



Roadmap for Rural Tennessee

I'm a product of rural Tennessee, and I know that if we don't act decisively, we risk losing our way of life forever.

We have many challenges to overcome, but to support rural Tennessee, there are several steps we have to take.

1. We must do more to promote economic independence and the dignity of work. It is crucial that we:

(a) Invest Early In Vocational, Technical, and Agricultural Education To Increase the Number of High School Graduates Ready to Work;

Vocational education may be a talking point for politicians, but it's been my life for the last 35 years. For far too many young adults, the opportunities of our TCATs come too late in life or are too far out of reach.

We must make vocational education a realistic opportunity for everyone starting in high school. Right now, only 7% of our career and technical education students earn a certification. We're not getting it done.

To get our high school graduates career-ready, we must make the necessary investments in training our instructors, lift up the trades as an option, and partner with the private sector.

We'll recruit, retain, and train the career and technical education instructors required to lead our students.

We'll make career counseling, not simply college counseling, an opportunity for every student beginning in 8th grade. And I'll use my real-world business experience to align with the private sector for educator training, work-based learning, and apprenticeship opportunities for our students.

(b) Strengthen Work Requirements for Social Programs to Lead Tennesseans Out of Dependency;

Tennessee is 17th in population, but 11th in food stamps. And nearly 1 in 7 working age men have quit the workforce altogether.

Tennessee's social programs should be limited, streamlined, and targeted to the goal of lifting people into independence, not government dependence.

We'll push forward on work and job-training requirements in our social safety net programs, not to punish, but to create opportunity. And we will strengthen fraud protections to ensure that no one takes advantage of our taxpayers.

(c) Reform State Licensing Laws to Eliminate Unnecessary Government Regulations that Create a Barrier to Work for our Citizens.

Just as seriously as we must reduce government dependency, we must also reduce the unnecessary barriers government places on people trying to work.

In order to get Tennessee back to work, we must reform our burdensome occupational licensing regime. We must hold our bureaucrats accountable, and cut regulations to promote—not discourage—honest work.

2. Embrace innovation and technology to improve our economic, health and educational opportunities. We must:

(a) Reduce the Tax Burden for Business to Reward Entrepreneurship and Investment in Rural Communities;

Tennessee's taxes on business are too high, too complex, and too hard for small business. At 6.5%, we are tied for the highest F&E tax in the region, holding back our ability to compete. Our tax code is ridden with special formulas, loopholes, and carve-outs for those fortunate enough to lobby for them.

We need a more uniform tax code that delivers favorable tax conditions for all businesses, both small and large.

And we should build on President Trump's vision of a pro-growth American tax system by ensuring our state tax code is pro-growth, making it easy for businesses to invest and grow in Tennessee

(b) Expand the availability of healthcare options through private sector innovation, reforming government, and supporting smart investments in rural Tennessee;

Health care is changing. And our government has to create the space for the market to adapt. We must reform the bureaucracy which stops a provider from building and maintain a successful facility in a rural community that wants it.

We have to remove harmful regulations that restrict providers from delivering the care needed in rural Tennessee and support innovative initiatives in telemedicine and rural residency that increase access to healthcare providers to rural Tennessee.

(c) Expand technology solutions to help rural schools deliver on their educational goals.

Rural connectivity is crucial to so many areas, but particularly in education.

We are competing with states like Georgia, who have made connecting classrooms and advancing technology in education a key goal, and to keep up we have to support a technology infrastructure for our schools.

An infrastructure that would support new innovations like distance learning; networks for teacher support, coaching, and professional development; and in-classroom technology for individualized approaches to learning that allow teachers to help students advance at their own speed.

3. Attack the epidemic of opioid abuse and addiction. I am convinced that we should:

(a) Seek Significantly Stronger Penalties for Drug Traffickers;

We must address the new scourge of illegally-trafficked fentanyl into our state, by supporting our law enforcement and district attorneys to not just

catch these criminals, but to put them away.

Stronger sentences and expanded resources for our law enforcement will be a major priority in our fight to end the opioid crisis.

(b) Invest in Sustainable, Community-Based Options that give Non-Violent Addicts a Path Back To Society;

We know that addiction fundamentally changes the brain and that too many Tennesseans fall into addiction as the result of some personal trauma.

We're not going to imprison our way out of that problem. We need a community-based solution that coordinates our physical and mental health providers and expands our successful drug courts programs to support addicted Tennesseans who put in the effort to turn their life around.

(c) Crack Down on the Funding and Access to Addictive Drugs.

Over 1.5 million Tennesseans are currently on TennCare, which raises the question of whether our TennCare providers should be prescribing opioids for any treatment beyond the most extreme cases.

And with over 1000 newborns born drug-dependent to mothers on TennCare, it's clear we have a serious crisis that requires serious action.

I'll stand up to the pharmaceutical status quo and lead the hard conversations on restricting access to unnecessary and addictive drugs.

4. Strengthen our state's commitment to faith, community, and family. It is vital to:

(a) Increase Our Support for Civic and Character Education to Help Our Schools Build the Next Generation of Productive Citizens;

We have to acknowledge that education is about more than a test score, it's about raising up the whole adult.

When we take civics and character education out of the classroom, we set our students and our nation up for challenges later in life.

It's time we return to teaching the basics right, and ensure that we teach our students the American values of work ethic and integrity so that they have the tools to become productive citizens.

(b) Strengthen Our Support for Children in Need, Particularly at DCS and in our Juvenile Justice System;

With 15 economically distressed rural counties and 29 at-risk of economic distress, we have a lot of families in rural Tennessee who are facing deep challenges.

And some of those challenges lead to children becoming at-risk for poverty and incarceration. When it comes to DCS or our juvenile justice system, we must ensure public safety but also make sure we are not wasting an opportunity for a child's growth.

As someone who has worked in mentorship for at-risk youth, I know that a child's success is deeply tied to the adults in their life. Working with local community organizations, we can give at-risk children, from the time of their first interaction with the system, a real opportunity for personal growth.

(c) Ensure that State Policies are Protecting and Encouraging Strong Families and Communities.

We have a rich tradition of faith and community organizations leading in the public square.

But for them to thrive, government must make sure that we are responding to their needs, not seeking to replace their role in our society.

I'll make it a priority to [protect the faith community and give them the opportunity again to be an active part of the solution, in partnership with our leaders in state and local government.](#)