

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 19, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Whitten Federal Building
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

Thank you for testifying before the House Agriculture Committee yesterday on the scope and importance of issues under the purview of the Department of Agriculture. We share your commitment to rural America and look forward to working with you on behalf of the constituents we all serve.

As you know, Rural Development is the only mission area at USDA focused exclusively on improving the economy and quality of life in rural and small town America. Rural Development has approximately 5,000 staff, delivers more than \$29 billion in investments through their programs annually, and manages a loan portfolio valued at more than \$216 billion - roughly equal to the 14th largest bank. These programs help provide financing and support for local businesses and construction of key infrastructure in these communities including providing clean water systems, electrification, broadband, rural hospitals, police stations, nursing homes, and even fire trucks and emergency sirens. Perhaps most importantly, during the last Administration, Rural Development was credited with helping about 112,000 rural small businesses grow, creating or saving an estimated 450,000 jobs.

Managing the tens of billions of dollars that flow through Rural Development every year is a great responsibility which requires stringent oversight and accountability to ensure taxpayers are being protected and funding is distributed with impartiality. We are concerned because demoting this position from a Senate-confirmed Undersecretary to a non-confirmed political appointee has the potential to undermine both the credibility and transparency of a program with a proven record of results in small towns and rural communities across our nation.

This is why, during Wednesday's Agriculture Committee Hearing, we questioned you on this concern during separate exchanges.

During your exchange with Rep. Bustos, you said Rural Development would be headed by an "Assistant Secretary." You added, "if it makes you feel better to call that person Undersecretary, then enjoy that" and stated "that person will be Senate-confirmed in that area, so you'll have an opportunity to visit with that person and ask them all those questions."

Later, Rep. Blunt Rochester followed up on that exchange by asking if "the Undersecretary was Senate-confirmed and this would be appointed?" You replied "our expectation is that this assistant secretary would be confirmed as well."

We were very pleased to hear that you had changed your mind and decided to maintain the head of Rural Development as a Senate-confirmed undersecretary position.

However, later in the day, we were disappointed to read that you told media outlets after the hearing that you "may have misspoken" during these two separate exchanges and still intend to eliminate the Senate-confirmed leadership of the Rural Development mission area in exchange for a staff level position in the Secretary's office.

In describing the importance of creating the position of Undersecretary of Trade, you said "my opinion is that people do business with people and I wanted someone every day that woke up with that on their mind – where can I go to sell United States agricultural products around the world."

We agree, but we also think it's equally important to have an Undersecretary leading Rural Development who has that same kind of focus on creating jobs, helping small businesses succeed and ensuring better opportunities for hard working men and women from small towns and communities across rural America.

We appreciate and support your willingness and interest to be more involved in the Rural Development mission of the Department, but we remain concerned that the reorganization proposal submitted to Congress and the proposed 21% cut in the President's skinny budget does not reflect the same vision and commitment you shared with us during the hearing. That's why we think it's important to maintain the position of Undersecretary of Rural Development, the only part of the USDA focused on creating jobs and growing rural economies, and we ask you to reconsider this decision.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

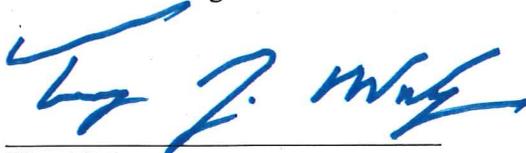
Sincerely,



Cheri Bustos
Member of Congress



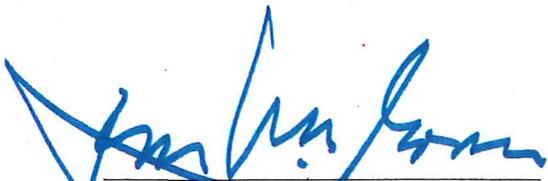
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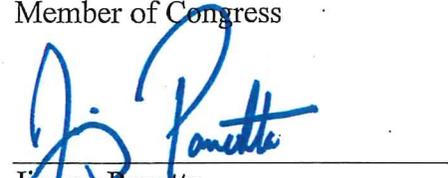

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Member of Congress

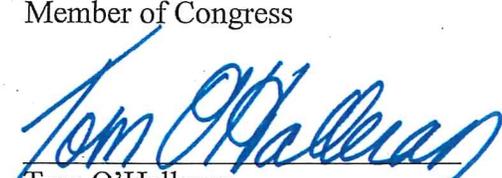

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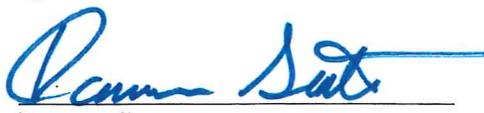

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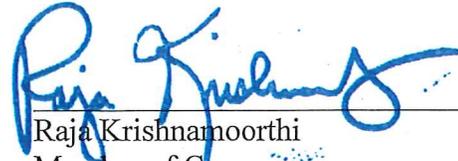

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