investing significant resources in reducing that hazardous fuel build up and creating markets for whatever it is you're taking out of the forest. I mentioned the aviation biofuel. Well, that's one opportunity. There are other opportunities that we need to figure out.

That creates jobs, it reduces the risk. It creates more recreational opportunities and it's the kind of circular economy that we talked about before. So again, I don't want to beat the dead horse here, but the Reconciliation Plan provides resources for the first time ever to actually begin to attack the hazardous fuel build up.

Can it be done in a year? No. It's going to take time. But we've got to start and we've got to start now. We should have started, you know, a decade ago. During the Obama administration, we continued to articulate the need for this and it was just, you know, budgets were tough and tight. We now know. Here's a statistic that people need to understand. It takes about \$1,400 an acre to properly treat an acre to reduce the fire risk.

MR. KRISTOF: Did you say \$1,400?

MR. VILSACK: \$1,400. It takes \$50,000 to put the fire out on that acre. Now, you tell me which makes more sense? Spending 1,400 bucks or 50,000?

And all of the ramifications of that fire after the fact. The flooding and the difficulty in the reduction in wildlife diversity and all of that comes from it. So we've got to get serious about this. And as

a country, we need to understand that we're collectively involved in this because if your forests aren't properly managed, they're not doing their job as the conservers and the reservoir of water.

And when they don't do that job, you're faced with some very difficult choices that you have to make that now governors and federal officials across the country are having to make relative to water resources.

MR. KRISTOF: Well, thank you for engaging with us today. I'd like to think of you not only as Agriculture Secretary but in some sense a secretary of rural affairs. And, you know, that's sort of what the Ag Department does in many ways. So thank you for that.

Thanks to the Brookings Institution for hosting this terrific conversation. And now, I'd like to turn matters over back to (inaudible) Chummy.

MR. PIPA: Thanks very much, Nick. And thank you, Secretary, for really being with us today. Great conversation. You put a lot of issues on the table that we look forward to following up with in this subsequent panel conversation, but thanks to the both of you.

So now, I'd like to turn to our panel and see if we can, you know, explore some of the issues that the Secretary elucidated during his conversation with Nick. And begin by introducing Alejandra Y. Castillo who was confirmed as the Assistant Secretary of Economic Development at the Department of Commerce on August 13th.

And Assistant Secretary Castillo has served in leadership positions now for three presidents, Presidents Biden, Obama, and Clinton. And in the Obama administration she served with the National Director of the Commerce's Department's Minority Business Development Agency becoming the first Hispanic woman to lead that agency. And she came to her current position after serving as CEO of WYCA, U.S.

I really appreciate you being with us so soon at the beginning of your tenure. Thanks for being here.

MS. CASTILLO: Thank you.

MR. PIPA: And next, I would like to introduce Ines Polonius who is CEO of Communities

Unlimited, which is a community economic development organization and community development finance institution or CDFI that serves seven states including Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee. Ines also serves on the Board of Directors of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership, the Association for Enterprise Opportunity and is an active member of the Partners for World Transformation which is a coalition of CDFI serving persons in poverty counties.

And thanks for being with us today especially knowing what's going on in Louisiana and some other states that you're serving in the aftermath of Hurricane Indian Ida. It's great to have you here.

MS. POLONIUS: Thank you.

MR. PIPA: And then I would like to introduce Connie Stewart who serves as the Executive Director of Initiatives for Humboldt State University and is the former Executive Daughter of the California Center for Rural Policy where she continues to serve as the Chief Policy Advisor. She's worked in the State Legislature covering one of the largest rural districts in the lower 48 and served on City Council and as Mayor of Arcata. She is also involved in several Boards of the Directors and is a member of the Aspen Institution, Community Strategy Group, the Rural Development Innovation Group. So welcome, Connie. Thanks for joining us.

MS. STEWART: Thank you so much for having me.

MR. PIPA: So just to get us started, I wanted to turn to each of you just to describe a little bit about the work that you do and the work that your organizations do. Actually, World America. So Alejandra, Assistant Secretary Castillo, I'll turn to you first.

So in your role, you head up the economic development administration or EDA at the department. Many people might not be familiar with EDA so can you just describe EDA's role? How it works? Some of the key principles behind the programs and activities? And it would be great to talk a little bit about EDA's relationship for rural places.

