



U.S. Senator Tina Smith: ***Making Economic Development in Rural America a Priority***

As rural communities in Minnesota and across the country struggle to overcome a slumping farm economy, rising health care costs, shortage of affordable housing, crippling lack of reliable broadband services, and limited childcare options, U.S. Senator Tina Smith has made it a priority to tackle these problems and help rural America thrive again.

Making health care more affordable and accessible in rural communities – As a member of the Senate Health Committee, and a leader of the bipartisan Senate Rural Health Caucus, Sen. Smith has made addressing the unique health care needs of rural communities a top priority.

- The 2018 Farm Bill included Sen. Smith’s provision to create a U.S. Department of Agriculture “Rural Health Liaison” who will work with other federal health officials to coordinate and address rural America’s health care needs.
- Sen. Smith teamed up with Republican Sen. John Barasso to introduce the *Rural Health Clinic Modernization Act* to update rules for the nation’s 4,400 Rural Health Clinics, which provide care for more than 7,000,000 Americans. The bill addresses the physician shortage, increases access to telehealth, and makes other cost-effective changes.
- Sen. Smith lead on urging Senate appropriators to support rural health programs, including funding for Community Health Centers, for efforts to place primary health providers in the most underserved rural communities, and to help rural communities build and maintain health delivery systems. The push also promotes telehealth, and funding to strengthen the health care workforce and infrastructure in rural areas.

Making rural housing more affordable and available – Sen. Smith understands that if a rural community doesn't have enough good places for residents to live, it affects families’ health and economic well-being, it hurts students' capacity to learn, and it frustrates businesses which can't house the new employees they need to fill jobs and expand.

- Sen. Smith, along with Sen. Jeanne Shaheen introduced the *Rural Housing Preservation Act* to provide rental assistance for rural residents.
- She’s supported funding for the Rural Housing Service, which offers low-cost loans, grants, and other assistance for rural housing projects and the construction or improvement of rural child care centers, fire and police stations, hospitals, and other public utility buildings.
- She’s backed funding for the Community Development Block program, which provides cities and counties invest in housing rehabilitation, homeownership assistance, economic development projects, and public services.

Pressing to expand rural broadband – Sen. Smith knows that broadband is the infrastructure of the 21st Century and that it is a necessity to help businesses run, students learn, and Americans share and access information. Unfortunately, too many rural, tribal, and low-income communities still lack access to affordable and reliable broadband services. Sen. Smith has pushed to change that with policies that expand broadband access.

- The bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill - signed into law late last year - includes Sen. Smith’s Community Connect Grant Program to help fund broadband deployment to rural communities where it is not economically viable for private providers to deliver service.
- This year, Sen. Smith has joined Republican Senator Rob Portman in making sure that coops can retain their tax-exempt status in efforts to expand rural broadband.
- She’s also cosponsored the *Digital Equity Act* to provide hundreds of millions of dollars in direct and competitive grants to historically underserved groups and to organizations working toward digital inclusion.

Upgrading rural infrastructure to expand economic development– By traveling to rural and Tribal areas across Minnesota, Sen. Smith knows that in order for these communities to create jobs and economic development, they need infrastructure that supports growth. As ranking member of the Rural Development Subcommittee, she has and will continue to support efforts to strengthen local communities’ access to affordable electricity and water systems and backed funding to expand rural businesses, boost local development, and promote trade that benefits rural areas.

- Sen. Smith championed the expanded use of renewable energy made from farm products when she helped write the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill that was signed into law last year.
- Sen. Smith supported funding for Rural Utility Service Electric Loans in USDA to help finance infrastructure developments that increase access to reliable electricity around the country.
- Sen. Smith backed funding for USDA’s Water and Sewer loan financing program, which provides funding for drinking water systems and sewage disposal systems in rural areas.
- Sen. Smith led efforts to fund the Rural Cooperative Development Grant program, which supports rural areas by helping individuals start, expand, or improve rural co-ops or mutually owned businesses.
- As part of the 2018 Farm Bill, Sen. Smith pressed an amendment to require greater inclusion of tribal products in federal trade promotion efforts.
- Sen. Smith cosponsored the *Native American Business Incubators Program Act* to offer competitive grants to establish business incubators to help Native-owned small businesses.

Increasing mental health resources in rural Minnesota – Sen. Smith knows that Minnesotans struggle to find adequate mental health resources in rural communities and continues to fight for making mental health resources more accessible.

- Sen. Smith reintroduced the *Mental Health Services for Students Act*, which will provide funding for comprehensive mental health services in schools.
- Sen. Smith introduced the *Supporting Family Mental Health in CAPTA Act*, which will bolster mental health services for populations under the *Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act*.
- In 2018, Sen. Smith wrote bipartisan legislation, the *Improving Access to Mental Health Services Act*, which would allow National Health Service Corps members to serve as behavioral and mental health professionals at schools, other community-based settings, or patients’ homes.
- Sen. Smith introduced the *Native Behavioral Health Access Improvement Act of 2018*, which would require the Indian Health Service to award grants to Indian health facilities for the prevention and treatment of mental health and substance use disorders.

Expanding affordable childcare in rural communities – Sen. Smith understands the positive influence high quality childcare has on a child’s development, and how difficult it is to find affordable childcare in greater Minnesota. She has worked tirelessly on finding solutions to make childcare more accessible for Minnesotans living in rural communities.

- Sen. Smith cosponsored the *Child Care for Working Families Act* to ensure low- to moderate-income families pay no more than seven percent of their annual income on childcare, making childcare and preschool more accessible.
- Sen. Smith introduced the *Child Care Supply Improvement Act of 2018*, which would provide grants to States, Indian Tribes, and Tribal organizations for activities to increase the availability of childcare options and to support the childcare workforce.