



IN THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 24, 2024

Mr. CARTER (for himself, Mr. Brown, Ms. Berry) introduced the
following bill;

A BILL

To encourage economic investment and development in rural areas, to improve rural healthcare outcomes, to revitalize rural infrastructure, and for other purposes.

*Be it resolved by the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States of
America in Congress Assembled,*

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Rural Americans Act”

SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act—

- (a) RURAL AREA.— For the purposes of this Act, the term “rural area” refers to any population, housing, or territory not located in an urban area as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.
- (b) THE DEPARTMENT. — For the purposes of this Act, the term “the Department” refers to the Department of Rural Health and Development.
- (c) THE SECRETARY.— For the purposes of this Act, the term “the Secretary” refers to the Secretary of the Department of Rural Health and Development.

SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF RURAL AFFAIRS

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.— There is established a Department of Rural Health and Development, as an executive department of the United States within the meaning of title 5, United States Code.

(b) MISSION.—

(i) IN GENERAL.— The primary mission of the Department is to:

(A) Improve, revitalize, and maintain infrastructure in rural areas within the United States

(B) Provide specialized housing and mortgage assistance to U.S. residents residing in rural areas

(C) Provide healthcare services, through existing federal laws, to rural residents

(D) Encourage and facilitate economic development in rural areas

(E) Mitigate the effects of natural disasters in rural areas; and

(F) Provide generalized assistance to rural residents that cannot be adequately provided with other departments within the United States government.

(c) SECRETARY, FUNCTIONS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.— There shall be a Secretary of the Department of Rural Health and Development, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate.

(ii) HEAD OF DEPARTMENT.— The Secretary is the Department and shall have direction, authority, and control over it.

(iii) FUNCTIONS VESTED IN SECRETARY.—All functions of all officers, employees, and organizational units of the Department are vested in the Secretary.

(iv) FUNCTIONS.— The Secretary, except as otherwise provided by this Act, may delegate any of the Secretary's functions to any officer, employee, or organizational unit of the Department, shall have the authority to make contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements, and to enter into agreements with other executive agencies, as may be necessary and proper to carry out the Secretary's responsibilities under this Act or otherwise provided by law; and shall take reasonable steps to ensure that information systems and databases of the Department are compatible with each other and with appropriate databases of other Departments.

(d) OTHER OFFICERS.—

(i) IN GENERAL.— There are the other officers, appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate:

(1) A Deputy Secretary of Rural Health and Development, who shall be the Secretary's first assistant for purposes of subchapter III of chapter 33 of title 5, United States Code.

(2) An Under Secretary for Rural Health

- (3) An Under Secretary for Rural Development
- (4) An Under Secretary for Management
- (5) Not more than 10 Assistant Secretaries
- (6) There is an Inspector General, who shall be appointed as provided in section 3(a) of the Inspector General Act of 1978.
- (7) A General Counsel, who is the chief legal officer for the Department.
- (8) Other Officers, appointed by the Secretary, to assist in the administration of the Department, and the execution of the Department's duties and mission, may be appointed, provided that their employment with the Department is deemed appropriate and proper by the Inspector General.

SEC. 4. DISSOLUTION, CONSOLIDATION, AND TRANSFER; RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- (a) IN GENERAL.— USDA Rural Development, including its subsidiary agencies (the Rural Business-Cooperative Service, the Rural Housing Service, and the Rural Utilities Service) shall be dissolved and consolidated into the Department of Rural Health and Development:
 - (i) ASSET TRANSFER.— All assets of USDA Rural Development shall be transferred to the Department of Rural Health and Development within ninety days of the effective establishment date of the Department.
 - (ii) FEDERAL EMPLOYEES.— All employees within USDA Rural Development shall be offered a position of equal standing, in compensation, benefits, and responsibility, within the Department, and shall be given a period of ninety days after the effective establishment of the Department to accept or reject the offer.
 - (iii) TRANSFER OF SERVICES.— All services, programs, authorizations, duties, and authorities of USDA Development, both under the law and resulting from past action by the Department of Agriculture, shall be transferred to the Department of Rural Health and Development.
 - (iv) LEGAL SUCCESSOR.— The Department of Rural Health and Development shall be considered, for all applicable purposes under the law, to be the legal successor entity to USDA Development and all subsidiary programs and agencies.

