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## **NRHA Applauds White House Rural Task Force**

Washington, D.C. – The National Rural Health Association applauds President Donald Trump’s Executive Order establishing a White House Rural Task Force.

“Since the day after the election, NRHA has strongly urged President Trump to make rural health care a priority in the Administration and to build upon the White House Rural Council established under President Obama,” said Alan Morgan, NRHA CEO. “President Trump is taking the first important step in that direction by creating the White House Rural Task Force.”

The well-intentioned White House Rural Council under the Obama Administration made important inroads but left much work undone. This new task force must act swiftly as a cohesive force within the Administration to advance policies that allow rural communities to prosper and grow. “Time is imperative because of the current rural health crisis,” said Morgan.

Since 2010, 78 rural hospitals have closed because of extensive reimbursement cuts. One in three rural hospitals is financially vulnerable; at the current closure rate, more than 25% of rural hospitals will close in less than a decade. Closures of this magnitude will create a massive national crisis in access to emergency services as well as detrimentally harm rural economies that already severely suffer.

In fact, economic recovery has not returned to rural America. At the peak of the Great Recession, rural counties were losing 200,000 jobs per year and rural unemployment stood at nearly 10 percent. Nearly 90% of the jobs that have returned after the Great Recession have been to urban, not rural areas and according to the USDA annual report, rural unemployment numbers are still far below pre-2008 levels. Poverty rates and child hunger rates also continue to remain unacceptably high.

In most rural communities, health care represents the largest, or second largest, employer in the community (one rural hospital can represent as much as 20% of the local economy). Therefore, NRHA calls upon the Task Force to promote policies that keep rural hospital doors open and invest in the chronic workforce shortages plaguing rural America.

“If the Task Force is to meet its goal of reinvigorating the economy of rural America, it must remember that health care is a critical component of economic stability,” said Morgan. “You cannot have a healthy rural economy without a healthy rural community. Quality rural health care saves lives, provides skilled jobs, attracts businesses, and reinvests millions back into rural communities.”

We hope today’s Executive Order is a starting point. Rural America is waiting.

*NRHA is a nonprofit organization working to improve the health and well-being of rural Americans and providing leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education and research. NRHA membership consists of more than 21,000 individuals and organizations.*

For more information or to learn more about NRHA, visit [ruralhealthweb.org](http://ruralhealthweb.org)

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