

Strengthening our Rural Economies





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Since entering this race, I have traveled to every part of Wisconsin, talking to voters about the issues that matter most to them. Our campaign has followed the lead of Senator Tammy Baldwin and Governor Tony Evers, showing up in communities that have traditionally been ignored by Democrats, and taken for granted by Republicans.

My plan has been to talk directly with every voter that we can, whether it's in an urban, suburban, or rural area. The road to a Democratic Senate runs through Wisconsin, and every single vote will matter.

I decided to run because for over a decade, Wisconsinites have only had one Senator fighting for them in Washington. I want to give Tammy Baldwin a true partner in the United States Senate.

I am committed to fight to help raise wages, bring real investment back to Wisconsin, and work every day to help make people's lives better. I have a proven track record of delivering real results for the people of Wisconsin. Whether that's creating good union jobs, paying a \$15-dollar minimum wage, and creating economic opportunity right here in Wisconsin, I don't just talk about the issues, I deliver on them.

This plan at its core is about investing more in our working families. We all know families are struggling right now with rising costs. The proposals in this plan will have a direct effect on easing supply chain problems, help lower inflationary pressure on prices, and help create more jobs in every part of this state.

I want to go to Washington to get things done for all Wisconsinites, no matter where they live, or who they have voted for in the past. People in every part of our state, whether it's in urban, suburban, and rural areas are struggling with many of the same issues.



We all want:

- **Good jobs that pay family supporting wages**
- **A quality education and good schools for our kids**
- **Access to high-speed broadband**
- **Access to clean drinking water**
- **To make sure that our families are safe**
- **Good, affordable, accessible health care when we get sick**
- **To keep our kids close to home as they grow up and start their own families**

Republicans like Ron Johnson want us to believe people in urban and rural areas don't care about the same things, that couldn't be further from the truth. They desperately want to divide and conquer us and are constantly trying to stoke division. But the wants and needs of our communities are not that different. We all share far more in common than we have differences.

No plan that seeks to strengthen rural communities will ever address every issue. My plan is where I will start, but not where my work will end.

I am running to help put more money in working peoples' pockets and help bring back more jobs to Wisconsin. I'm not a career politician. Instead of just talking about what I want to do, I have a proven record of delivering real results for Wisconsinites.

Wisconsin needs a partner for Tammy Baldwin to fight every day to ensure these issues have the funding and attention they need to help rural communities prosper and succeed. I want to be that Senator.



Retain, Attract, and Train Rural Workers and Jobs

We have a graying crisis all across Wisconsin, but it is most acute in our rural communities. The median age in rural counties is now approximately 44.4 years old, and it's steadily getting older.

In the twenty years between 1989-2009, Wisconsin saw its labor force grow by 20%. But since that time, our state has not experienced any growth, and most areas of the state have seen negative growth. Especially in rural areas, we have seen population loss, a shrinking labor pool, and limited access to career training and opportunity. Young workers are leaving rural Wisconsin, often driven by the growing problem of limited rural jobs, which then drives even less workforce availability for prospective employers. It's a vicious cycle that we must break.

It often seems that the number one export from Wisconsin is our children. We do a great job of giving them a quality education and world class college degrees, but then they leave. No place is this more acute than in our rural communities. One of the best ways we can help strengthen our rural communities is to make sure our kids can stay, or come back to the community they are born and raised in.

That means jobs, opportunity, and the ability to raise a family. We need to retain young people by improving career awareness efforts by local businesses in their nearby high schools. We need businesses to help sponsor young people, get involved in the classroom, and offer scholarships for college that are conditioned on coming back. This should all be done in an effort to provide local options for students to stay in their communities.

But retaining our local students won't be enough. We need to attract new workers to move into our rural communities. We need to emphasize things like the natural beauty, outdoor recreation opportunities, affordability, safety, and the quality of life in a community that is a good place to live and raise a family.

We need college loan forgiveness programs that eliminate student loan debt in order to attract people to move back to our rural communities to do critical jobs for the community. We need to incentivize health professions, teachers, lawyers, mental health counselors, substance abuse counselors, and other professionals to work where our rural communities are facing severe shortages.



Encouraging Remote Work

The boom in remote work during the pandemic is allowing more people and companies the flexibility to do their jobs wherever they want. During the early part of the pandemic, 27% of adults considering relocation were most interested in a rural location according to a survey conducted by DCI (an economic development marketing firm). We need to market our rural areas as more affordable, especially as home prices in cities continue to skyrocket. But in order to make this possible, we also need to ensure that every community has access to affordable, reliable high-speed broadband.

