Partnerships with Rural Communities

For centuries, the people who call rural America home did so because of its combination of beauty and opportunity. Rural communities feed the world, provide the raw materials for industry, and are home to ancestral Tribal lands and the ecosystems that purify and protect clean water.

However, many rural areas face deep economic and social challenges. Far too many people, particularly in rural communities, feel alone or left behind. The great project of our democracy is to continuously stitch together the patchwork of our diverse geographies and people into one nation.

Tom recognizes the time is now to renew the connective bonds that bind our nation together — city to city, town to town, person to person, generation to generation. In Tom’s People Over Profits Economic Agenda, he pledges to direct the full power and resources of the federal government to build inclusive economic prosperity for all Americans — including the nearly 60 million — who call rural America home.

Tom pledges to:

1. Build a Foundation of Connectivity
2. Invest in People
3. Grow a Just Economy with Good Jobs
4. Partner to Address the Climate Crisis

A Foundation of Connectivity

Tom’s Partnerships with Rural Communities begin by ensuring that Americans are connected to one another — and to economic opportunity.

Information Networks

The modern economy is a knowledge economy. Full participation in commerce depends on reliable, fast, affordable access to the Internet. However, 39% of rural residents do not have access to high speed wireless as Internet Service Providers fail to serve rural populations, despite receiving large government subsidies as an incentive. We need to alter our approach, break the corporate gridlock, and build these networks. Tom’s business experience and acumen will give him the insights needed to:
• Protect the rights of local governments and not-for-profit organizations, including cooperatives, to build their own networks.

• Mobilize $135 billion in Rural Utilities Service grants and loans alongside private investment for broadband, fiber and next generation networks.

• Target 60% of the $135 billion in new funding to disadvantaged communities, with at least 10% of the funds set aside to improve connectivity on tribal lands and at least 20% of funds directed to minority-majority communities, including Southern communities of color; and require investor-owned ISPs that receive federal grant funds to subsidize service to low-income residents to end the digital divide.

• Appoint FCC commissioners who support Net Neutrality.

Transportation Networks

We must connect people to each other and to markets. From the transcontinental railroad to the Eisenhower Highway System, fast transportation has revitalized American communities, opened new markets, made us safer, and brought us closer together. Tom will:

• Mobilize $112.5 billion over ten years to fix America’s crumbling roads, bridges and levees, ensuring they are resilient to climate impacts.

• Green the Army Corps of Engineers with new resources for the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund and a new agency mandate to prioritize green infrastructure projects.

Investing in People

Current investments in Rural America have failed to create economic growth and drive opportunity for residents. Our rural communities face housing, immigration, endemic poverty, and environmental justice challenges. To begin, Tom will open an Office of Rural Affairs within the White House to coordinate programs to rural areas and ensure that rural communities and people have a direct line to the White House. It is time to smartly reinvest in rural America to fulfill every American’s right to a good education and quality, affordable healthcare. In particular, we must ensure these rights for the 20% of rural residents from communities of color and Tribal nations who have historically faced discriminatory laws and practices.

Healthcare

The corporate stranglehold over our healthcare system puts the health of rural communities in jeopardy. Mergers and consolidations have closed hospitals, resulting in critical services — such as mental health treatment programs — being cut dramatically.

Tom believes every American deserves the Right to Health and will ensure universal access to quality, affordable healthcare by driving down premiums and prescription drug costs through a robust public option.
To address specific challenges in the rural healthcare system, Tom will:

- Prevent hospital closures by reviewing mergers for antitrust violations and ensuring the merged entity maintains a high standard of care; providing resources to rural hospitals through increased global revenues and/or provider rates; and invest in telemedicine to improve specialized care and help bridge local provider shortages.

- Address the shortage of rural healthcare providers by following through on our national commitment to the public service student loan forgiveness program, unlike President Trump; and work with states to grow the class size of public medical and nursing schools to train more healthcare providers.

- Invest $100 billion over a decade to revolutionize the way America addresses mental health care. Vocally champion mental health treatment to reduce the stigma of seeking care; partner with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, public schools, the prison system, and providers to initiate a nationwide conversation on the importance of mental health. Mandate that insurance programs provide full mental health coverage, increase access to telemedicine, and train additional specialized healthcare providers.

- Address the opioid crisis through $75 billion in new funding over ten years to resource treatment programs, hold big pharmaceutical corporations and their executives accountable, and strongly enforce against the illegal distribution and sale of opioids.