SEC. 5. ASSUMPTION OF DUTIES

- (a) IN GENERAL.— The Department shall assume full responsibility over the duties of the programs described herein:

- (i) The Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, within the Health Resources and Services Administration, shall be transferred in full to the Department within ninety days of the effective establishment of the Department.
- (ii) The Department shall assume in full the services provided by the Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program, within the Department of Housing and Urban Development. All assets germane to the administration of this program shall be transferred to the Department within ninety days of the effective establishment of the Department.

SEC. 6. RURAL HEALTH SERVICE; ADMINISTRATION

- (a) IN GENERAL.— There shall be established, within the Department, an executive agency, the Rural Health Service.
 - (i) HEAD OF AGENCY.— The head of the Rural Health Service shall be the Under Secretary for Rural Health as established by section 3 of this Act.
 - (ii) OTHER OFFICERS.— The Under Secretary shall have the authority to appoint other officers, as well as make provision for the employment of other persons, to carry out the functions of the agency, provided that the appointment of new officers is deemed appropriate and proper by the Department's Inspector General.
 - (iii) MISSION.— The primary mission of the Rural Health Service is to ensure that every rural American has access to quality and affordable healthcare services, including but not limited to emergency services, hospital and outpatient care, dental care, optical care, mental health services, and hospice care.

SEC. 7. RURAL HEALTH SERVICE; FUNCTION

- (a) IN GENERAL.— The Rural Health Service shall administer programs that enhance rural health outcomes and increase access to healthcare in rural areas.
 - (i) AUTHORIZATION.— The Rural Health Service is authorized to, within the constraints of all current federal laws and the means of the agency's budget:
 - (1) Develop programs of direct or indirect assistance available to rural residents for the purposes of acquiring or paying for healthcare services
 - (2) Develop programs to facilitate the development of rural healthcare infrastructure, such as hospitals or clinics, that provide monetary assistance to firms on the condition that such facilities are constructed in rural areas

- (3) Coordinate with other federal departments and agencies, state health authorities, and private firms, to develop programs to assist rural residents with the acquisition of or paying for healthcare services.
- (ii) **RURAL HOSPITALS INITIATIVE.**— The Rural Health Service shall develop a program, the Rural Hospitals Initiative, by which to provide financial assistance to state and local governments, as well as not-for-profit firms, in the construction of rural hospitals.
 - (1) **FUNDING.**— The Rural Health Service shall be appropriated at least \$500,000,000 per month for operation of the Rural Hospitals Initiative until the fiscal month December 2031, after which funding is discretionary. At least 95% of funds must be used in financial assistance.
- (iii) **OPIOID TASK FORCE.**— There shall be established, within the Rural Health Service, the Opioid Task Force, which shall adhere to the following:
 - (1) **FUNCTION.**— The Opioid Task Force should seek to mitigate the effects of the opioid epidemic by assisting those addicted to opiates, providing information and access to resources for those who are addicted and their families, and studying the opioid epidemic for the purposes of public policy.
 - (2) **LEADERSHIP.**— The Under Secretary for Rural Health shall appoint a commission of nine people to the task force, which shall make decisions collectively.
 - (3) **FUNDING.**— The Opioid Task Force shall be appropriated at least \$150,000,000 per month, until the fiscal month December 2031, after which funding is discretionary.
- (iv) **ASSISTANCE OFFICE.**— There shall be established, within the Rural Health Service, the Office of Rural Health Assistance, which shall develop programs of direct financial assistance for rural residents who cannot afford to pay for health care services.
 - (1) **LEADERSHIP.**— The Under Secretary shall appoint a Director to oversee the office, who shall assume authority over the functions thereof.
 - (2) **FUNDING.**— The Office of Rural Health Assistance shall be appropriated at least \$350,000,000 per month. 95% of funds must be used for direct financial assistance.

SEC. 8. RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY; ADMINISTRATION

- (a) **IN GENERAL.**— There shall be established, within the Department, an executive agency, the Rural Development Agency.

- (i) HEAD OF AGENCY.— The Under Secretary for Rural Development shall function as the head of the Rural Development Agency.
- (ii) OTHER OFFICERS.— The Under Secretary shall have the authority to appoint other officers, as well as make provision for the employment of other persons, to carry out the functions of the agency, provided that the appointment of new officers is deemed appropriate and proper by the Department's Inspector General.
- (iii) MISSION.— The primary mission of the Rural Development Agency should be to encourage and facilitate economic development in rural areas, create good paying jobs for rural residents, and to manage, maintain, and improve rural infrastructure.