Capitalizing and Incentivize Business Location Decisions

A summer 2020 survey of site selectors said that 31% of responding businesses were more likely to consider locating new businesses operations to rural locations, compared to the only 10% considering large urban areas. This shift in attitudes is a tremendous opportunity for rural communities to attract new businesses and workers into their communities.

Instead of just handing out tax breaks to all businesses whether they are good corporate citizens or not, we need to incentivize companies to earn their tax breaks by making decisions that help our communities. Companies that do things like bringing back manufacturing from overseas, locating their operations in rural communities, investing in the health and wellbeing of the community they are located in, and have a unionized workforce - those are examples of ways they can earn a tax break. If they choose to not do any of these things, then they will not be eligible for tax breaks.



Re-shoring Manufacturing and Improving Supply Chains

We are in an unprecedented time in recent history where both business and the government understand the vital need to bring back critical manufacturing to the United States. This has the potential to greatly benefit rural Wisconsin, as we have a long history of rural manufacturing. We need a coordinated, concerted effort to bring these jobs and investment back to Wisconsin. Our economic efforts cannot solely be focused on bringing jobs to large urban areas, we must also put an equal emphasis on helping bring jobs to rural areas to harness their available workforce and history of manufacturing.

Recent events have clearly shown that supply chains need to become more diverse and less fragile, with an emphasis on sourcing and production closer to the consumer. We need to double down on efforts to push “Buy America” and ensure that critical manufacturing is done right here in the United States.

For too long, our country has been in a race to the bottom where we have incentivized companies to ship jobs overseas and produce products for the lowest price possible, no matter what the consequences are. We need to make sure that when government dollars are being spent, they are being used to Buy American goods and help prop up companies that are producing goods and services in America with American labor.



Rebuilding Our Rural Infrastructure

We need to rebuild infrastructure across our state. For too long, critical infrastructure that was built more than a generation ago has not received the care and maintenance that it needs. That doesn't just mean roads and bridges, but also ensuring that Wisconsinites in all parts of the state have access to reliable, affordable broadband, clean drinking water, and other vital parts of our infrastructure like expanding and improving rail access to ship products.

Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, there are billions of dollars in funding being dedicated to rural infrastructure needs. While 60% of the funding will be distributed by a formula basis, most of the rest will be distributed based on competitive grants. The challenge now is ensuring that Wisconsin competes for and receives as much funding as possible. This will take work from the Wisconsin congressional delegation, working with state and local officials. We need a Senator who will work to make this happen, not one who thinks it's not his job.

We also need to invest in upgrading our rail infrastructure across the state. We need to have a system that can not only transport Wisconsin produced goods to the market in an efficient manner, but also help transport our people and allow workers to live wherever they want, including rural areas, and commute more easily. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill makes a good down payment on building out these networks, but there is a lot more that needs to be done all over our state.

In the coming years, Congress will need to pass a follow up bill to ensure our critical infrastructure needs are continuing to be addressed. If elected U.S. Senator. I will continue to press for additional funding for infrastructure.

Expanding Ethanol Use

In light of soaring gas prices, I support President Joe Biden's order today to expand the use of biofuels, allowing vehicles to use up to 15% ethanol blends throughout the summer. Labeled as E15, the blend can save consumers up to 10 cents per gallon on average. I believe this is a good transitional step to help bring down current gas prices, stretching gas supplies and increasing demand for biofuels.



Expanding Broadband

Broadband Internet is critical infrastructure that is just as important as roads and electricity. The pandemic has shown us first-hand what a lack of access to reliable broadband means for schools, healthcare facilities, and small businesses. More than 35% of rural Americans and Tribal communities lack access to broadband at acceptable speeds.

We are seeing both the federal and state governments invest to ensure that all Wisconsinites have access to affordable high-speed internet, but more needs to be done. We must bridge the gap to ensure an equal footing when it comes to opportunity for every part of our state. This is especially acute in education. Our students are Wisconsin's future, and if we don't invest in them, then they won't be able to invest in Wisconsin.

Historically, lower density population areas have made it economically undesirable for private providers to invest in the cost of installation of broadband infrastructure in less densely populated areas. Advances in technology are starting to change this, with newer options like 5G and satellite internet that bridge the 'last mile problem' while delivering high-speed, reliable broadband almost anywhere.

