



## Investing in an American Asset: Unleashing the Potential of Rural America

Accelerate economic transformation by investing in *people* and enabling them to build new businesses and seize new economic opportunities.

- **Expand and connect Regional Innovation Clusters.** In order to revitalize America’s rural economy and catalyze job creation, Pete will provide up to \$500 million in federal funds to develop and support a national network of 1,000 clusters. By bringing together training, technology, and talent, these regional innovation clusters will support the growth of rural businesses and jobs and launch a new generation of rural entrepreneurs. This initiative will be complemented by efforts to:
  - **Provide support for local economic planning.** Pete will grant \$200 million in federal funds to support state and local governments’ regional development strategies.
  - **Support the Rural Jobs and Innovation Accelerator Challenge.** To spark business innovation and job growth, Pete will support the [Rural Innovation Challenge](#), which will match one dollar in federal grant funding for each dollar of state or private investment (up to \$100,000 per opportunity) in the 1,000 most innovative rural businesses.
  - **Expand Boots to Business.** To support returning veterans who aspire to start a business, Pete will transform the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) Boots to Business entrepreneurship education program from two days to two weeks. Veterans who successfully complete this program and have an accepted business plan will receive a \$10,000 grant to start their business.
- **Double funding for small-scale manufacturing partnerships.** The Commerce Department’s Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) is a public-private partnership that helps to train small- and medium-scale manufacturing entrepreneurs. Unlike the current Administration, which has repeatedly tried to eliminate MEP funding, Pete will double MEP funding to \$3 billion for MEPs to work with Regional Innovation Clusters to train rural workers in new business practices, from cybersecurity to supply chain management to workforce development.
- **Create a national network of apprenticeships.** Pete will double apprenticeships and expand access to other “earn-and-learn” opportunities (such as traditional and virtual apprenticeships, paid internships, and career and technical education programs for high schoolers). The current apprenticeship system enrolls fewer than 600,000 apprentices each year.<sup>1</sup> When Pete is President, he will invest up to \$5 billion over the next decade to ensure an apprenticeship program in a growing industry is available within 30 miles of every American.
- **Increase access to Internships for All.** To encourage companies to offer paid internships to students from underrepresented backgrounds, Pete will allow companies an extra tax deduction for 50% of the cost of interns who live in rural and other underserved areas and who are current

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<sup>1</sup> "[Registered Apprenticeship National Results Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2018 \(10/01/2018 to 9/30/2018\)](#)." Data and Statistics. March 6, 2019.

or recent students. These internships will pay at least the minimum wage, be approved by the Department of Labor with amount limitations and abuse protections, and last up to three months.

- **Create a local Community Renewal visa.** Pete will create a new, place-based Community Renewal visa to provide opportunities for people who want to move to America and help build our economy where they are needed most and where they will do well. These visas will be targeted toward counties that have lost prime-working-age population over the last 10 years, and smaller cities that are struggling to keep pace economically with larger cities.<sup>2</sup>

**Invest and empower rural communities to lead the way in combating climate change.**

- **Support agriculture and significantly invest in R&D as a powerful solution to climate change, including through soil carbon sequestration.** Pete will invest nearly \$50 billion over a decade in innovative research in soil technology, plant and animal health, food safety, nutrition and health, and natural resources, to promote a healthy environment for future generations. He will promote significant investment in R&D that has the potential to reduce agriculture’s carbon emissions to net-zero or net-negative and in technologies for monitoring and measuring soil carbon, while also boosting the bottom line for farmers.
- **Pay farmers for conservation.** Pete will expand many of the ecosystem services available today, like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program, to pay farmers to maximize land conservation, biodiversity, productivity, and soil health. He will also reduce the administrative barriers that many farmers face trying to access these incentives.
- **Establish next-generation Resilience Hubs to provide climate resilience data, tools, and support to communities.** The hubs will provide climate data for each region to help communities understand and manage risks. Where private sector funding is not available, the Resilience Hubs will be complemented by a \$5 billion per year in federal Resilient America Grants, which would be allocated regionally and used for high-impact investments to mitigate damage before disasters.
- **Support biofuels and rural America by supporting the Renewable Fuels Standard as written.** Pete will work with farmers on policies and incentives that reward best practices and drive innovations that are good for U.S. agriculture and good for our climate. Additionally, Pete will stop the abuse of “small refinery” exemptions established by the current administration, which allows fossil fuel giants to skirt their obligations to blend biofuels.

