

## **Oklahoman**

### **Obama's visits to rural areas may be in response to U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas**

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**By Chris Casteel**

As President Barack Obama prepared to embark today on a two-day tour of small-town America, the White House released a report highlighting the president's efforts to strengthen rural areas and close gaps in education, income and business development.

The president is heading "into the heart of rural America," a White House spokeswoman said Monday, making stops in Iowa, Missouri and Illinois, to visit "people who are living the challenges Americans face."

The latest leg of the president's White House to Main Street tour — which will include a visit to a Missouri farm — comes a week after U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas charged the administration with trying to turn rural areas into "bedroom communities" by cutting federal help to farmers.

The president this year proposed cutting subsidies to wealthier farmers, attempting to use his budget to accomplish what former President George W. Bush couldn't do during a standoff with Congress over the last farm bill.

### **Crop insurance may be cut**

The White House wants to cut the maximum direct payment from \$40,000 to \$30,000; direct payments are made to farmers who have historically received federal farm subsidies, whether they are growing crops now or not.

The president has also proposed cutting all subsidies to farmers who have an adjusted gross income of \$250,000 from nonfarm sources or \$500,000 from the farm. Congress two years ago rejected Bush's efforts to lower the thresholds that much. Currently, subsidies are available to those with \$500,000 in nonfarm income and \$750,000 in farm income.

The White House also wants to cut federal subsidies to crop insurance. "These are certainly sensible proposals that the president thinks are good policy," Christina Romer, head of Obama's Council of Economic Advisers told reporters Monday.

Lucas, the top Republican on the House Agriculture Committee, said Monday, "I am glad to hear that President Obama will meet with farmers on his upcoming trip to Missouri. I hope he's prepared to really listen to their concerns.

"For more than a year, the agriculture community has been sounding the alarm on cap and trade, an overreaching EPA, government-run health care and the administration's

spending spree. I hope the president is prepared to discuss the real impact of his policies on family farms, small businesses and rural America. I hope he's prepared to explain why he hasn't sent the three pro-agriculture free trade agreements to Congress, which would mean real money for rural economies."

### **Education levels are lower**

The Council of Economic Advisers released a report stating that agriculture employs "Only a small fraction of rural workers" as farm production has become increasingly more efficient and rural economies have become more diverse.

The White House report says the administration has directed billions of dollars from the stimulus bill to help rural areas rebuild water systems, expand broadband internet service, loan more money to small businesses and encourage alternative energy production. Obama plans to visit an ethanol plant on his tour.

Romer said the administration also has invested more than \$2 billion in improving federal lands in rural areas to promote tourism.

According to the report, rural residents have lower rates of college degrees than those in urban areas and lower incomes. Because they don't make as much money, rural residents have to spend a higher percentage of their incomes on health care.