

**Governor's Rural Affairs Council
Meeting Minutes September 10, 2020, Quarterly Meeting 3**

1. Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton called the meeting to order at 10:07 am.

2. Roll Call

Member Agencies Present:

Illinois Department of Agriculture, Robert Barren
Illinois Department of Aging, Amy Lulich
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Agnes Masnik
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Rachel Torbert
Illinois Community College Board, Lavon Nelson
Illinois Department of Transportation, Holly Bieneman
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Christine Davis
Illinois Farm Bureau, Brenda Matherly
University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Anne Silvis
Southern Illinois University, Laura Kessel
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Christopher Merrett & Sandy Wittig
Illinois Finance Authority, Charles Myart
Rural Partners, Molly Hammond

Not Present: Illinois Department of Human Services,
Illinois Department of Employment Security, Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois
Housing Development Authority, Illinois Department of Public Health,

Citizen Members Present:

Heather Hampton-Knodle
Sameer Vohra
Sonja Reece
Norm Walzer

Guests:

Troy Horton
Shelly Tweedy
Ngoan Le
Lynden Schuyler
Janae Price

Lt. Governor's Office Staff Members Present:

Juliana Stratton, Lt. Governor
Charles Watkins, Chief of Staff
Kevin Beck, Director of Scheduling
Kirsten Franklin- Davis, Legislative Director
Bobby Mannis, Policy Director
Akanksha Balekai, Dunn Fellow

Governor's Office Staff Members Present:

Mollie Foust, Senior Counselor to the Deputy Governors

Quorum determined. *All individuals were present via phone/videoconferencing

Lt. Governor Stratton asked her staff members to introduce themselves.

Lt. Governor Stratton inquired if there were any corrections or additions to the agenda for today's meeting. Charles Myart made a motion to accept the agenda as is. Sonja Reece seconded the motion. Motion passed.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes from June 11, 2020.

Lt. Governor Stratton announced that a draft of the minutes from the June 2020 meeting had been provided to council members prior to today's meeting.

Sonja Reece made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Norman Walzer. Motion passed. Minutes were approved.

4. Lt. Governor Stratton Remarks

Lt. Governor Stratton provided a brief update on the 2020 GRAC Annual Report. She announced that her office facilitated several calls with rural students about the information and recommendations found in the report. Two sets of calls were held. One with high school students and the second with college students. These calls were made to bring the students' unique perspectives and experiences into the conversation around issues that directly impact them and their communities. The students provided significant feedback.

Lt. Governor Stratton continued to announce that the report will be submitted by her staff to the Governor and the Illinois General Assembly in the next few weeks. Her staff is currently working on developing a public unveiling to build awareness around the work of the GRAC and the needs of rural Illinois that have been uplifted in this report. Her office is currently working on strategizing around the current realities of the COVID-19 pandemic to create an event that honors the work of the GRAC. Details will be shared soon.

5. New Business

The Lt. Governor introduced Ngoan Le, Illinois Department of Human Services, Census Office. Ms. Le will be sharing a presentation on Illinois census response and challenges. Joining Ms. Le will be Lyden Schuyler, Illinois Public Health Association; Janae Price, Clay County Health Department, and Anne Silvis, University of Illinois Extension.

Lt. Governor Stratton stated it is critical for the GRAC to think about the diverse areas of expertise that the members of the Council hold that can be used to address the historic disparities in the rural census count. We must be sure to have every Illinois resident counted.

She stated she is already presuming that everyone on the Council has already completed the census and have gotten a few others to complete it also.

Ms. Ngoan provided a presentation that explained what outreach has been completed to encourage the census participation. She noted that at this point in time, Illinois was still in the top 10 states for the response rate, but is still behind where we were in 2010. She stated that resources have been made available to launch a statewide initiative to be sure everyone is counted.

Ms. Schuyler added that partners in the southern counties have helped the census effort. She explained that lack of broadband has been a challenge in the southern counties.

Ms. Price explained that their issues were similar with lack of internet, but they also encountered a “lack of trust.” They used the local health department as a partner.

Ms. Silvis said her organization (i.e. UI Extension) focused on counties which had low census rates as of April. Extension used various forms of messaging including social media, blog posts, and articles.

