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# News Release

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## **Top Obama Administration Officials Hold Rural Health Community Forum**

### ***Cabinet Secretaries Kathleen Sebelius, Tom Vilsack, Hilda Solis and Eric Shinseki Seek to Strengthen Support for Rural America***

WASHINGTON -- Four Cabinet Secretaries will host a rural health community forum today in St. John Parish, La., to share information about the federal government's efforts to rebuild and revitalize rural America. This is the next leg of a tour launched by President Obama, showcasing how communities, states, and the federal government can work together to help strengthen rural America.

The Secretaries for the Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Labor and Veterans Affairs will listen to local residents' perspectives and discuss solutions to the challenges facing rural communities during the 90-minute community forum.

"The President is committed to improving health care in rural communities and doing all we can to make all of America's communities even better places to live, work, and raise a family," HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said. "Rural communities face unique challenges. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. We all know that the policies that work in one area of the country may not be the best for all communities, particularly when it comes to health care."

In June, President Obama announced that top officials from his Administration would visit communities across the nation to discuss how we can strengthen rural America. The community forums allow the Cabinet Secretaries to hear directly from people living in rural communities and advise the President on best ways to support their needs.

"To address the many challenges facing our rural communities, we are traveling across the country to listen, learn and facilitate problem-solving," said USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack. "To ensure the success of rural America in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, it is critical that policymakers hear the thoughts, concerns and stories about each community's

vision for its future, and to collect ideas about how all of our agencies can help build a better future for all Americans.”

The forums provide for direct public input on how to build a more healthy American economy, which depends on a prosperous rural America. Rural America supplies much of our nation’s food, safeguards the environment, cultivates a vibrant small business sector, and plays a growing role in science, innovation and energy independence.

“Americans need jobs, and our nation’s rural communities need better health services. By training more nurses, direct care workers, and other health professionals, we can better address both challenges,” said Labor Secretary Hilda Solis. “I look forward to continued joint efforts with my colleagues in the Administration, the United States Congress, and local governments, as we sharpen our focus on improving health services for rural residents and expanding employment options for workers.”

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act includes broad support for rural communities by investing in nutrition programs, broadband, rural economic development, conservation, and in the community health centers that dot the landscape of rural America. It provides \$800 million to help make rural America a leader in the green economy; and it provides \$700 million in mandatory farm disaster assistance.

“It is essential that we work together to build rural programs that reach out to our nation's Veterans,” said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. “VA has a strong national program, but there is more to be done. We are continually seeking innovative ways to apply the tools of leading edge technologies and advances in medical science to enhance access to services and improve quality of care for our Veterans in rural areas.”

Rural Tour events have already been held in Pennsylvania, New Hampshire and Michigan. Future events are currently scheduled in Alaska, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, Wisconsin and Ohio.

All Americans can follow the Rural Tour’s progress online at [www.RuralTour.gov](http://www.RuralTour.gov) or on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/RuralTour](http://www.twitter.com/RuralTour).

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