**To compete globally, we must be digitally connected. Pete will launch an ambitious and holistic Internet for All initiative to ensure all communities have affordable access to this necessary technology to create businesses, access health care, and expand opportunities for students to learn and thrive.**

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<sup>2</sup> The plan draws inspiration from the Economic Innovation Group’s Heartland Visa proposal: Ozimek, Adam, Kenan Fikri, and John Lettieri. "[From Managing Decline to Building the Future](#)." Economic Innovation Group. April 2019.

- **Pete will ensure full high-speed broadband coverage with an \$80 billion Internet For All initiative that will expand access to all currently unserved and underserved communities.**
  - First, Pete will invest in new ways to more accurately map which communities lack broadband or wireless in partnership with the private and nonprofit sectors.
  - Second, in regions private companies won't cover, Pete will invest in public and community-based options to guarantee that broadband will be built out.
  - Third, Pete will create a Broadband Innovation Incubator office to catalyze community-owned networks.
  - Fourth, Pete will work with Congress to pass legislation to embrace community-driven broadband initiatives.
- **Close the “homework gap” within the first term.** Pete will ensure that every child—regardless of where they live or how much their parents make—can take full advantage of digital learning opportunities. He will support the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) initiatives to streamline approval processes and leverage the federal E-Rate program so that every classroom has access to world-class Internet speeds.
- **Upgrade our most essential public safety network—our 911 system.** Pete will upgrade our 911 infrastructure to enable anyone, anywhere, to reach lifesaving first responders in an emergency. Every 911 call center and first responder should have broadband connectivity.
- **Restore net neutrality.** Pete will restore net neutrality obligations to ensure an open Internet.
- **Speed up next generation wireless expansion.** Pete is committed to leading the world in next generation wireless and making available more mid-band spectrum. To do so, he supports clearing more government and other spectrum (like the C-Band). A C-Band auction could raise tens of billions that might be able to be invested back into improving rural broadband.<sup>3</sup>
- **Foster a new generation of commercial satellite networks to expand Internet access.** Pete will foster new broadband solutions through R&D and by reducing bureaucratic red tape, such as simplifying new generation broadband technology licensing rules while ensuring safety in space.
- **Build the first network of “connected” rural communities by the end of the first term to enable rural Americans to have reliable, safe, and equitable infrastructure and public services.** Pete will transform and expand the Department of Transportation’s Smart City Challenge Initiative to rural areas and double the National Science Foundation’s Smart and Connected Communities Initiative. Ultimately, this will drive 5-10 times the federal grant money in private investment to dramatically upgrade and modernize critical infrastructure and services.

**Reduce the teacher shortage in rural areas by 50% within 15 years.**

<sup>3</sup> McInerney, Susan. "[C-Band Auction Worth Up \\$40 Billion, FCC to Weigh Rival Plans.](#)" Bloomberg BNA News. July 3, 2019.

- **Increase teacher salaries at rural Title I schools.** Rural schools offer \$7,300 less per year on average, even accounting for the lower cost of living in rural areas.<sup>4</sup> Pete will dramatically increase Title I funding to support higher teacher pay.
- **Provide student loan forgiveness to teachers, including rural teachers.** Providing more support to those entering public service, including those who are teaching in rural public schools, will make it more affordable for those teachers to remain with their students.
- **Expand Grow Your Own (GYO) programs.** A promising strategy for rural schools is GYO programs that help community members become teachers without needing to leave their community. Pete will invest an additional \$50 million in the existing Teacher Quality Partnership Grant Program. The new funds would be targeted specifically for rural schools, and would allow colleges to partner with rural school districts to create these programs.
- **Increase funding for Personnel Prep Grants for special education teachers.** The Department of Education runs a \$83 million per year program designed to train special educators.<sup>5</sup> Pete will increase funding for the program to \$150 million and add a particular focus on special educators serving in rural schools for the increased funds.

