By President Barack Obama

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to get out of Washington, DC and travel to small towns and farm towns in the heartland of the country.

I sat down with small business owners, farmers and ranchers in Iowa; I had lunch with veterans in Cannon Falls, Minnesota; and I talked to plant workers at a seed distributor in Atkinson, Illinois.

I made the trip because I think the rest of this country can learn something from Rural America.

The heartland is central to the economic health and prosperity of our nation.

Rural communities provide us with affordable agricultural products, competitive manufacturing capabilities, and an independent, renewable energy supply. And you're also stewards of America's great outdoors — an important source of jobs and an incredible treasure for all Americans.

Now we all know times are tough for many Americans — and Rural Americans in particular. Some of you may have been struggling for a long time. But we also know what it's going to take to get America going again. And we know it's going to start with helping families in the heartland and across the country feel like they're moving forward.

That's why, over the last two years, we've been focused on improving infrastructure — building roads and bridges and providing broadband access to millions of rural Americans. We're expanding educational opportunities and helping more Americans get access to affordable

health care.

We've made historic investments in innovation and clean energy. And we established the first-ever White House Rural Council to promote economic growth in rural America — and to do it in a faster and more coordinated way.

But even with the progress we've made, it's also clear the pace of our recovery is still not fast enough.

We need to do more to create jobs.

That starts with getting your elected officials in Washington to put their differences aside and take steps right now to help businesses get more customers and create more jobs for Americans.

We can cut payroll taxes again, so families have an extra $1,000 to spend.

We can pass a road construction bill so construction crews — now sitting idle — can head back to the work-site.

Let's connect the brave Americans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with businesses to use their skills. And let's pass trade deals to level the playing field for our businesses, because I want more products sold around the globe stamped with three words: Made in America.

These are commonsense ideas — ideas that have been supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

The only thing holding them back is politics. The only thing preventing us from passing these

bills is the refusal by some in Congress to put country ahead of party. That's the problem right now. That's what's holding this country back. That's what we have to change.

You deserve representatives who show the same kind of discipline and integrity and responsibility that most Americans demonstrate in their lives every day — leaders who can put their differences aside to help grow the economy and put this nation back to work.

Because, for all the knocks we've taken, despite all the challenges we face, this is still the greatest country on earth. We still have the best workers and farmers, entrepreneurs and businesses, students and scientists in the world.

Getting out of Washington and spending time with folks like you reminds me why I got into public service in the first place.

Your work ethic; your creativity; your determination only makes me more hopeful about our future.

And it only makes me more confident that if we come together, there is no stopping the United States of America.