Strengthening Legacy Rural Industries

Legacy rural industries like agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and forestry are all under immense stress. We need to do more to help support our industries to make investments to modernize, helping them save money while also protecting the environment. We need to ensure that good business practices and good environmental practices go hand in hand and end the false trope that we have to do one or the other.

The loss of manufacturing in rural areas has been devastating for local communities. Wisconsin has a proud history of having a geographically diversified manufacturing base. We have hard-working, well-trained workers who are ready to work, they just need access to good jobs in their communities.



Creating More Access to International Trade

Increasing access to foreign markets has to be a priority for the next farm bill. Wisconsin farmers need more access to developing markets around the world, especially in emerging markets like North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

We already have the ability to sell more large volume commodities, and with the looming grain crisis as a result of the Ukraine war, this is an opportunity to help meet the world's needs in this time of crisis. There is already a new bulk commodity port facility under construction in the Milwaukee Port that is going to enhance our ability to export to areas around the world. We need to examine and fund additional ways we can enhance Wisconsin's export capacities both through the Great Lakes and down the Mississippi, and through enhanced rail connections.

Saving Our Small Farms

The continued loss of family farms and the increased concentration of farmland into larger farms is bad for our state. We need to do much more to help keep family farms in the hands of the working families and incentivize and help the next generation to be able to stay on the farm. We must promote local food systems, sustainability, and access to markets for small family farms.

Our state and local governments lack the needed funding to help create more direct markets for farms to local businesses, farmers markets, and consumers. The funds that exist aren't enough to make a real impact on the size of the need or opportunity. We should invest federal funds in the UW-Extension to help do this work. Located in all 72 counties and driven by the Wisconsin Idea, they are ideally suited to scale up.



Securing Wisconsin's Dairy Legacy

In recent years, Wisconsin has been losing an average of one to two dairy herds a day. Our country's milk pricing system is out of date and is far too restrictive. We need to work cooperatively to ensure that Wisconsin has a seat at the table in order to enact meaningful dairy policy reform in the next Farm Bill or through separate legislation.

We also need to continue to open more markets for dairy exports, especially in the specialty cheese categories. There are growing markets in the Middle East and Asia for our dairy products, and we need to ensure that any and all trade negotiations help open these markets to Wisconsin farmers.

As Chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, Senator Baldwin has worked relentlessly to address the needs of our dairy industry. We need to continue to fight to expand funding for our Dairy Business Innovation Initiatives, to support dairy entrepreneurs and help Wisconsin dairy businesses develop new markets, reduce costs, and support local farm economies. In the Senate, I will be a partner with Senator Baldwin to fight for more investment.

Improving the Agricultural Workforce

Wisconsin agriculture is facing a workforce crisis like so many other parts of our economy. Our agriculture industry, especially our dairy industry, is one of the heaviest utilizers of immigrant labor in the state.

For reasons that extend well beyond workforce needs, we need comprehensive immigration reform. It's long overdue. We need to create legal pathways for farms to get the workers they need. We also must reform the H-2A temporary visa process to be streamlined, expedited, and for it to provide certainty for farmers who desperately need workers.



Investing in Affordable Rural Housing

We need to do more to spur on the development of additional affordable housing in rural communities. In general, there is a staggering lack of new construction in rural communities. This is having a severe impact on the availability of workforce housing, the ability to attract and retain workers, and the ability for families to relocate to and stay in rural communities. The lack of new construction is also often coupled with older housing stock that is in desperate need of updating.

We need federal housing incentives that do a better job of incentivizing new rural affordable housing. Building in rural communities is less dense than in urban areas and often comes at higher costs because of the additional cost for transporting materials and hiring harder to find skilled labor. We need to ensure that the competitive bidding nature of affordable housing credits adequately incentivizes rural affordable housing to spur new construction and renovation.



Improving Access to Rural Healthcare

Many rural communities in our state do not have access to quality healthcare facilities within a reasonable distance. When there is a physical or mental health emergency, people are often forced to drive an hour or more to receive the care they need.

The rural health facilities that do exist often have limited usefulness if they cannot provide the services that are needed. Many critical services have been taken out of rural communities as cost savings measures and placed in regional healthcare centers instead of in more convenient locations. Congress can help by raising the rural health reimbursement rates for Medicaid and Medicare and establishing more stringent minimum standards to make sure they can afford to provide the services that are needed in our communities.

We need to attract and retain more staff to small-town facilities. Government can incentivize doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals to start their careers in rural medicine in exchange for student loan forgiveness. Too many rural healthcare facilities are staffed by medical professionals who are nearing the end of their careers. Without direct intervention, we are staring down an enhanced rural healthcare crisis that will not be easy to solve.

