

(Senate - August 05, 2010) By Mrs. LINCOLN: S. 3745. A bill to amend the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act to require the Secretary of Agriculture in the case of low-income States to use 95 percent of the national average nonmetropolitan median income for purposes of determining the eligibility of communities in the States for certain rural development funding; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, I rise today to offer the Rural Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2010. This legislation will help rural communities have better access to the funding available through the Rural Development programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, specifically the Rural Water and Wastewater Program and Community Facility Program.

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, I am strongly concerned that communities in low-income states such as my state of Arkansas have limited ability to qualify for grant funding through certain Rural Development programs due to current non-metropolitan median household income requirements. The structure we have today creates barriers for many of our poorest rural communities that are most in need. Some of these rural communities have median household incomes well below the national average, yet they are ineligible for any grant funding because USDA applies the State's non-metropolitan median household income to funding formulas instead of the national median household income.

This structure creates disparities for many low-income rural States. For example, in Arkansas, a rural community with a median household income greater than the State's non-metropolitan median household income of \$31,845 is ineligible for grant funding through the Rural Water and Community Facility programs. Rural communities in Arkansas who meet all of the other eligibility requirements for funding through these programs are ineligible for grant funding simply because of their low median income level. In fact, 45 States have a higher non-metropolitan median household income level. The legislation I am introducing today is designed to even the playing field for low-income rural communities in Arkansas and several other States.

Forty-eight percent of my home State's population lives in a rural community. The programs offered through USDA Rural Development are vital to our efforts to meet basic needs and foster economic development. Without the types of key infrastructure improvements that can be made through these rural development programs, it will be difficult for many of these communities to reach their full potential and prosper.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows: S. 3745 - Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Rural Infrastructure Improvement Act of 2010".

#### SEC. 2. MEDIAN INCOME REQUIREMENT ADJUSTMENT.

Section 306 of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C. 1926) is amended by inserting after subsection (b) the following:

"(c) Median Income Requirement Adjustment.--

"(1) IN GENERAL.--If the Secretary applies a median income requirement to communities for purposes of determining eligibility for the community facilities programs and water, waste disposal, and wastewater programs authorized under this section and sections 306A, 306C, 306D, and 306E, in the case of a State for which the State nonmetropolitan median income is equal to or less than 90 percent of the national average nonmetropolitan median income, the Secretary shall use an amount equal to 95 percent of the national average nonmetropolitan median income in applying the median income requirement for any community in the State.

"(2) TERMINATION OF AUTHORITY.--The authority provided by paragraph (1) terminates on September 30, 2012".