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Building a brighter future for our country starts here, at home, in the small and rural communities that are the foundation of America. Without them, we would not be the great nation we are today.

Having grown up in Cumming, Iowa, which is still my home, I know firsthand the significant challenges facing rural communities. But I also deeply appreciate their strengths and contributions – very notably in agriculture -- and their tremendous potential and promise.

That is why I am very pleased and encouraged by the executive order President Obama issued earlier this month to create a White House Rural Council. This council will draw together departments, agencies and offices across the federal government to concentrate their focus on growing the economy, creating jobs and enhancing the quality of life in rural communities.

It is especially encouraging that President Obama has named to chair the White House Rural Council someone who knows what it means to be from a small town and who is closely attuned to the challenges and aspirations of the families, farms, and businesses that make up rural America. That, of course, is my long-time friend and colleague, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

To achieve these goals of economic growth, more jobs and a better quality of life in rural communities, the White House Rural Council will help rural Americans obtain better job training and education. It will help expand markets for agricultural products in local, domestic and

In Iowa's Interest: New White House Rural Council Means Stronger Focus on Initiatives for Rural Iowa

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international markets. The council will push to increase biofuels production and rural renewable energy projects and investments. And to enhance health and the quality of life in rural areas, the council will help improve access to quality health care and support initiatives and opportunities in outdoor recreation and conservation of soil, water and wildlife.

The White House Rural Council holds significant promise for increasing opportunities in states like Iowa. It has strong potential for reinvigorating these rural communities and their economies and, in turn, revitalizing our nation. As a senior member and former Chairman of the United States Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, I applaud this new White House initiative and I look forward to the ideas it generates, the action it spurs and the opportunities it engenders.

For more information, please feel free to contact any of my offices or visit my website at <http://harkin.senate.gov>