

**Governor's Rural Affairs Council
Meeting Minutes November 7, 2019
Starved Rock State Park, Illinois**

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

Lt. Governor Stratton thanked everyone for attending today's meeting.

2. Roll Call

Member Agencies Present:

Illinois Department of Aging, Jose Jimenez
Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Sal Garza
Illinois Community College Board, Lavon Nelson (phone)
Illinois Department of Employment Security, Jeff Fulgenzi (phone)
Illinois Department of Human Services, Francisco Alvarado (phone)
Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Rachel Torbert
Illinois Farm Bureau, Brenda Matherly
Illinois Housing Development Authority, William Pluta (phone)
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, Christopher Merrett
Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Christine Davis (phone)
Illinois Department of Agriculture, Rob Baren
Rural Partners and USDA Rural Development, Molly Hammond
Southern Illinois University, Laura Kessel
University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Anne Silvis

Not Present: Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Department of Public Health,
Department of Transportation, Illinois Finance Authority

Citizen Members Present:

Heather Hampton Knodle (phone)

Ex Officio / Nonvoting GRAC Members Present:

Molly Hammond, USDA-Rural Development
Norm Walzer, Northern Illinois University, Center for Governmental Studies

Lt. Governor's Office Staff Members Present:

Juliana Stratton, Lt. Governor
Charles Watkins, Chief of Staff
Janelle Gurnsey, Community Outreach Coordinator (phone)
Levi Bain, Dunn Fellow | Office of Illinois Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton
Bobby Mannis, Policy Director for the Office of the Lt. Governor
Narciso Perez

Guests:

University of Illinois, Karen Jenkins (phone)

University of Illinois, Laura Lasley

Southern Illinois University, School of Medicine, Dr. Sameer Vohra

Quorum determined.

Lt. Governor Stratton asked that her staff introduce themselves. She stated that if anyone needs anything at all, to please feel free to contact her staff. She then inquired if there were any corrections or additions to the agenda for today's meeting. No changes were noted.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes from August 8, 2019.

Lt. Governor Stratton announced that a draft of the minutes from the August 2019 meeting had been provided to council members prior to today's meeting along with a hard copy today. She inquired if there were any corrections to the minutes.

Laura Kessel noted that Rob Baren's name was misspelled. The spelling should be Baren. Noting this change, Molly Hammond made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Rachel Torbert. Motion passed. Minutes were approved.

4. Lt. Governor Stratton Remarks

Lt. Governor Stratton again thanked everyone for attending today's meeting. She thanked the Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and IDNR Director Colleen Callahan and Deputy Director Rachel Torbert for securing the location of today's meeting at Starved Rock State Park.

Lt. Governor Stratton provided an update on her work outside of the GRAC. She is thrilled to work alongside Governor Pritzker. Her role is multifaceted as she chairs the Restore, Reinvest and Renew Board, the Illinois Council on Women and Girls, the Illinois Rivers Coordinating Council, the Military Economic Development Committee, along with the GRAC. She has also provided leadership to the Justice, Equity, and Opportunity (JEO) Initiative, Main Street Development, and Caregivers for Alzheimer's disease. Her office oversees a host of agencies and boards focused on improving the lives of Illinoisans.

She noted that the GRAC has an education and workforce development committee, an economic development and infrastructure committee, and a health and healthcare committee. Her offices will focus on improving education outcomes, improving health, and improving economic opportunity for the residents of Illinois.

Lt. Governor Stratton stated that she sees lots of places where synergies are present between the various programs and initiatives she manages. There are several opportunities to connect the GRAC and other agencies and councils with the focus on improving Illinois.

She reminded GRAC members that at the August meeting she announced her desire to host discussions that lead to real, substantive change in Illinois, rather than simply some reports. This view explains why three GRAC sub-committees have been formed – Education and Workforce Development, Health & Healthcare, and Economic Development and Infrastructure. All committees have met and have begun conversations about the work they view as meaningful to their respective committees. She thanked everyone for the work that has already been completed and looks forward to building on the work today and in the future.

5. New Business

Matt Schmit, Illinois Office of Broadband

Lt. Governor Stratton introduced Matt Schmit, DCEO's newly hired Director of the Illinois Office of Broadband. Matt provided a brief overview of what the state is doing to increase broadband availability. Matt explained how he came to be the Director for the Illinois Office of Broadband. He previously worked at the Hubert H. Humphrey School for Public Policy at the University of Minnesota, with an emphasis on broadband issues. He served as a state senator in Minnesota, where extending rural broadband was one of his key accomplishments.

After this brief introduction, Matt announced that there is going to be \$420 million dollars invested to expand broadband across Illinois. He explained that he has worked in broadband for the last 15 years and that Illinois has the opportunity to solve many of its pressing broadband challenges – for example, extending broadband into rural communities. Of the funds available, \$400 million will be used for grants that entities such as electric cooperatives and municipalities can apply for to improve local broadband services in their respective communities. This program will focus ways to connect communities, business, education, and health care facilities. The program will also work to educate Illinois residents on the benefits that broadband can provide to them individually. He wants everyone to have the knowledge on how to use broadband effectively.

The Lt. Governor thanked Matt for the short overview. She asked if there were any questions.

Sal Garza announced in the past there was an Illinois Broadband Strategic Plan. He wondered if the advisory committee has reviewed this plan.

Matt Schmit said they had not, but he thanked Sal for the good recommendation. He mentioned that the goal was to align opportunities better between state and federal funding.

Molly Hammond mentioned that she would like to meet with Matt to discuss how the USDA can help. William Pluta from the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) mentioned that he would like to meet also to discuss the opportunities for the Housing Authority to work with Matt.