The Lt. Governor asked what she can do to help make an impact during the last few days of the census. She liked the slogan from Clay County, “Last Call.” She also noted that while lack of broadband hampered response rates, she was excited to hear that volunteers have gone door-to-door to increase census response rates. She thanked all for taking their time to share the work they are doing and noted again how critical this work is to maximize returns to Illinois. Her office will also engage in a “final” push for completion of the census.

Rural Development Resource Directory

The Lt. Governor requested that Chris Merrett and Sandy Wittig report on the *Rural Development Resource Directory*. Chris provided an overview of the program and its emphasis on rural development. Sandy thanked all of the agencies that had returned their data for the website. The website is <http://www.iira.org/data-tools/rural-development-resource-guide-2/>. Only the agencies that have verified their information are included so that current information is listed.

Lavon Nelson asked if this was something that her agency could be included in. Sandy assured her that yes it was and she would send the forms to Lavon.

The Lt. Governor questioned if there were areas without broadband would it be possible to have this document in print. Chris confirmed that the report could be printed if needed.

The Lt. Governor thanked everyone who had supported this effort in response to Sandy’s emails. She thanked Chris and Sandy for the report. She stated she looked forward to announcing this new rural development tool.

Committee Updates

Lt. Governor Stratton then announced that updates will be provided on efforts to develop telehealth, rural education, and economic infrastructures throughout the state.

Telehealth

Laura Kessel, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine (SIU SOM).

Laura provided an overview of the needs for permanent telehealth to be a viable option for health needs. She stated that the Executive Order issued by the Governor needs to be made permanent for insurance reimbursement to be at same rate for actual visit, to allow new patients to be added, and to expand the list of providers. A handout was distributed, which noted the needs for telehealth.

Laura also mentioned the growth of telehealth especially due to COVID-19. During the period of January 31 to May 31, SIU SOM telehealth visits grew from 171 per month to 12,163 per month. She stated that some of these visits were by phone for those that do not have internet services.

The Lt. Governor thanked Laura for her report.

Rural Education Webinars

The Lt. Governor stated she was excited to announce that her office, in partnership with the Hunt Institute, produced a rural education webinar series following a recommendation from this Council's Education and Workforce Development Committee. The webinar was very successful in highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on rural schools. She mentioned that Bobby Mannis shared these webinars with the GRAC members.

Lavon Nelson asked if there will be an opportunity to do more webinars with other topics that would affect education in rural Illinois.

Bobby Mannis agreed that more webinars can be created.

Economic Development & Infrastructure

The Lt. Governor stated that Norman Walzer would be providing an update.

Norm noted that the *Rural Development Resource Guide* is already being implemented.

Bobby Mannis announced that the *Rural Research Reports* will now include not only the IIRA as publishers, but Rural Partners and the U of I Extension as supporters to promote research on rural issues. This info will be made accessible for rural businesses. Norm noted that previous authors were often from the IIRA Conference. There is a new emphasis on creating written reports and webinars, but unfortunately the effort is limited due to funding. Norm mentioned that the impact of COVID-19 may determine if small businesses survive after the pandemic.

The Lt. Governor thanked Norm and noted that her office is providing \$2,000 in funding to support the *Rural Research Reports*. She stated that this is an important project for the GRAC to support, with partners who will support work that will improve rural lives.

6. Member Updates and Reports

Jonathan McGee, DCEO announced that rural strategies for rural businesses will be announced in the next few weeks. He will also send the information to the Lt. Governor's staff.

Robert Barren stated that even though the state fair was cancelled, there will be a junior livestock show in the next couple weekends. All social distancing recommendations will be followed; thus, this event will not be open to the public. Winners will be announced on social media.

The Lt. Governor requested that the info be sent to her office so that those who do not have internet are not excluded. This information can be sent in a written report.

Amy Lulich stated that she had put a notation in the chat room of this meeting about the Illinois Connection Program. This program distributes tablets and iPads to seniors who are socially isolated and also provided internet service for 12 months. If there are any questions, please reach out to her.

The Lt. Governor asked if there were any public comments. There were no public comments at this time.

Lt. Governor Stratton announced the next meeting is scheduled for December 10th from 10:00 am – 11:30 am. She then requested a motion to adjourn.

Laura Kessel made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Sonja Reece. The meeting was adjourned at 11:32.

Respectfully Submitted:

Chris Merrett and Sandy Wittig
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University