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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–0917

February 1, 2016

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Secretary Julián Castro
U.S. Department of Housing and
Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Castro,

I am writing in strong support of the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council's application requesting Rural Promise Zone designation for the Southwest Florida Promise Zone covering Glades County, Hendry County, and Immokalee (Collier County).

The southwest Florida region faces a number of economic challenges. The poverty rate exceeds 30 percent, the proportion of non-English speakers well exceeds the state average of 27 percent, and both public transportation and amenities for youth are scarce. The lack of skilled workers and low education rate both impact the area's ability to attract new businesses, while the rural nature of the area often results in hour-long drives to services and stores.

Fortunately, the area does have great potential for development due to the large amount of readily-available land and user-friendly development processes that are significantly less burdensome than other contiguous areas. The cost of doing business in the proposed Promise Zone in southwest Florida is significantly lower than larger areas due to its lower labor and property costs. In addition, ecotourism is a largely untapped opportunity for development in the region near Lake Okeechobee and Lake Trafford.

The Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council (SWFRPC), in cooperation with its partners in the community, is focused on job creation, economic development, improved educational opportunities, reduction in crime and improvement of community infrastructure. Upon reviewing the grant proposal the SWFRPC will submit to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), I believe that Promise Zone designation is an important step towards ensuring that federal programs and resources support efforts to develop this area and improve the lives of its residents.

Please accept this letter noting my strong support for the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council's request for Rural Promise Zone designation for the area covering Glades County, Hendry County, and Immokalee. I greatly appreciate both USDA and HUD's efforts to ensure their application is given full consideration.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Rooney
Member of Congress

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