I am honored to serve as Chair of the Governor’s Rural Affairs Council. I am pleased to have the opportunity to play a role in focusing on the interests of Illinois’ rural communities, and to continue the work of the Council to improve economic opportunity, education, transportation, and health care services for those of us who live outside the urban centers.

I am fortunate to have had the experience of growing up in southern Illinois, and to have lived and worked there for the greater part of my life. I have been inspired by my travels to all of Illinois’ 102 counties, where I learned first-hand of the hard-working spirit of the people dedicated to advance the economic outlook for all Illinoisans. And, I am here as your chief advocate to help move Illinois forward.

One of the most important things that we can do together is to improve access to a quality education for every child in Illinois. For too long, the best educational opportunities have been dependent on a child’s address. This is unacceptable. We need to ensure that schools are fully funded and our funding system reformed, to lessen the impact of the property tax on the quality of education. Recently, we have watched as the population of our rural communities decline as area youth leave in search of jobs. It is my hope that, as a result of our work on the Council, we can reverse that trend. And, I am confident that we can by investing in new employment opportunities.

We must continue to provide broadband access to rural Illinois so that small businesses can survive in a high-speed business environment and people can participate in a global economy while enjoying the best of small town life. We can be part of making renewable energy more accessible to consumers by optimizing the potential of our wind, building wind turbines close to its source.

We can respond to consumer demand for locally grown, healthy foods taking advantage of our rich land resources and creating jobs. We are also focusing our efforts on improving and enhancing emergency medical services (EMS) in rural areas. We are part of a world of opportunity and rural Illinois is poised to be a leader.

I look forward to continuing my work with the Governor’s Rural Affairs Council to do all that we can to realize our greatest possibilities. We will chart our course to bring communities together. In a spirit of cooperation, we will move forward to create new opportunities for a stronger rural Illinois.

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Sheila Simon, Lt. Governor
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