

# Rural America is in the cross hairs

## Agriculture • New federal policies threaten the livelihoods of people in America's heartland.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack will be in Hillsboro, Mo. today to host a "National Summit of Rural America: A Dialogue for Renewing the Promise" on behalf of the Obama administration.

As co-chairmen of the Rural America Solutions Group, we hope the event will mark a turning point in the Obama administration's agenda for rural America. However, if the first half of President Barack Obama's term is any indication of things to come, the outlook for folks in America's heartland isn't good.

Put simply, the Obama administration and the Democratic-controlled Congress are out of touch with the needs of the people who keep this country running — farmers, ranchers, small-business owners and the hard-working families who call rural America home. It seems as if we wake up every day to find government bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., churning out new policies that disproportionately will affect rural Americans.

Today, rural Americans are in the cross hairs of several job-killing policies that threaten to destroy their livelihoods. One example is the proposed national energy tax. Democrats in Congress arrogantly have been pursuing an ill-conceived cap-and-trade program that will slam rural families and businesses with a national energy tax. As a result, electricity prices would skyrocket, gas prices would balloon and thousands of jobs in rural America could be lost forever.

In a two-pronged attack, President Obama also is instructing the Environmental Protection Agency to impose harmful new regulations and mandates on carbon emissions and energy consumption. This government power grab would give the EPA unprecedented authority to regulate anything that emits carbon — including tractor trailers, tractors, lawnmowers and even weed-whackers.

Additionally, the administration and majority leaders in Congress are working on a plan that radically would expand the EPA's authority over production agriculture. They have introduced a bill that would broaden the scope of the Clean Water Act by bringing nearly every body of water — from small creeks and ponds to seasonal mud puddles — under the unlimited jurisdiction of the federal government. This massive expansion of authority would create new hurdles for small businesses and dramatically raise the cost of running a farm.

Bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., think they know what's best for rural America, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Time and time again, the administration and majority leaders in Congress have proven that they do not understand or appreciate the unique challenges faced by folks in the heartland.

It's unfortunate that someone who ran for president on a platform of hope and change would pursue policies that bring frustration and heartache to our rural communities.

Hosting a Rural Summit will do nothing to help rural Americans unless Washington, D.C., learns to listen. The millions of American families who are struggling to make ends meet need more than soaring rhetoric and fancy speeches. They need action that will create jobs and build a better future for our children.

In order to quickly rebuild and revitalize America, we must place a renewed focus on helping our rural communities and small towns flourish.

Members of the Rural America Solutions Group know that we can find ways to protect our environment and secure energy independence without punishing the people who run the businesses and cultivate the lands that fuel our communities and feed our families.

It is past time to consider new ideas for the future. We must stop imposing job-killing taxes and regulations on the very people who will lead us through our economic recovery.

U.S. Reps. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., Frank Lucas, R-Okla., and Sam Graves, R-Mo., are co-chairmen of the Rural America Solutions Group.