MS. CASTILLO: So, Tony, thank you so much for facilitating today's discussion. I'm very excited. And I appreciate the work that Brookings does to spur the transformative ideas needed to solve some of our country's most pressing problems.

In particular, I want to commend you for the great work that you just published just this last November, reimagining world policy. And just the chart that you showed at the beginning, when Secretary Vilsack was speaking, of just the 400 different agencies that have something to do with rural is very indicative and very telling of some of the challenges that we face, but also the opportunities.

Let me just say that, you know, I'm honored to be representing the Biden administration, the Department of Commerce, and the Economic Development administration, which now I'm leading. And to send my regards from Secretary Raimondo as well.

And I noticed Connie in particular. We met over a phone call not too long ago. Just delighted to be part of this panel.

So to your question, Tony, who is EDA, right? As you mentioned I spent a good amount of years at Commerce during the Obama administration. And just understanding Commerce at large is fascinating. But more importantly, it's what Commerce does and what EDA does in particular.

So EDA is the only really agency dedicated to economic development. And the question then is, well, what does that really mean? Well, we touch communities large and small. We touch communities whether urban, suburban, or rural. And for the purposes of this conversation, the work that we're doing in rural communities.

You know, as Secretary Vilsack mentioned, the federal government does a lot. We don't tell the story very well. But when travel communities across the country, there is an EDA contribution in so many different areas. And I'll just tell on my second day on the job, I flew to Norwood, Colorado.

And it was -- I'm going to use that as an example of what EDA does. There in collaboration, not only with the local government, which are critical partners to us, but also with organizations like NATO, which I know, Connie, you're part of it as well. As well as philanthropy. We come together and really look at what are the solutions from the bottom up?

It's a delicate dance at times. Who should play the more prevalent role? Whether the federal government or local. We believe it has to be bottoms up and really bringing as many stakeholders as possible.

Just to be brief, right now EDA is in a very important moment in time. We went from a \$3 million organization to a \$3.5 billion. And this \$3 billion grant challenge is very indicative of President Biden's Build Back Better agenda. And through these different grants, there are six grants, which we'll talk about I'm sure in the Q&A.

But rural America has a role to play in all of the six different grants. And in your report, Tony, you mentioned something very unique, which is sometimes rural is left into a very specific bucket where they have to, you know, fight for those funds. In this model, we actually incorporated rural to be in all of the different grants.

So I'm going to spend -- I'm going to wait for the Q&A because I think that's where the richness of this conversation is going to be. But just know that for EDA, we're looking at not only economic development at large. We're looking at workforce development, how to train. We're looking at whole communities. How to help them transition. And we're looking at the Good Jobs Challenge. What are the jobs of the future? And how do we make sure that we're preparing our workforce for that?

And rural is integral to what we're doing right now. So it's exciting times. It's going to take a lot of work. A lot of work across the board with individuals like yourself not only to think big and to think as to how really can we make that transformative contribution to what rural America brings to the table. So I'll stop there and I'm sure we're going to have some great questions and answers in a minute.

MR. PIPA: So thanks very much for laying all that out. And I do want to come back to that increase in resources that you talked about and how you're thinking about it. And how you think about rural inside those.

Let me go to both Ines and then Connie. And I want to, you know, Alejandra just talked about sort of bottom up. And we even heard the Secretary talk about sort of circular economic, right? Like that's the way to be thinking about a business model potentially in rural America.

So, Ines, you know, talk to us a little bit about the work that Communities, Unlimited does. I mean, you serve many communities that are predominantly rural. Also, have large populations of communities of color and also serve areas where there's been persistent poverty. So the poverty about

20 percent for several decades on a regular basis. Tell us a little bit about the places where you work and the approach that you take and the prospects for sort of that bottom-up approach that Alejandra was just talking about.

MS. POLONIUS: Well, it's super exciting that this is such a good fit. Communities, Unlimited is a rural development hub. So we take a very holistic approach, Tony, to really building that community from the bottom up through a diversity leadership team.

Now, through our various programs, we touch about 600 communities a year. But in communities that invite us in to take this holistic strategically blended approach, we start by developing a diverse leadership team. A lot of times with individuals that have never led before. And really helping them understand what moves in a community? What economic development might look like?

Helping them understand what an entrepreneur ecosystem could look like in their community. Working with them to identify the assets that make that place unique. And I think the Secretary spoke to that. And then they create a plan. Five strategies that moves that community forward, that creates some momentum that can create mind set.