Even less accessible than physical healthcare services are mental health services. We have a mental health crisis in this country and there's nowhere with greater need than our rural communities because these areas often lack any access to mental health services. We need the government to incentivize more mental health workers to locate in rural communities and we need to invest more into tele-medicine in order to bring additional services wherever they are needed.

The opioid crisis is also still raging in our rural communities, and in many ways worse than ever. While it has largely been overshadowed by the pandemic, the pandemic has made the situation worse because people have been more isolated and have not had access to the help they need.

Many rural communities lack any access to drug treatment professionals or programs. We need Congress to invest in attracting more proven drug treatment programs and personnel into rural communities. We need to ensure that those that need help in rural communities have access to similar programs and treatments that are available in bigger cities.



Investing in Rural Legal Representation

The constitution gives you the right to an attorney, but what if no attorney is available? Much like the shortage in healthcare professionals and mental and substance abuse professions, there is a shortage of lawyers in rural Wisconsin. Many rural communities have few, if any, lawyers and the ones that are there often are approaching retirement age.

We need to incentivize lawyers to move to rural communities at the start of their careers by offering loan forgiveness if they stay in that community for a number of years. We cannot have a properly functioning legal system without more rural lawyers.

Improving Conservation and Climate Resilience

We need to incentivize conservation reserves on farms across this state by compensating farmers for climate smart agricultural practices. We need to incentivize them to do things like plant cover crops on less productive agricultural lands, no till farming, and winter cover crops. All these practices are well known for helping control soil erosion, but they are also good ways to help sequester carbon.

We need new federal programs that will quantify this carbon capture and compensate farmers that do climate smart agricultural practices like these. Sequestering carbon while improving water quality by reducing runoff of soil, fertilizers, and pesticides benefits everyone and we should make sure that it is economically sound for farmers.



Ensuring Clean Drinking Water

Access to clean, safe drinking water is increasingly under threat in Wisconsin. Whether it's from PFAs or other contamination in our aquifers, or from aging drinking water infrastructure, an increasing number of communities are confronting challenges to this most basic of needs.

The drinking water infrastructure in rural communities is rapidly aging and creating a threat to public health. Fortunately, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill contains new funding for rural water projects at historic levels. We need to ensure that the communities that need help now are positioned to compete for and win funding to address this critical need.

A growing number of communities across Wisconsin are also discovering that they have serious issues with PFA forever chemicals in their drinking water.

This is a crisis that is hurting Wisconsinites all across the state. The worst part is that we still don't know the full extent of the problem as new pockets of contamination are regularly found. This is a significant issue in Wisconsin that affects many communities rendering their drinking water poisonous. The size and scope of the problem is so large that the federal government is going to need to play a significant role in making sure this problem is dealt with and cleaned up.

Congress needs to establish PFAS regulations that will protect the most vulnerable. We must start holding polluters accountable and make them pay for the damages they have caused communities. They should have to clean up the mess they made. For areas where the offending companies can't be identified or have long gone out of business, we are going to need a Super Fund type program. This is a crisis that we must address with urgency.



Protecting Our Public Lands

I strongly support keeping public lands in public hands. I believe that in order to make real, lasting change we need to protect and preserve our public lands, because ownership of public lands is an incredible birthright of every American citizen. I strongly believe in the goal of protecting 30% of the United States' lands by 2030, but to achieve this goal, Congress is going to need to act to provide the funding and authority to aggressively save the wild lands that we have left.

In Wisconsin, tourism is annually the 2nd or 3rd largest industry. Increasing our public lands would help bring more tourism dollars and enhanced opportunities to rural communities all across the state. This should be coupled with additional tourism grant opportunities to help communities build out offerings and market the opportunities for what is available.

Investing in Agricultural Research and Development through the UW-System

The Wisconsin State Legislature has done everything they can to disinvest from the University system over the last dozen years. We have seen fewer professors, smaller programs, and hollowed out UW-Extension staffs. UW-Madison used to be the #3 university in the country when it comes to receiving annual R & D funding - now it's 8th. That represents tens of millions of research dollars that are not coming into the state and instead are going somewhere else. It also has a direct effect on the innovations, patents, and new startups that result from that research. Wisconsin has seen the success that Tammy Baldwin has had with bringing new research and development dollars to our state, most recently through Dairy Business Innovation Funding. This is a model that we need to replicate and double down on for new research initiatives across all Wisconsin agriculture.