Lt. Governor Stratton stated that her office will send out the contact info for Matt and the Office of Broadband.

Brenda Matherly asked if there will be special provisions for communities in rural areas to help secure broadband funding. Matt explained the standards will be the same for all. However, he did acknowledge that some smaller communities may need help during the application phase to help them compete for grant funds.

LaVon Nelson stated that any help to broadband, helps the educational system.

Lt. Governor thanked Matt again for his presentation. She is excited about the vision and a comprehensive plan for broadband in Illinois. She requested that Matt continue to provide updates and join the GRAC at another meeting or provide info to her office so that she can share with all members.

Strategic Report

Lt. Governor Stratton announced that her office will be coordinating the creation of a strategic plan for the Governor's Office and the General Assembly. The report will be reviewed and outlined by the next meeting, February 6, 2020, and will be finalized at the subsequent meeting.

She stated that all chairs need to coordinate with her liaisons in her office. Each committee will provide guidance for the document that is ultimately created. She requested that Bobby Mannis provide a brief overview of what is planned.

Bobby Mannis explained how the office will develop a plan for the report. The report will focus on key priorities for the next 1-2 years. A draft of the report will be available at the February 6 meeting. We will discuss, make changes, and receive comments at this meeting. We will discuss implementation suggestions. The report will be finalized at the following GRAC meeting.

Lt. Governor Stratton noted that committee content summaries and initial preferred recommendations will be used to draft the report. She then requested that each committee provide a brief report of the discussions they have held.

Education & Workforce Development – We currently need a chair for this committee. Ann Silvis reported from the committees' discussion. There is a need to get a clear charge of soft skills, portable skills, and path to higher education along with an alignment of expectations for the plan and what the Lt. Governor's wants the focus to be upon.

Lavon mentioned that she was not aware of the call. She thinks that the skills gap, apprenticeships, and work place learning are important.

Lt. Governor Stratton encouraged everyone who wants to be a part in the conversation to please let her office know. She wants the committees to focus on short term and long range goals.

Health & Healthcare – We currently need a chair for this committee. Laura Kessel reported that rural health, telehealth, having an accurate census count, the health care workforce, health care for younger kids, scholarships, J1-Visa issues for foreign health care professionals working in the US, and mental health along with opioids, and the concern around cannabis were all discussed at the committee’s last meeting.

The Lt. Governor stated that she wants to emphasize how important the census is. We need to engage, support, and promote the census. She added that many of the federal government social and economic development programs are determined by the census. This in determines where the resources are allocated.

Molly Hammond said there will be two speakers who will present on the census at the upcoming Rural Partner’s meeting. She invited all to attend.

Sameer Vohra mentioned that the Rural Health Summit was held and this might help with the planning for the committee’s report. Also, SIU will publish some health care policy briefs in early 2020. He will forward drafts to the Lt. Governor’s Office.

The Lt. Governor thanked Sameer and said she would love to see the reports and policy briefs. She stated that if anyone on the GRAC needs help to please use her office as a resource.

Economic Development & Infrastructure – Norm Walzer is the chair of this committee. Heather Hampton Knodle said the committee’s focus has been on population, retaining and attracting families, and conducting research into best practices. Norm also is going to share information from the past and what he has done. Heather mentioned the importance of dual credit courses (i.e. high school students earning college credits) to student success and workforce development.

Sal Garza volunteered for the Economic Development Committee. Other issues he feels need to be covered by this committee and included in the GRAC Strategic Report include immigration and restorative justice, along with addressing the welfare of the family unit.

The Lt. Governor thanked both of them for their comments. She asked what the key/core values are as we approach work, family, activity, and capacity?

William Pluta wants to make sure that affordable housing is included. He mentioned he will share information about this topic during his presentation at the IIRA Annual Conference.

Lt. Governor Stratton will formalize the ideas and how to include these suggestions in the report. She mentioned that she looks forward to working with everyone as we create the strategic plan.

6. Member Updates and Reports

Chris Merrett, Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

Chris provided a handout with a brief overview of the IIRA. Currently the IIRA is working on food desert issues, cooperatives, addressing the Asian carp problem, and resurrecting the *Rural Research Report* series. He also mentioned Dollar General stores – both the upside and downside of these stores to a community. He included a copy of a report CNN had done, which cited the IIRA.

Lt. Governor Stratton mentioned that many communities that have Dollar General Stores lose small businesses which have trouble competing with more efficient retail chains such as Dollar General.

Chris announced that the IIRA Conference will be held on February 26 & 27, 2020 at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel in Springfield. The theme will be “Keeping Rural an Exciting Place to Live and Work.” More details to follow soon.

Anne Silvis, University of Illinois Extension

Anne distributed a handout on the benefits of students attending the University of Illinois, which focused on the graduation rates instead of the tuition costs.

Lavon Nelson, Community College Board

Lavon reminded everyone that next week is “Apprenticeship Week.” She also suggested looking at the “State Unified Plan” and the “Workforce Innovation Areas” as a tool for promoting workforce development and linking education to economic development. For more info, please contact her directly.

Lt. Governor Stratton thanked everyone for the member updates. She encouraged everyone to let her know about upcoming events. Please be sure to email her office so that they can share those events.

Karen Jenkins requested that the Lt. Governor’s Office share the information about the ethics training and the policies of the committees.

7. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

8. Adjournment

The Lt. Governor announced the next meeting would be held February 6, 2020. In the meantime, please don’t hesitate to contact her office if they can be of any assistance.

Sal Garza made a motion to adjourn. Motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 11:29 am.

Respectfully Submitted:

Chris Merrett
Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs
Western Illinois University