And then we provide the rest of our programs to support their plan. So we ensure that they have safe drinking water and appropriate and adequate disposal of waste water. We make sure that entrepreneurs in that community get intensive technical assistance so that they start and succeed or that they grow their businesses and create jobs.

Then we have a health initiative that looks at what do we do in these many, many food deserts that we're facing in rural America where grocery stores have closed their doors. And how do we ensure that fresh produce can make it into those communities and at the same time benefit local farmers because they're part of the economy also.

And to speak to the Secretary's point. If you're growing fruits and vegetables that's way higher profit than a commodity crop. And all of these initiatives are supported by our Community Development Financial Institution so that we cannot just provide technical assistance and capacity building, but also the capital to make some of these things work.

And I think that's what's really important because so many of these places have just been starved of capital especially in persistent poverty areas, communities of color. A lot of times, those are the same. And there's no coincidence there.

So what are the prospects that we see? You know, I've been doing this work for 23 years, and I'm so humbled every time that I am in a community by three things. Amazing resilience. And I'll be honest with you, some states in the South that we're getting battered by climate change. And so over and over and over again we're seeing people's resilience.

Entrepreneurial spirit. You know, there are so many entrepreneurs in these communities with really great ideas that need a little bit of skill building and a lot of capital and off they go.

And then the third piece is this problem-solving mindset. From time when they were kids, if something broke, they had to fix it. They couldn't just call somebody that would come along and -- or a place that they could bring it that would fix it. And so, there's this mindset of, you know what? If we put our minds to it, we can fix anything.

These are three core values that our entire country is built upon. And so, I have no doubt that we can rebuild rural America with the right set of resources. Both capacity building resources, leadership team development resources and capital. And I think I'll just stop there because Connie has way more to say.

MR. PIPA: That's wonderful. And I loved the three elements that you just laid out. First off, I heard sort of access to both investments and human capital. And then access to capital itself. But those elements that you laid out, I think even spoke to what the Secretary was talking about, an emotional connection. Because there's an emotional connection there local like Alejandra, but then there's an emotional connection even to the country as a whole.

But, Connie, let me turn to you now. You're a former mayor. And when we think California, I doubt that a lot of us think immediately rural. Tell us about the rural communities there because I think it's important for us to understand a little bit of the diversity. That challenges that we're providing to a policymaker like Alejandra because, you know, we've got such a diversity and a range of

what happens across the U.S.

And then a little bit about the successes and challenges that you see there. And I think it's also good then to start to touch on what do you think about the federal role is in communities? And we can come back to what Alejandra was talking about what the resources that they have.

MS. STEWART: Wonderful. Thank you so much for having me today. And it's such a wonderful thing to be on this panel with so many good friends.

So first of all, I brought a slide, an image, to show you what rural looks like in California. California actually has 37 of its 54 counties which consider themselves rural. Those counties are humongous. So here's a map of superimposed on North Carolina. In this little area, there are about 175,000 people.

So we have very big counties with small people. Part of the issue is that many of these counties have a lot of federal land associated. So we're clustered together in communities surrounded by forest. And we know what's happening in our forests right now in California.

And so, you know, we have these challenges because of the size of the clusters we sometimes do not get considered rural. There are many of these communities that have 50,000 people in them and then nothing else around it for a long time. You can take the map away now.

So, you know, one of -- I've been working on challenges of like how do you interconnect these communities using things like water, energy, broadband in order to create an economy of scale. And, you know, there's many, many challenges because you are going through regulations that require the federal government to be a great partner. And in some agencies, they are fantastic. We have been very lucky with the EDA and with USCA.

But there's a regulatory side of USDA, where we have not been as lucky. And so, sometimes ironically, we will get a grant to move forward with a project only to find out that the regulators of the same agency won't give us a permit to implement that project as well. So that's one of the challenges in California.

I really like what Ines was saying about the community vision and the need. And there's

really a need and an opportunity to not only develop those community visions, but really get buy in from the federal government. Like this is the vision for our community, a resilient vision for our community that we have chosen. And we need you to be a partner on this vision.

And then to get away from the project-by-project discussion into something that's deeper. And then we can also bring the community in like, okay, we can show you how this is part of meeting the needs and the goals of our vision. And of course, we're all dealing with that climate change about is our vision appropriate for the future that our lands face?

