



The Contract For Rural And Working America



"For far too long, rural America has been abandoned, by government and by business. This has left large parts of the country devastated - with not nearly enough good paying jobs, insufficient health care, obstacles to education and opportunity, and a general feeling of being left behind. This is why I helped create "The Contract For Rural & Working America", a set of aspirational goals for government to apply to the very specific needs of rural and working America. And, as you read this collection of proposals, understand that implementing these will lead to more opportunity and economic security for the rest of America as well."

HANK LINDERMAN

- 1. Restoring Health Care In Rural America** - Rural hospitals are failing at an accelerating rate. As we address reforming and modernizing our health care system, we must secure the survival of rural hospitals. Our goals for America's health care system are: significantly reduced costs, coverage for everyone, and a system that is easier to use and that gets better results. A modernized health care system will also provide relief and stimulus for businesses which are paying rising health care costs each year.
- 2. Education and Childcare** - Education must once again be an investment in our Nation's future. Higher education, from trade schools to universities must be made available to any qualifying student for free or for very low cost. Public schools must be expanded to provide childcare and preschool in order to allow working people to work. These programs must be available to all children regardless of income. Excessive student debt carried by many Americans is a 1.6 trillion dollar drag on the U.S. economy, so financing of education must be cleared of predatory lenders. We need the return of high school shop classes, home economics, trade schools and apprenticeship programs. These will be critical as we move forward with rebuilding our supply chain. All of these programs will create jobs.
- 3. Support for Small, Subsistence and Family Farms** - Farming by individuals, families and co-ops needs to be encouraged. Tax benefits like those given to large agri-businesses that will work for and not against the family farm must be implemented. Possible policies include: price supports for family farms or co-ops, a national non-profit disaster insurance program designed to protect family farmers, a national non-profit credit bureau to finance family farms and equipment, and community tax benefits for businesses using or selling local family farm products. We will also support "Right To Repair" laws and common sense migrant worker policies. We need high quality locally grown food, clean water and air, sustained wildlife habitat, and the assurance that our children will continue to want to call rural America, "home". The resurrection of vibrant rural communities will bring much needed health and economic benefits to all Americans.
- 4. Rebuilding America's Infrastructure And Domestic Supply Chain** - For too long, working people have been denied the benefits of global trade. The needs of business, working people and national security must all be considered and balanced. We must rebuild our domestic supply chain, particularly in industries with national defense ramifications, such as tech, electronics, renewable energy.
- 5. A Living Wage** - Compared to the 1970's, wages have dropped, in fact, 1977's minimum wage adjusted for inflation and purchasing power would be \$22/hr. today. Raising the minimum wage is one way the Nation can begin to



address the extreme inequality we now face. It will also raise tax revenues, stimulate the economy, and provide much needed opportunity throughout America.

6. **Support For Workers In Declining Industries** - We believe American workers need protection from the increasingly turbulent changes they experience in the workforce. As industries decline, working populations need support. Some of this support must be direct, such as using targeted/universal basic income when factories shut down. By designating development zones and using tax credits and grants to encourage new industry these areas can be spared the devastation they are currently facing.
7. **Renewable Rural Energy: Water, Wind and Solar** - The tremendously profitable fossil fuel industry is subsidized annually to the tune of billions of dollars. We question the need to subsidize highly profitable international corporations. We think rural America would be better served if subsidies were redirected to make energy costs lower for all Americans. This will reverse the pollution of our air, water, and land, safeguarding a cleaner environment to pass on to our children, as well as creating more and better paying energy sector jobs. To ensure the best future for America, our energy must come from renewable, non-polluting sources. The transformation away from petroleum powered vehicles to electric has already begun - providing clean power for all of our needs will be a challenge we cannot afford to ignore.
8. **Rural Broadband** - Stable, secure communications are now a requirement for daily life, like water and power. We must fully fund and protect our rural postal services for physical communications - letters and packages -- and bring virtual, electronic communications via the internet to every place Americans live and work - this will improve education and provide business opportunities that are currently impossible. Construction of this new broadband infrastructure will provide jobs as well. To avoid the difficulties states have faced when trying to do this themselves, this must be a national project, like Rural Electrification (1936) or the creation of the Federal Interstate System (1956). Additionally, we need higher standards for wireless carriers. Extensive sections of rural America are without any coverage. Wireless providers that benefit from doing business in cities must up their game in Rural America, or other ways of providing coverage must be found.
9. **Abuse Prevention, Rehabilitation and Support** - Drug abuse in America is a complex problem that will require efforts on several fronts to control. Prevention programs in schools, expanded health care, rehab and follow up will all be important, as will be addressing America's rising inequality. In Kentucky one in four public school students have a parent in jail or serving time for a drug related offense. The collateral damage from the "War on Drugs" continues to do almost as much damage to rural families and communities as the problem of abuse and addiction. The War on Drugs has failed. It is time for a more enlightened approach. We must also hold drug manufacturers liable for misleading the public, and for irresponsibly promoting and overselling addictive drugs.
10. **Legalization of Cannabis** - Cannabis is under prohibition in many states, but the writing is on the wall: legalization is coming, sooner or later. Legal cannabis and hemp mean new cash crops for farmers, new business opportunities for investors and business owners, and new ways of treating pain without addiction. Cannabis enforcement disproportionately punishes people of color; legalization will eliminate a significant piece of systemic racism.
11. **Secretary of Rural Affairs** - This new cabinet level position must be created with the goal of making rural life more than survivable: Rural America must become a place where families can thrive, with new opportunities for work, education and a dignified life.



HANK FOR KY

DEMOCRAT FOR KENTUCKY'S 2ND DISTRICT

1182 PARADISE ACRES ROAD * FALLS OF ROUGH, KY 40119.

PHONE: 270-925-9498 | EMAIL: hank@hank4ky.com | WEBSITE: <http://hank4ky.com>

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