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COMMITTEE ON
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JOINT ECONOMIC
COMMITTEE

October 7, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On September 9, 2021, President Biden issued a sweeping executive order to require full vaccination of all federal employees and federal contractors. Shortly thereafter, USDA announced an arbitrary deadline of November 22, 2021, to prove full vaccination status against COVID-19. I am deeply concerned by this heavy-handed and overreaching decision and its implications for our citizens' freedoms, our American farmers and ranchers, and the US agriculture economy.

Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices have been severely understaffed due to totally unreasonable pandemic reopening protocols for almost 18 months. As a result, the review of applications for crucial relief programs has all but stopped in many offices and created a nationwide backlog. Now essential staff—including volunteer and elected positions—are being threatened with loss of employment should they choose to be partially vaccinated or completely unvaccinated by November 22, 2021.

Many individuals have decided they would rather preserve their personal liberties and resign from their position than be forced to vaccinate, which will only exacerbate the current staffing and workload issues our local offices are experiencing across the country. The loss of these long-time employees will be devastating to rural communities, especially as November is prime harvest time across the Southwest. Producers will be turning in crop acreage reports for fall-seeded crops, as well as certifying cover crops in preparation for next year's planting season. It is imperative they have access to fully open and operational FSA offices.

I implore you and President Biden to respect the personal freedoms of every American, consider the cost on our agriculture economy, and provide reasonable accommodations for all USDA employees. Thank you for your attention to this matter and your urgent consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



Jodey C. Arrington
Member of Congress