You know, one of the things is we're really all united in wanting to make sure that every region of the country succeeds. When we talk rural, we care about the South even though we're in California. We want -- we know that interconnected, we all have to succeed. And we need resources to be given everywhere because many cases, the challenges -- the solutions are different but the challenges are the same, right? And so, if we move forward with policy together to deal with the resiliency, we need here, we can all succeed.

MR. PIPA: I think that's a really interesting point. I mean the solutions are different but the challenges are the same. I mean where I grew up in Northeast Central Pennsylvania, it's again very different than the context that you both described. But I think this idea, Connie, that you put out, it's sort of a local vision and a local strategy.

And, Ines, to your point, one that's comprehensive is it's very compelling, but it also has to be really challenging for you, Alejandra. You know, as a federal policymaker as you're putting programs together.

Talk to us a little bit about what EDA is anticipating with the funds that you've already gotten through the American Rescue Plan. But also, how you envision sort of providing those resources in a way that get at some of the elements that they just talked about.

And I think it also leads us to a little bit of a conversation of like how do you measure success? What does success look like? And how is EDA thinking about what that success looks like?

MS. CASTILLO: Yeah. All great questions. And we could have, you know, multiple

panels I'm sure on each of the subsections. But just a couple of things.

You know, to manage rebuilding again. I can't underscore enough how of an important moment in time it is. And the responsibility that we have as EDA to make sure that not only is it transparent. That we're accountable to the public trust and the public dollars. But most importantly also this lands on equity, right?

Your report touched on equity. We spoke about the diversity that exists in world communities, but also geographical diversity as well. And that's one of our top investment strategies or priorities as I should say. When we're evaluating a proposal.

But there are two other things that I want to raise is, one is, you know, spreading the word. These are grants that exist? Yes, the reaction we get sometimes is that it's daunting, it's complicated. There's technical assistant grants also to support the development of these strategies.

So a big part of our job is engaging communities where there are at. Making sure that we can help them. And this is where organizations like NATO play a very important role with the economic development districts in making sure that that technical support exists.

But also, sending the message that as I mentioned before, and I hate to sound like a broken record, but we need engagement from not only the public sector, the private sector, philanthropy. You know, different segments of community because there is a requirement in EDA grants, as you may know, which is a 20 percent match.

And at times that in itself can be an impediment. We're trying to bring to the table organizations like, for example, a good example is the Telluride Foundation. They have been able to provide the 20 percent grants in places like Norwood, Colorado, a rural area, to develop projects.

So the model has been tested. It works. And what we're trying to do is to make sure that we can make it as accessible. But to your point of the metrics, the metrics are also broad. How do we bring out counties from persistent poverty? How are we creating jobs? How are we retaining jobs? How are we measuring transformation from one sector to another?

So the data is going to be key. And how we collect that data, how we analyze that data is

going to drive decisions as well. So there's a lot at stake and that's what makes this space so fascinating. We all on this panel are truly architects of what this economic development in rural communities can look like.

And my commitment as a public servant is to connect the dots inside of government so that we don't have that, you know, hodgepodge of different agencies all working kind of a one-off, but really trying to work more synergistic.

MR. PIPA: That's helpful. Ines, talk to us. I mean, Alejandra just mentioned the match first off that's also part of the programs as well as the technical assistance. Because of the daunting prospect of like applying for and using federal resources to do some of the work that you talked about.

So talk a little bit about what are some of the practical implications that you encounter because of these kinds of things? And also, the complexity. I mean it's not only just EDA. There's also USDA. There's the problem of transportation. There's EHS. There's HUD. There's lots of different opportunities, but sort of getting them to work together to kind of support the holistic vision that you and Connie were talking about could be a challenge.

So talk a little bit about the practical locations and how that plays out on the ground in the work that you do.

MS. POLONIUS: So I'm going to get really practical here. When we're in community, we give this impression that, you know, everything is strategically blended. We can bring services when we need them. We can bring partners when we need them.

In our shop, we are managing 74 grants. Seventy-four different grants with different requirements and different metrics and different reporting and different timing on reporting and I tell you, I have the best CFO in the industry. But, you know, I think that's the challenge that speaks to what you so eloquently put in that diagram that I think many of us reference these days.

