

## NLGA State Strategies in Agriculture & Rural Affairs

Kansas Lt. Gov. Lynn Rogers

Kansas has vibrant rural communities across the state that provide food, industry, and jobs to Kansas and the country. As Lieutenant Governor, I believe it is critical to support and enhance the opportunities for these unique and vital areas of our state.

That is why Governor Kelly and I created the **Office of Rural Prosperity** (<https://www.ruralkanprosper.ks.gov>), a statewide effort to **streamline policy, aid in rural improvement efforts, and give rural Kansans a seat at the table**. ORP is here to serve and assist these rural Kansans by listening to their priority issues, connecting them to or crafting sustainable solutions, and implementing policies that will help these communities thrive.

I led the ORP on a listening tour in 2019, holding 130 meetings and events in 44 towns and 23 counties. Using the 2019 listening tour's stories and input, we crafted the ORP's key priority areas: 1) **broadband and infrastructure**; 2) **early education and childcare**; 3) **healthcare**; 4) **housing and community development**; and 5) **workforce**.

After the 2019 tour, one of the critical things we pursued was bringing state agencies together around our key policy issues and asked them to critically analyze their policies and regulations. My main goal at the Cabinet-level is to remind our secretaries to avoid a one size fits all mindset and collaborate instead of harboring a silo mentality.

We continued our tour in 2020 virtually, placing emphasis on the actions our agencies are taking to respond to the needs we heard in 2019.

After seven public meetings and fifteen smaller stakeholder meetings focused on specific challenges, the 2020 tour finished a few weeks ago, and efforts are already underway to address many of these issues.

In July, Gov. Kelly announced the **Kansas Certified Sites Program**, a system to support economic development by reporting to developers when the state has deemed a potential site ideal for investment and growth.

Utilizing federal CARES Act funding, Kansas will award **\$60 million in grants to bolster broadband infrastructure and enable more Kansans to participate in distance learning, telehealth, and the digital economy**. We will continue to invest in this critical need with the first year of our 10-year broadband grant program, part of a broader transportation and infrastructure program that the Governor signed in March. This program is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that it is to make all our communities more connected.

Regarding housing, we have been working with the Kansas Housing Resources Corporation and other stakeholders to commission the first statewide housing study in decades. This study will give developers and rural communities the data they need to ensure we are making targeted investments and being responsive to local needs.

Another key area is childcare and early education. So many parents struggle with access to childcare, especially in rural communities. Not only is it hard to find childcare, but we also heard from providers about the difficulties they have faced in remaining open during the pandemic. We addressed childcare and early education in all three rounds of our state's CARES Act allocation process. Considering how vital childcare is to our workforce, more needs to be done, and we look forward to advocating for this resource in rural Kansas.

Finally, it is impossible to speak about rural communities' needs without addressing affordable healthcare. Our rural communities have the most resilient and innovative healthcare providers in the state, but they need financial help. Six rural hospitals have closed in Kansas in the last few years, depriving these communities of hundreds of jobs and critical health access. Kansas' failure to pass Medicaid Expansion has cost our state \$4.2 billion and counting.

The situation is growing worse for our rural communities as every state surrounding Kansas-- Missouri, Colorado, Nebraska, and Oklahoma--will expand Medicaid. These state's rural communities have more revenue flowing into their hospital, allowing them to pay higher wages and bring on more staff, pulling our health professionals out of Kansas.

Since our inauguration in January 2018, Medicaid Expansion has been Governor Kelly and I's top priority. We will be pursuing it this upcoming legislative session once again as our top issue, especially with COVID-19 continuing to put pressure on our healthcare system.

Governor Kelly and I will continue to tackle the critical issues facing rural Kansas. Our state is stronger and best poised for post-COVID economic recovery by supporting healthy, vibrant, rural communities and ensuring Kansans can have the tools for success no matter where they live.