

Good morning. It's an honor and a privilege to be with all of you this morning. Thank you to Dr. Kopko for the invite to address you.

It was a pleasure to have the Center for Rural Pennsylvania in McKean County last year and to share with you on issues that were in play in McKean County as well as the hearing held on healthcare issues. You were able to see the highs such as the rejuvenation of Kane, Kinzua Bridge State Park and the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford and the transformation that is taking place there with the new science and technology building which will be a benefit to our region and hopefully keep these students here after graduation.

In your travels you also saw the small town of Mt. Jewett close to where I reside with no grocery store any longer and vacant store fronts. This is becoming the picture of rural Pennsylvania if we don't take steps to prevent this from continuing.

Housing is an issue as well. Failure to keep up properties have left them uninhabitable in many instances. A funding source for those above the low to moderate income level would help families to restore existing structures and make them better suited for families. A way to incentivize the building of new homes would be helpful. Three things people (especially young couples) look for in choosing a community to live in are:

1. available and affordable housing
2. healthcare including functional hospitals (which has taken a huge hit in McKean County) and
3. strong schools.

At the other end of the spectrum we have the elderly population that want to stay in their communities and in many instances their homes but we lack trained care givers to assist them. We lack assisted living facilities and if we do have availability we lack trained employees to care for them. Nursing homes face these issues as well and in some instances aren't able to fill their beds because of lack of

staff. Transportation needs to doctor appointments, grocery stores, hospitals and specialty care services (dialysis, rehabilitation) remain a challenge although there is limited availability in some areas.

With a projected 8% decline in population by 2050, McKean County faces a population reduction into the 37,000 range. So how do we help prevent that? The obvious is to keep our young people at home in McKean County. Unfortunately, we have a lack of education process to prepare students to enter the trades such as electricians, plumbers, masonry such as block and brick layers and concrete specialists, HVAC certified, building construction and auto and diesel mechanics. While job-shadowing would be a beneficial opportunity these may not be available locally due to retirement of those that provided those services or that service isn't available. Encouraging these students to attend trade school could be a goal for High School Guidance Counselors. While back in the day it seemed we pushed all students towards a Bachelors degree we need to understand that there are good paying jobs via the trades and get students the incentive to explore these avenues.

Now having plugged the trades we also need to address the declining professional people in our rural areas. Teachers have become hard to find. A once robust Bar Association in McKean County has dwindled drastically yet there are needs of the population that leaves them searching for legal advice. Nurses in rural Pennsylvania are at an all time low. Large bonuses are being offered in attempt to fill open positions. You can only imagine what it's like to recruit and retain Physicians especially those with a specialty practice.

Agriculture has been big to the area but the number of farms and farmers have declined. Some farmers have reduced the size of their farms (both acres and number of heads) to make it more manageable. Milk and beef are needed everywhere as well as pork and chicken. We need to incentivize the need for farmers. A positive note is that we have seen a resurgence of 4H and Future Farmers of America programs in our county so we are hopeful this will provide a lifeline to the continuance of farms and farming.

Broadband in our area is spotty at best. While the county has been involved in trying to get coverage to school students especially, it has been a slow go. Money is now starting to flow however we need to be passionate about getting internet to all sooner than later. Businesses depend on it and many won't consider moving to our area without a strong internet signal. Broadband would also allow patients to connect with their doctors via Telemedicine and help eliminate the need to travel for care. Yes, there is a lot of money being dedicated to Broadband, but I ask is it really enough to accomplish the goal of internet for all? Before Covid very few internet providers were willing to work with the county. Now that there is funding available they want to do their own thing with funding and discussions are still lacking.

New Economic Development has been a challenge. The needs and wants of potential employers are sometimes unattainable. Of utmost importance is retaining the businesses we currently have. Many of the smaller businesses have closed for various reasons or are struggling to hold on. The beauty of rural Pennsylvania is that it offers itself to tourism. While we don't see the high number of fishing and hunting enthusiasts we once did it still remains popular as does the open space for hiking, four wheeling, cross country skiing and camping. Rural areas need to capitalize on opportunities we have like the Allegheny National Forest.

The last point I would like to make is making grants or funding opportunities more user friendly. Trying to navigate the process is at times difficult at best. We hear this is viewed as a discouragement rather than an encouragement to take advantage of the potential funding opportunities and to improve our area and the needs of our citizens.

In conclusion, there is much capacity for improvement and we as Commissioners would welcome any and all avenues to address these issues. Thank you for your time today.