Because that's our reality, right? And so now when we're in community and the community develops a strategy, we can't cobble together 74 sources. So I'm going to take them over here for broad banding. I'm going to take them over here for housing. And so, you begin to see the

complexity of it.

I'll give you an example on the financial side. Again, we're a community development financial institution. And up until the rapid -- the RPP program, we had these different pots of money. There were whole swaths of states in our footprint where we could not make a loan because we didn't have available capital because the philanthropists wanted us to put the money here. This federal agency wanted us to put the money here.

This is the first time that we actually have flexible money. And the way that we're able to work is so different because now when an application comes in, we don't have to turn it away, we can begin to work with that entrepreneur or that water system or that waste water system because we know we have the capital to back it up.

And so, I think that's sort of the reality that we're working towards. And, Alejandra, I'm glad that you mentioned the Telluride Foundation. While they don't fund us, we've done some work together around what works in the past. And, you know, part of our challenge is in Texas, you've got the Texas rural funders.

An amazing collaborative of philanthropy. And we certainly have had many conversations with them about how do you leverage federal funds? But in so many of our other states, there might be one philanthropic partner or there might be two philanthropic partners. They cover an enormous amount of persistent poverty communities.

So there just isn't enough money to go around to say, hey, can you help me match that federal program? Not for us and not for the community either. So those are some of the challenges that we run into.

MR. PIPA: But a couple of things that you talked about there. Just flexibility. How important flexibility is. And as I understand it, for example, EDA is one of the few places within the federal government where you can get some of that flexibility actually to be able to invest.

But it's, you know, managing -- like having the capacity to manage those 74 different grants and juggle what you're juggling to make it all piece together, it sounds like both a challenge, but

also an opportunity because there's a responsiveness to the federal government that wants to be involved and wants to be able to make those resources available. But from my perspective, better coordination and better linking up could be really helpful.

Connie, speak to us a little bit about your experience especially with the flexibility as well as the -- you already mentioned some of the challenges. And you're a former mayor as well so I think it would also be interesting. And we heard the, you know, we heard the Secretary talk about this as governor or as mayor sort of coming in where there was federal investments and taking a lot of -- and taking some of that credit. Or at least getting credit because he was just there.

Talk to us also a little bit about the alignment between like local government and the federal government and the challenges there as well.

MS. STEWART: It's sometimes so challenging to get everyone to work together. I was telling, Tony, you a story yesterday about how I actually just returned to the state of California \$47.5 million for a grant for broad band because it wasn't compatible with my private funders. And so, my private funders finally just said, forget it. We'll pay for it. Give the money back to the state.

Now, you can just imagine trying to explain to your community that, you know, you're returning a grant you spent seven years trying to get because that's actually going to move your project forward. So, you know, but that's sometimes how crazy the rules are with trying to blend funding.

You know, Ines, also, you know, sometimes we have problems like there are philanthropic people in the community, but they have their own initiative. Does it work with the federal or state funding to provide that match? Or is it too hard to blend those funds?

So, you know, we're in that similar situation of like we don't want to be chasing grants. We want to be succeeding at a vision. And so, you know, if we're working on a project that's the most important part of it is like how do we get everyone on board to understand that we need to blend to accomplish that vision? We've been very lucky with our federal partners that what we do is I -- my nickname is Sherpa of the Redwoods, right?

And so, I put together tours where I make them all come on site at the same time and talk

about their funding streams that could help make our vision come true. So, you know, maybe EDA saying, well that piece of property is owned by the state so we can't do anything on that. And USDA will say, well, we can. You know, so we'll partner on this one. You take that other part of the vision.

And so, when we can have them on the ground. You know, you're only as good as your program officer in many of these situations. And it's really important to have that partnership and for people to understand, you have to pushback on your program officers. And you have to explain to them because they're the ones that are going to go to the Assistant Secretary and say, this is how this program needs to change in order for us to meet the vision.

So, you know, that's the other thing I encourage people is push back because that's the way you get the feedback of the line. I mean that's the story of broadband right now. It is that broadband was since 1996, the goal of it has been to get the private sector to provide for the needs. And I think with the pandemic and everything, now the federal and state governments are saying, forget it. We need to provide for the needs and we can't listen to the companies anymore because no one is getting their needs served. And we're all regions and tribal regions.

So, you know, but it's that constant pushback that helped design where we are now.

