

{As prepared for Delivery}

Serving Rural and Remote Communities

Remarks for

Under Secretary Dallas Tonsager

Saturday, June 5, 2010 (6:30 pm)

Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada

Thank you Dan (Patterson) (President, Niagara College)

Good evening and thank you for the kind invitation to join you.

On behalf of the Obama Administration, I would like to thank Ms. (Donna) Mitchell and Chairwoman (Marilyn) Luscombe (Association of Canadian Community Colleges) for your commitment to rural education and economic development.

We are also fortunate to have passionate leaders in the United States who share your commitment: The American Association of Community Colleges and the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI: Chuck Fluharty and Marcie McLaughlin) and the Rural Community College Alliance.

I am pleased that we have advanced the sharing of mutual and diverse ideas through the Alliance of Community Colleges. This is an especially important alliance as it allows us to better understand our commonalities, experiences and tribulations. And from this understanding, we can further strengthen the role of community colleges.

Challenge to Community Colleges:

In discussions I have had with the American Association of Community Colleges over the last few years – I have challenged them to develop training curriculums for new opportunities.

Community colleges have traditionally been seen as being local and affordable. It was a place where local employers could utilize the structured educational environment to develop skills sets for their employees and provide a stepping stone to four-year degrees. Today, the dynamics have dramatically changed, and I believe so have the opportunities for rural communities and for community colleges.

Building a Strong Rural Economy

President Obama took office amid an array of challenges:

- Our economy was in freefall – deepest downturn since the Great Depression

The President took strong and politically-difficult steps to rebuild the economy; and for USDA, our budgetary commitment includes almost \$26 billion to build on:

- New opportunities from renewable energy,
- Local and regional food systems, and
- Environmental markets and green jobs.

Building a strong new rural economy requires a solid foundation. Communities must come together to build regional economies – that can support an entire hub of communities.

To build successful 21st Century rural communities – I believe there are seven strategies:

- **Capital Markets**
- **Regional Food Systems**
- **Alternative Energy**
- **Broadband and Continuous Business Creation**
- **Strategic Partners**
- **Community Building**

➤ **Regional Collaboration**

Role of Education:

The President strongly supports utilizing community colleges to assist our citizens in securing the education needed to create competitive opportunities.

Announced the American Graduation Initiative on July 14, 2009:

- Competitive grants – challenging community colleges to pursue innovation, results-oriented strategies;
- Loans to renovate and rebuild classrooms; and
- Creation of new online, open-source clearinghouse of courses.

Jill Biden – professor at community college in Northern Virginia, understands community colleges and will be promoting and helping to make community colleges stronger.

USDA Rural Development:

In the United States, USDA Rural Development provides the vast majority of federal resources to rural communities. We have begun

to incorporate these strategies into the way that we respond to local needs.

I oversee a portfolio of \$138 billion in loans and loan guarantees, and administer over 40 rural programs through a network of 500 local offices and 6,100 employees. We annually provide over \$20 billion a year in housing, business and utility funding.

- **\$31.2 billion:** Overall commitments (ARRA and Non-ARRA) in 2009

In 2009 and in 2010, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, USDA Rural Development has played a key role in working with community leaders to help stimulate their local economies.

To date:

- **Over \$17 billion** committed;
 - 2,300 projects, and;
 - nearly 88,000 homeownership loans

Our partnership financing reaches across several programs (Rural Business grant programs, Community Facility programs,

Community Connect and Distance Learning/Telemedicine programs.)

Example of working with Community Colleges:

Rural Business Opportunity Grant was provided to the Neosho County Community College and a local school district in Kansas – to create a technical training program needed by a local employer.

The school provided the facility, the community college provided the faculty and both provided equipment for the facility. This has resulted in a solid building trades curriculum, without duplications. It has resulted in a 100% increase in enrollments in these classes.

Distance Learning Telemedicine Loans and Grants:

Since inception of the program in 1993, over 75 community college initiatives have been financed.

Most recent example:

Walters State Community College in Tennessee was selected to receive \$493,637 to link 11 rural schools and three rural campuses of the college with its main campus in Morristown using videoconferencing. The focus of the project is to share resources among the schools as well as to bring the resources of the urban

campus to the rural schools, and in particular, to provide continuing education and vocational programs.

USDA is committed to bridging expanding access to broadband technology so that rural communities have all the tools they need to create jobs and build prosperous economies for the 21st century.

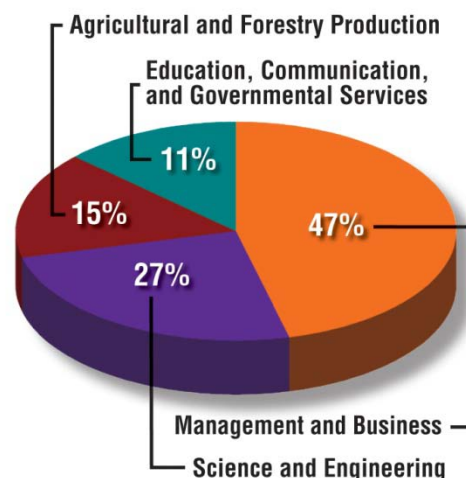
Preparing for the new Workforce:

A recently released study suggests that new economic opportunities in rural America will also create a shortfall of an educated workforce needed to create and grow competitive markets locally.

From the study: The agricultural, food, and renewable natural resources sectors of the U.S. economy will generate an estimated 54,400 annual openings for individuals with baccalaureate or higher degrees in food, renewable energy, and environmental specialties between 2010 and 2015.

Seventy-four percent of the jobs will be in business and science occupations; 15 percent in agriculture and forestry production; and 11 percent in education,

Employment Opportunities



communication, and governmental services.

Community colleges play a critical role – not only in preparation for higher degrees, but skills training that will reach the entire newly generated workforce.

Colleges have the opportunity to help develop and drive the economic development – the network of resources allows you to bring together regional approaches that support the primary economic driver and the ancillary businesses.

Community colleges serve many roles: educator, community leader, and visionary.

As the conference gets underway, I encourage you to:

- 1) Explore ways that you can lead the development of regional collaboration toward both the educational needs of the community and the economic opportunities that present themselves as a result of this new economic dynamic underway in rural areas; and

2) Continue to strengthen the dialogue and alliance with your U.S. counterparts.

Rural communities are positioned to greatly benefit from the desire to create new economies centered on renewable energy, local foods, and utilization of broadband technologies. I am confident these dynamics will result in building stronger more viable and sustainable rural communities.

We recognize the role as conveners and community anchor that colleges play in their communities and regions. Thank you for that service and for the opportunity to be with you this evening.