- Convene a task force to develop a comprehensive plan for aging rural Americans by providing home assistance, reducing caregiver burdens and social isolation.

- Mandate healthcare insurers cover dental and eye care; expand the reach of mobile clinics to bring specialized care to low income kids in isolated rural areas.

- Reverse the Trump Administration’s attacks on maternal health funding to ensure resources for midwives, OB/GYNs, and rural clinics, particularly those that serve rural African American and Tribal mothers who on average, suffer higher maternal mortality rates than their white peers.

**The Right to Education**

Rural schools suffer from severe underfunding. As rural tax bases decline, the educational quality in rural areas has fallen. To address the unique challenges of rural schools, Tom will:

- Ensure every child can attend a well-funded public school with great teachers.

- Incentivize the integration of technical courses and workforce readiness curriculum to prepare students for modern careers.

- Fix the teacher shortage by securing higher wages and smaller class sizes; deliver on the promise of the Public Service Student Loan Forgiveness program and reverse the Trump Administration’s decision to backtrack on our promise to public school teachers relieve their student debt.
• Initiate programs for online learning, enabled by classroom high-speed broadband.

• Provide two years of free community college or technical skills training to hone the skills necessary to excel in the modern workforce.

**Housing**

Housing is a fundamental challenge nationwide, including in rural communities. In many places, especially in rural areas accessible to major economic hubs, construction of new units has been outpaced by rising demand, leaving a shortage of units and skyrocketing costs. In other rural communities, shrinking economies have left an aging housing supply with significant maintenance needs. To address the housing challenges specific to rural America, Tom will:

• Expand programs within the US Department of Agriculture's Rural Housing Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs Housing Improvement Program for affordable housing, including programs to develop new housing, renovate older units, and provide senior housing.

• Prioritize projects building farm worker housing in towns, rather than on a job site.

• Incentivize home weatherization programs through the restoration of the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program to decrease energy usage and reduce carbon emissions.

• Enforce against predatory landlords and mobile home loan programs.

**Fighting Endemic Poverty**

The social safety net is critical to helping people in poverty or on its brink, but it will take a concentrated and sustained effort by the Federal government to end endemic poverty across America. To begin to chart a path toward that goal, Tom will:

• Support and help to refine Congressman Clyburn’s (D-SC) 10-20-30 Plan which directs 10% of funding for certain Federal programs to geographic areas where 20% of the population has been below the poverty line for more than 30 years; amend the proposed rule to target census tracts, rather than counties, to account for persistent low income pockets within wealthier counties.

• Reverse the damage done by the Trump Administration to ensure access to SNAP benefits and automatic access to free or reduced school lunch programs for the quarter of rural American children growing up in poverty.

• Train and welcome young people to rural areas through an expanded National Public Service Plan that places at least 200,000 funded Americorps and Climate Corps members in rural communities to address pressing social needs, including on tribal lands and in communities of persistent poverty.

• Address long-standing environmental justice challenges, particularly in rural communities of color, by fully funding the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund by appropriating $1.3 billion for clean drinking water projects; increasing funding to
Growing a Just Economy with Good Jobs

Tom will work hand-in-hand with rural communities to lay the foundation for good jobs and shared economic prosperity. In the past fifty years, rural America was hit hard by globalization, automation and the consolidation of agriculture by big corporations which pushed residents to cities in seeking economic opportunity.

Tom pledges to work closely with states, local governments, and the private sector to identify and cultivate opportunities for economic innovation and success in rural America.

Growing Fair and Sustainable Global Markets

Tom will bring deep economic experience to the White House to break the corporate stranglehold on America and re-right our trade relationships. Tom supports building a fair, people-powered economy that harnesses innovation and competition. He will:

- Support American farmers and manufacturers through fair and open trade policies that identify and grow global markets while ensuring food security at home. These trade agreements must meet strong economic, labor, and environmental standards, while promoting and preserving American interests.

- Build upon the Made in Rural America Initiative to connect American farmers and businesspeople to global markets.

- Direct the Department of Justice to enforce antitrust law across sectors, including in the agricultural sector, to end practices that put family farmers, food security, workers, environmental quality, and resiliency at risk.

- Foster a culture of entrepreneurship by directing the Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help rural small business owners, with a focus on supporting women, people of color and entrepreneurs from low income communities.