MR. PIPA: So let me just say, Ines and Connie, you all are pretty sophisticated now. Users of these resources in piecing them together. And Alejandra talked about sort of technical assistance and the ability to help communities get to a point. Is this possible in communities?

Like, Ines, how do you think about this? Is this possible in other places? You know, what is it like to sort of build capacity in places across the United States?

MS. CASTILLO: So I think it's really important that there's an invitation from the community. Somebody. Two people that have that beginning, you know what? We want to see some change here.

And then for us to be able to come in and say, now, let's diversify that leadership team because if we have the same people calling the shots that have called the shots for the last 15 years, we're never going to reach a more equitably economy in this place. And that's just a viewed challenge.

And it's going to take some time and some trust building. And sometimes, it's us with one of their leadership members literally going door to door whether it's in the Latino community or in the black communities saying, look, we know you are leaders in your community. Will you join us?

And then for that team to come together and, you know, we use -- we're part of the Wealth Works network, which is a national network that really looks at building rural communities in a new way. Or rural economies in a new way. And it's focused on eight capitals or assets, you might want to call them.

And so, helping a community really understand as the Secretary said. What's unique? What do you have in this community to build on? And that for us is the first step in mindset. And in measuring that mindset shift those are important markers along the way until we get to where Secretary Christina took us which are those hard economic measures. We can get there. It's just going to take time.

And I think that element of time is the other part of flexibility that we should talk about in this conversation because when these communities have been, you know, divested from, have been part of an extracted economy for 15 years. We're not going to build a -- with one grant cycle. Or maybe a grant cycle of one year, right? And so, again this cobbling together so that we can stay in a community for 10 years. That's been sort of our Litmus test is the communities where we can see very clear economic measures of success in addition to momentum, mindset shift.

Those are communities where we've been for 10 years, right? And so, you can begin to see improvements after three years and five years. But again, every place is also going to move at its own pace. And so, I think that's what we need to layer over this conversation is time.

If we're going to do it right. If we're going to take a bottoms up approach. And honestly, you know, to explain why so many other administrations took a top-down approach, it's easier. It's faster. It makes you feel good, but it doesn't change anything, right?

And so now for this administration to say, wait a minute. Let's turn it on its head. Let's figure out how to do this from the bottom up. I think is an incredible opportunity for both support

organizations like ourselves and the amazing work that Connie does. But also, for the actual communities themselves.

MS. STEWART: Can I just jump in and say, beautifully said. Beautifully said. The element of time as we not only push out these grants, look at the technical assistance and more importantly build capacity.

It's of great concern. How do we make sure that communities have the capacity? Not that they don't -- they're not able to, but just to have the infrastructure in place to really use these dollars and make that transformative change? It's not the incremental. It's the transformative change.

So, Ines, I really appreciate you talking about time. And this is something we need to educate our legislators and other decisionmakers because it's not a magic wand. It's urgent, but it doesn't happen overnight if we're going to do it right and sustainable.

MR. PIPA: Right. So I think that's a great point. If there's this real sense of urgency and to Ines' point. There's been a long steady decline in investment for a long time. So there's a real sense of urgency, but to your point there's a necessity for patience as well.

And for consistency over time to be able to enable communities. To be able to achieve what they want to achieve. And I think that's really important.

Let me ask you because I know some of the work that you're going to be doing through the American Rescue Plan funding that EDA already received is regionally oriented. I mean, you've got a Build Back Better initiative on regional clusters.

How do we be authentic in engaging rural communities with some of the cities? Whether they be midsize metros or even larger metropolitan areas that sort of make up their regional markets? And how are you thinking about that at EDA? And, Connie, I want to come to you and ask you about that as well.

MS. POLONIUS: I hate to sound like a lawyer, but it all depends on how we're defining region, right? And that is a definition that we have also left to applicants to define.

It could be rural regions that cross state lines. It could be as on a conversation with the

governors, it could be, you know, Hawaii, for example, could be its own region with the different islands.

We're leaving that definition also to the applicants because, you know, these could be artificial lines so when you draw the states. We're looking at what is the economic fabric that weaves them all together.

But to your question more specifically, Tony, in terms of how do you deal with the urban, suburban, rural conversation? It's look at it from a continuum. How much would Secretary Vilsack said. Turning over and doing that circular economy of sort where it's not just rural areas looked at as extractions that gets shifted to another place for the value added, but actually look at it more holistically.