SEC. 9. RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY; FUNCTIONS

- (a) IN GENERAL.— The Rural Development Agency shall administer programs that facilitate the economic development of rural areas, improve infrastructure in rural areas, and create jobs.
 - (i) AUTHORIZATION.— The Rural Development Agency is authorized to, within the constraints of all current federal laws and the means of the agency's budget:
 - (1) Develop programs that collaborate with other agencies or departments, state agencies, and private firms, in the interest of creating jobs or assisting job-seekers in obtaining jobs.
 - (2) Develop programs that provide assistance to job-seekers in obtaining jobs.
 - (3) Develop programs that administer grants or loans to state governments, local governments, and private firms, for the purpose of developing rural infrastructure networks.
 - (ii) RURAL HIGHWAYS INITIATIVE.— The Rural Development Agency shall develop a program that offers grants to state and local governments for the maintenance and restoration of state highways in rural areas.
 - (1) FUNDING.— The Rural Development Agency shall be appropriated at least \$250,000,000 per month for the operation of the Rural Highways Initiative. At least 95% of funding must be used in direct grants.
 - (2) DIVERSIFICATION.— No state may receive more than \$30,000,000 in a given month under subsection (a)(ii).
 - (iii) RURAL DEVELOPMENT LOANS.— The Rural Development Agency shall develop a program to offer low-interest forgivable loans to businesses seeking to develop in rural areas.

- (1) **METHODOLOGY.**— There shall be appointed, by the Under Secretary for Rural Development, a board of five commissioners to review applications for loans, as well as create eligibility requirements.
- (2) **FUNDING.**— The Rural Development Agency shall be appropriated at least \$250,000,000 for the operation of the Rural Development Loans program. At least 95% of funding must be used in loans.
- (3) **DIVERSIFICATION.**— No state may receive more than \$30,000,000 in a given month under subsection (a)(iii).
- (iv) **RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION.**— There shall be established, under the Department for Rural Health and Development, and the Rural Development Agency, the Rural Telecommunications Corporation.
 - (1) **OVERVIEW.**— The Rural Telecommunications Corporation shall be a publicly-owned, not-for-profit corporation that offers low-cost broadband and telephone services to all Americans, with an emphasis on rural areas with low access to broadband. The Rural Telecommunications Corporation shall be considered a government corporation for the purposes of 5 U.S. Code § 103.
 - (2) **LEADERSHIP.**— The Rural Telecommunications Corporation shall follow a cooperative business structure, with elected executives and management positions.
 - (3) **SERVICES.**— The Rural Telecommunications Corporation shall offer, to American citizens and qualified legal residents, internet broadband services and telephone services, including both landline and cellular. By law, the services must be offered at the lowest possible price.
 - (4) **FUNDING.**— The Rural Telecommunications Corporation shall be appropriated at least \$100,000,000 for the first five fiscal months following the effective enactment of this Act, after which funding is discretionary. The Corporation is meant to be self-sustaining after this period.
 - (5) **MEANS TEST.**— For U.S. Citizens and qualified legal residents who demonstrate a household income under 115% of the federal poverty line, services may be discounted under a formula developed by the Corporation.
 - (6) **DEFINITIONS.**— For the purposes of subsection (a)(iv)(1) and subsection (a)(iv)(3), a “qualified legal resident” is defined as any person who is legally authorized to reside in the United States, and who has resided in the United States for at least 180 days consecutively.

SEC. 10. SUMMARY OF FUNDS

(a) Under the provisions of this Act, the following mandatory expenditures must be appropriated:

(i) RURAL HEALTH SERVICE.— Total \$1,000,000,000 per month.

(1) RURAL HOSPITALS INITIATIVE.— \$500,000,000 per month.

(2) OPIOID TASK FORCE.— \$150,000,000 per month.

(3) ASSISTANCE OFFICE.— \$350,000,000 per month.

(ii) RURAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY.— Total \$600,000,000 per month.

(1) RURAL HIGHWAYS INITIATIVE.— \$250,000,000 per month.

(2) RURAL DEVELOPMENT LOANS.— \$250,000,000 per month.

(3) RURAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION.— \$100,000,000 per month.

SEC. 11. SEVERABILITY.

a) SEVERABILITY.— Should any provision of this Act be deemed invalid or unconstitutional for any reason in a court with relevant jurisdiction, the rest of the Act, and the application of the remaining provisions, shall not be affected.

SEC. 12. ENACTMENT.

EFFECTIVE DATE.— The provisions of this Act shall come into force thirty days after passage, unless specified otherwise in this Act.