Fighting for Rural Workers

The growth of our economy has not translated into growth for all. Blue collar workers have not seen the same wealth creation as the rest of America. These broader economic trends have hit rural areas particularly hard. Tom will:

- Increase the minimum wage to no less than $15.00 per hour.

- Defend and protect every worker’s right to organize in a union.

- Support portable benefit plans for healthcare and retirement.
• Support the rights of farmworkers, including the right to organize and strengthen efforts to enforce employer wage theft regardless of a plaintiff’s immigration status.

Banking Services and Access to Capital

Banks are anchor institutions in a community, yet many rural communities now lack a full service bank. As the banking industry has consolidated, rural residents have less access to capital. In fact, small business lending in rural areas has fallen to 1996 levels. Tom and his wife Kat founded a not-for-profit bank, Beneficial State Bank, to meet the financial needs of underserved communities. Building on his work in community banking, Tom will:

• Expand funding for Community Development Financial Institutions in rural areas and Tribal lands to promote financial education, reduce predatory lending, and foster entrepreneurship; expand funding from the Community Reinvestment Act to reach more rural residents and foster local economic development.

• Enforce against predatory lending to rural residents in car loans, mobile home loans or mortgages, and payday loans through a fully funded and aggressive Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and an active Department of Justice.

Partnering to Address the Climate Crisis

On Day One of his presidency, Tom will declare a climate emergency to address the climate crisis. Prioritizing people and justice, he will partner with rural communities to energize rural communities with the funding and technical resources needed to combat this challenge.

Climate-Smart Agriculture

Rural America feeds the whole nation — and the world. Since the nation’s founding, farmers have played a critical role in the economic and cultural health of the nation. Looking to farmers to foster innovative and climate-smart agricultural practices, Tom will:

• Mobilize $50 billion to support young and family farmers, including farmers of color, to implement climate best practices in agriculture and respond to the challenges of climate change.

• Mobilize $75B for upstream watersheds, groundwater, and green infrastructure; reform crop insurance programs to include flexible payments for ecosystem services and target support to farmers.

• Reverse the Trump Administration’s decision to give waivers to Big Oil companies who want to dodge their responsibility to farmers, ethanol producers, and Federal clean air standards; support implementation of the Renewable Fuel Standard as written.

• Dedicate $20 billion to keep high value farmland productive in perpetuity and stop conversion to development by reforming land conservation easement tax credits.

• Establish low-carbon agricultural standards to reduce emissions and water pollution 40% by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2045. Backed by revenue-generating market
mechanisms that direct at least 50% of proceeds to disadvantaged communities and small and mid-sized farmers.

• Empower the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Justice to hold industrial agriculture companies accountable for environmental degradation.

• Establish regenerative and carbon-sequestering standards for farming and ranching on public lands.

**Building the Clean Energy Economy**

We are in the midst of an energy revolution. To date, more than 55% of clean energy investments are made in rural areas as open landscapes provide the best siting for wind and solar energy at scale. Rural areas will also be where innovative approaches to large scale battery storage can be piloted and scaled. To grow rural America’s economy and accelerate the clean energy future, Tom will:

• Mobilize $62.5 billion for rural grid modernization and resilience, including transmission planning and construction, to help increase grid reliability and expedite renewables penetration; and invest $50 billion in rural distributed reliability resources including solar, microgrids, mobile batteries, emergency power centers.

• Mandate that 100% of new commercial and residential buildings be zero-carbon by 2030. Retrofit 100% of all buildings by 2045 to net-zero carbon buildings.

• As energy extraction enterprises end in rural America, we need to work with local communities to build just transition pathways to a new economies by ensuring robust remediation processes for old mines, preventing companies from shedding pension obligations, and fostering workforce retraining options.

**Supporting Climate-Safe Parks, Public Lands, and Recreation Economy**

Public lands are special places where we can recreate and renew ourselves. They also form the backbone of many rural economies through tourism, grazing, forestry, or mining. Tom will:

• Mobilize $80B for forest health and wildfire reduction treatments to promote ecosystem resilience, fire safety, and carbon sequestration in federal, state and private forests.

• Foster outdoor recreation economies by ensuring public access to public lands; dedicating $25B to upgrading and maintaining parks facilities and sites; and expanding national monuments.

• Enforce the full reclamation of mined lands by committed EPA oversight of cleanup processes and, where appropriate, the Department of Energy; improve and enforce third party bonding requirements for reclamation.