So it is an exercise. It's not a simple answer, but I think what my point of it of the discussion is that in this particular notice of funding opportunity is to give the applicant complete license as to what regions look like. What they need. How they can actually make that transformation and how they bring the various stakeholders.

And to Ines' point about time. Even that considering what does that timeline continuum looks like in order to reach those metrics of success. So it's a different way of doing grant making, but it's one that we're trying to be as attentive as possible. And as intentional as possible to, you know, meeting communities where they're at and what they need.

MR. PIPA: That's wonderful. Thank you. And, Connie, you talked about just sort of the distance and also the like how you're surrounded and cut off even by a different land owner basically in some of the areas where you work.

Does that even, you know, provide you a basis to be doing regional work? Like how do you think of regional work where you're at? And what does that look like?

MS. STEWART: Well, as I said, if you first focus on the community vision. The reality is in order to implement that vision, you may have various definitions of region.

When I'm working on broad band, my region is east, west. When I'm working on energy issues or cannabis issues, my region is north, south. And then those people may have different regions so they, you know, you have to have the opportunity to partner depending on how the vision works

together. And so, we've -- you know, back in the Obama administration, it was sort of -- and the state here was trying to say, okay. Create a region and live with it, right?

And so, we would end up with these four county regions that were the size of New Jersey and Connecticut combined and it was like work together. And what happened was sometimes their vision would be conflicting. And like one of us would get on a plane to say, here's our vision. And the next county would have to go back and say, that's not our vision.

So we really kind of had to develop these more flexible lines depending on our commonalities. And recognize just like you would with any infrastructure the project is different.

MR. PIPA: So really reflective though of what the Assistant Secretary was talking about. That flexibility to define your region. Like what is making up your region? And that could even change what you're saying depending on what it is you're working on actually even in the same places?

MS. STEWART: Yeah, and I think it's been really wonderful to see them move away from, hi, create a big region and we're only going to give you \$100,000. You know, and it was like, you know, for those of years we were like, forget it. You know, we can't even drive to each other.

We have a situation out here where no matter where you are because of geography in the federal land, it was cheaper for everybody to meet in San Francisco. Like it's four hours to get to the community next to you because of the road system. But everybody can get to San Francisco faster.

So here we are talking about rural issues meeting in the urban area. So, you know, so that was -- I mean that's part -- also part of what drove us to like, we've got to work on broadband because we've got to be able to network together. And so those were some of our challenges.

MS. CASTILLO: I was just going to jump in and to, Connie, to your point of \$100,000 when you look at it doesn't move the needle no matter how small your community is. It takes -- it's labor intensive. It's also resource intensive. The Build Back Better set of grants is at a larger scale. And going again, what we need to really drive through is that this should not be episodic.

It is episodic because of COVID and obviously the American Rescue Plan that's what this is meant for. But how do we also make it sustainable so that these grants are at this level? You know,

where we're talking about \$5 million, \$10 million, \$30 million even \$60 million? Because that's what we need as a country to move this forward.

And last point I'll make is I always draw this point. If we look at the United States compared to our OECD countries, we're at the bottom in terms of economic development dollars that are really pushed out. And we have to raise the bar on ourselves in terms of our commitment and our long-term commitments. And that's a message that obviously I continue to drive home as not only representing EDA but also representing the great work that Commerce does at large.

MR. PIPA: Well, that's exciting to hear for me about the opportunity that you just put out to continue to make significantly increase and make those significant increases consistent over time because certainly in our analysis has shown that with the type of federal government funding that's available that kind of flexible substantial long-term investment has diminished significantly over the last three decades.

And so, it's very difficult for communities to find the kind of investment that Ines and Connie are talking about that can really support the holistic community visions. And a new type of leadership that Ines talked about to be able to go forward in their communities.

This has been a really rich discussion. I just looked at the clock and I want to go on, but we're at time. I want to thank you all. And I really appreciate your candor and your ability to sort of get practical about what's necessary. I think to the Assistant Secretary's point, this is a seminal moment and it's one that I think we need to work together on to get right because I think our communities and our country can only benefit from it. So thanks very much. Thanks to the audience for tuning in and we'll look forward to continued analysis and ideas and recommendations to take federal policy on an equitable road to prosperity forward. Thanks very much.

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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(Signature and Seal on File)

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Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2024

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