**Increase the share of rural adults with a bachelor's degree by 25% within 10 years.**

- **Provide free public college tuition for low- and middle-income students.** Pete will ensure that tuition is free for all low- and middle-income students, which will particularly help rural areas where students are more likely to be low-income and college is often more out of reach.
- **Support satellite hubs for colleges:** A new \$50 million grant program will help rural states and regions establish community “hubs” with their community colleges and public four-year institutions to create local centers where students can access critical campus services and attend some classes in person.
- **Invest \$25 billion in HBCUs and other Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), including Tribal Colleges and Universities.** Many MSIs operate in rural communities; that includes nearly all Tribal Colleges and Universities in the United States.<sup>6</sup> These funds will help colleges continue and improve their operations, reach more students, and strengthen opportunities for graduates.

**Reinvigorate antitrust enforcement to protect workers and family farmers.**

- **Double funding for antitrust enforcement and halve the reporting threshold** so that firms cannot skirt the law and our laws can be properly enforced.

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<sup>4</sup> Provasnik, Stephen, Angelina KewalRamani, Mary McLaughlin Coleman, Lauren Gilbertson, Will Herring, and Qingshu Xie. “[Status of Education in Rural America](#).” U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics at the Institute of Education Sciences. July 2007.

<sup>5</sup> “[Fiscal Year 2019 Budget](#).” Department of Education. 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Gasman, Marybeth and Clifton F. Conrad. “[Minority Serving Institutions: Educating All Students](#).” University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education Center for Minority Serving Institutions. 2013.

- **Revive regional/state antitrust enforcement** and re-invigorate the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA).
- **Require the Department of Justice to conduct post-merger reviews on a regular basis**, including ensuring that the telecom industry carries out its promises on rural broadband.
- **Launch investigations of the seed market’s recent mergers for anticompetitive behavior.** The Department of Justice should use this power to investigate these mergers—and when appropriate, break them up—for anticompetitive behavior.
- **Protect family farm rights for seeds.** The Utility Patent Statute should be amended to protect the right of farmers to replant seeds grown on their own farms.

**Ensure workers access to the wages, protections, and support they deserve.**

- **Restore overtime regulations that would protect 8 million more workers across the country**, including nearly 1 million in rural areas.<sup>7</sup>
- **Provide workers with paid sick leave and paid family leave—no matter where they work.** Pete will set up a national system of paid sick leave and will work to pass the [FAMILY Act](#) to create a national paid family and medical leave fund.
- **Expand worker protections for farm workers and domestic workers.** Pete will ensure that these workers are protected by labor and employment law, and that they are empowered to continue and expand the use of existing strategies, like consumer pressure campaigns and worker-driven social responsibility programs, to achieve a more dignified workplace.<sup>8</sup>
- **Pass a \$15 federal minimum wage indexed to wage growth.** Pete strongly endorses the [Raise the Wage Act](#),<sup>9</sup> of which an important part is ending the subminimum wage for disabled workers and ending the tipped minimum wage.

**Empower local governments to access critical federal development resources through technology.**

- **Launch a Rural Opportunity Center to streamline grant processes in rural communities.** Dozens of federal programs provide funding for projects in rural, farming, and conservation areas. Yet it is difficult and often cost-prohibitive for communities with limited resources to identify and apply for funds. That’s why Pete will establish a Rural Opportunity Center to help officials easily identify federal resources and provide technical assistance. This Center will be complemented by initiatives to:
  - Create a digital tool for officials at all levels of government to understand and access federal resources available to their communities.
  - Simplify grant applications through a “Common Application.”

<sup>7</sup> Shierholz, Heidi. [“More Than Eight Million Workers Will Be Left Behind by the Trump Overtime Proposal.”](#) Economic Policy Institute. April 8, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Greenhouse, Steven. [“In Florida Tomato Fields, a Penny Buys Progress.”](#) *The New York Times*. April 24, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> [“Raise the Wage Fact Sheet.”](#) U.S. House Education and Labor Committee.