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United States Senate

Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry

Testimony of Mr. Zac Stewart

Chairwoman Stabenow, ranking member Roberts and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to speak today regarding the proposed Rural Star legislation and its potential job creation impact in rural America.

I operate a small home energy retrofit business located in southwest Colorado. We are a full service home performance business which means that we conduct the initial energy audit and generate a recommendation report based on potential energy savings and then perform the repairs. We install windows, insulation and other related energy saving measures. I currently have three employees, and all three including myself were previously employed in the residential home building industry prior to the downturn in the housing market. We are experiencing a steady demand for energy efficiency repairs, but face the same challenges most markets face: access to capital.

For home performance programs to work a funding mechanism must be in place to meet the needs of the homeowners who want and need repairs but lack the money to proceed. In metropolitan areas there are large national home performance contractors that have the capital to offer financing to homeowners. In rural areas like southwest Colorado, we are made up of small home performance businesses that don't have the ability to offer financing to customers. Financing options coupled with existing energy efficiency incentives is the piece that we in the rural areas are missing, and I believe this would propel many homeowners to move forward with repairs.

The housing stock in the southwest is weathered and aged. Home repairs usually only take place when there is a "good year" or the furnace stops working and there is no other choice but to fix it. There is no shortage of homes that need to have energy efficiency upgrades completed. Our greatest challenge as a home performance company is converting the audit into repairs. I can perform energy audits and have the most talented salesman around but if the homeowner doesn't have the money to implement the recommended repairs we are back to square one. I routinely encounter homeowners that are taking advantage of rebates available for an energy audit but cannot proceed with any installed measures due to financial constraints. Rural Star benefits a homeowner by making their homes safer, healthier, and more efficient, and it benefits the rural contractors by increasing our workload.

It has been a pleasure speaking here today. Thank you for your time.