

November 5, 2025

Senate Ag Committee Confirmation Hearing

Hon. Glen R. Smith

Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, distinguished members of the Ag Committee; it is an honor to appear before you today as President Trump's nominee to be the Under Secretary for Rural Development in the United States Department of Agriculture.

I'm a fifth-generation farmer from the gently rolling hills of Western Iowa. All of our children behind me are involved in various degrees of production agriculture and represent the sixth generation and my special guest, our oldest granddaughter, Emma, represent the seventh generation of agriculturalists if she continues her impressive accomplishments in the cattle business.

Like most farm kids, the important virtues of hard work and determination were instilled in me at a very early age. When I was ten, I witnessed my father run over by a tractor, a disabling accident that drained all our farm resources having to sell our farm equipment and livestock to pay hospital bills. For years, I watched my folks fight their way back, working off-farm jobs, doing farmwork in the evenings, weekends and holidays and raising a large family on the limited resources of a small farm. But our rural community was always there, supportive, our neighbors, friends and family; church, emergency response, health care system, schools and local businesses offering jobs. The list is long, and the lessons learned from living in a rural community never leave you.

In order for rural communities to survive and prosper, we must have robust rural economies. As a life-long farmer, I can tell you; when a farmer has a dollar in his pocket, chances are 80-90 cents of that will be spent in town. It's that multiplier effect. The key to that prosperity has and will continue to be adding value to our raw, bulk agricultural products. It's been great to see in the last decade (maybe since Covid) a proliferation of branded farm products; beef from Texas and Montana ranchers, pork from Minnesota farms, locally raised vegetable and fruit in our schools, hospitals and farmers markets. I have witnessed this value-added in our own backyard as one of our farms borders one of the most efficient ethanol plants in the country and I've seen how it's boosted our local economy. It is not just the 80 some jobs at the plant, it's all the support services and businesses it engages and the wealth it pumps into the trade area from the premium price paid for corn. Capitalize those premiums by long-term investment rates and you're talking hundreds of million, possibly billions over time. Rural Development could and should play a key role in that value added investment and entrepreneurship encouragement.

The second area I'd like to touch on is rural connectivity. During Covid, we actually saw a reversal of the historic rural to urban population migration, largely in areas that could support remote internet work. I firmly believe that many urban residents desire and would seek the amenities of rural living; however, they also need the tools to work remotely in meaningful occupations. Those same tools of connectivity allow schools, hospitals and businesses in rural areas to compete with the rest of the world. In 1936, under the New Deal, Rural Development was charged with the challenge of bringing electricity to our country's rural regions, a mission that was admirably achieved. Given the right resources, Rural Development should strive to achieve the same level of success in rural connectivity.

The last area I'd like to touch on is the cost and availability of homes in rural America. While this is a challenging area, if confirmed, I pledge to ensure USDA programs on housing operate with transparency and efficiency. I will look at all options specific to different regions and make intelligent, long-term investments in meeting housing demand, not just "push money out the door". That's not fair to the recipients. That is not being accountable to the public dollar.

These are a few ideas I've been pondering as I look ahead to a new role as adviser to Secretary Brooke Rollins in carrying out the goals of the Trump administration in serving rural America. As members of this committee, I'm sure you have many of your own ideas that are applicable to your area of the country. If confirmed, I pledge to you to listen to those ideas in improving the viability and prosperity of Rural America. I look forward to your conversations and questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.