

Biden proposes a development strategy to revitalize rural America

As part of his campaign for the Democratic nomination for the coming 2020 presidential campaign which will, in all likelihood, pit the winner against the incumbent Republican, Donald Trump, Joe Biden has issued “The Biden Plan for Rural America” (<https://joebiden.com/rural/>). Unlike two of his competitors for the nomination, Warren and Sanders, Biden does not address commodity policy and the current six-year period of low prices.

Instead, he recognizes that while 20 percent of Americans live in rural America, everyone depends upon rural areas for fuel, food, and outdoor recreational areas. He also notes the dilemma that rural communities lose most of their youth because of the lack of employment opportunities.

Biden’s focus is “a rural economic development strategy that partners with rural communities to invest in their unique assets, with the goal of giving young people more options to live, work, and raise the next generation in rural America.”

His rural economic development strategy is set out in three major categories:

- I. Fundamentally revitalize rural economies;
- II. Partner with rural communities to help them fully access federal resources; and
- III. Protect and build on the Affordable Care Act to improve access to quality health care in rural communities.

To revitalize rural economies, Biden calls for “a trade policy that works for American Farmers.” Recognizing the importance of agricultural trade, Biden contrasts his vision with Trump’s “damaging and erratic trade war without any real strategy.” He says he “will stand up to China by working with our allies to negotiate from the strongest possible position. And, he’ll make sure our trade policy works for American farmers.”

In addition, Biden proposes to improve programs to support beginning farmers, foster regional food systems, increase the federal investment in land grant universities’ agricultural research, and partner “with farmers to make American agriculture first in the world to achieve net-zero emissions, giving farmers new sources of income in the process. He also proposes to “protect small and medium-sized farmers and producers by strengthening enforcement of the Sherman and Clayton Antitrust Acts and the Packers and Stockyards Act.” Biden wants to focus on bio-based manufacturing as a means of bringing manufacturing jobs to rural America.

The closest Biden gets to commodity policy is his pledge to “promote ethanol and the next generation biofuels. He plans on supporting wind and solar energy and investing in building out the rural broadband infrastructure so that farmers and rural residents are not at a disadvantage to urban residents.

One of the problems that rural areas have is fully accessing federal resources. He says, “the Biden Administration will partner with these communities to help them fully access federal resources to create jobs, build wealth, and give rural Americans who live in poverty the chance to join the middle class.” Along with Sanders, he notes that “approximately 85% of roughly 350 persistent poverty counties in the United States fall outside of a metropolitan area” and plans to “allocate 10 percent of funding to areas ‘where 20 percent or more of the population has been living below the poverty line for the last 30 years.’”

Given his role in the Obama administration, it is no surprise that Biden wants to use the Affordable Care Act to strengthen the rural health care system by improving rural residents’

access to health care. In the states that did not expand Medicaid eligibility, “Vice President Biden’s plan will enroll all of these individuals in a new public option, without a premium and with benefits like those offered in Medicaid. This isn’t just the right thing to do, it will help rural hospitals remain solvent.”

The details of the rural and agricultural policies of the three leading Democratic candidates show both differences and commonalities among them, giving Democratic caucus goers and primary voters the chance to find a candidate who represents their views.

Policy Pennings Column 992

Originally published in MidAmerica Farmer Grower, Vol. 37, No. 238, September 6, 2019

Dr. Harwood D. Schaffer: Adjunct Research Assistant Professor, Sociology Department, University of Tennessee and Director, Agricultural Policy Analysis Center. Dr. Daryll E. Ray: Emeritus Professor, Institute of Agriculture, University of Tennessee and Retired Director, Agricultural Policy Analysis Center.

Email: hdschaffer@utk.edu and dray@utk.edu; <http://www.agpolicy.org>.

Reproduction Permission Granted with:

- 1) Full attribution to Harwood D. Schaffer and Daryll E. Ray, Agricultural Policy Analysis Center, Knoxville, TN;
- 2) An email sent to hdschaffer@utk.edu indicating how often you intend on running the column