I’ve heard a lot of talk over the last few years from Washington about boosting the economic prospects of communities like ours. No one needs to sell me on our potential, but does this new administration and Congress actually understand what towns or cities like ours really need to prosper? And who speaks for the interests of America’s smaller communities like ours in Washington?

For the last few months, I’ve been working with a bipartisan group of more than 100 other local elected leaders from other towns and cities under the banner of the First & Main coalition (firstandmain.org) to help leaders in Washington understand how they can continue supporting local prosperity in [TOWN] and other places like it across the country. We know firsthand how federal resources help leverage billions of dollars in private investment that bring transformational change and drive prosperity in our communities.

We call it First & Main because no matter the size of the town, if business and life is good at that main downtown corner, there’s a good chance that the rest of the community is following suit. In the same way, when America’s smaller towns and cities (like ours) are prospering, so is the rest of the country. And many of you, like myself, are hard at work on bringing prosperity to [TOWN].

Recently I joined dozens of these other local elected officials in our nation’s capital to send this unmistakable message to members of Congress and The White House. We are counting on them to be a reliable partner and support our homegrown efforts to rebuild our downtowns, restore our economies, revitalize neighborhoods, attract new, job-creating investments, and improve opportunity for everyone.

In meetings at The White House and with key congressional leaders, we asked federal officials to continue helping us turn our cities and towns into beacons of opportunity for everyone, including those who are struggling and have been left behind. I was proud to join colleagues from all over America to stand up for these proven programs because they are so important to our quality of life and continued progress right here in [TOWN].

After threats of severe cuts, the FY18 federal budget approved by Congress and signed by the President in April maintains and even strengthens many of the vital federal programs that help all of us drive prosperity in our communities, including Community Development Block Grants, brownfield cleanup assistance from the Environmental Protection Agency and economic development grants from the Economic Development Agency. I am grateful for this commitment to local revitalization and growth and I am hopeful that Congress and the Trump administration will continue their commitment in FY19 and beyond.

Yet I also remain deeply concerned by plans to pull back funding already committed to these programs in this year’s budget, and in future budgets, putting robust federal support for local communities back in the crosshairs.
I am keenly aware of concerns over the ballooning federal deficit; balancing budgets is something I have to do every day as [mayor/city manager]. But the budget should not be balanced on the backs of local communities. That kind of deficit reduction strategy is penny wise, but pound foolish. Dollar for dollar, federal investments in places like [TOWN] generate a far greater return on investment in terms of local revitalization and job creation than any other line item in the federal budget.

Make no mistake—I’m not asking for handouts. I’m looking for a reliable federal partner to continue the progress we’ve made in eliminating blight, stabilizing neighborhoods, and cleaning up contaminated industrial sites to prepare them for new development. Local communities like ours continue to meet our challenges head-on, with creative, data-driven approaches to revitalization.

We’re picking ourselves up by our own bootstraps, but we still can’t do it alone.

GREAT PLACE FOR AN ADDITIONAL SPECIFIC LOCAL STORY of fed investment that stimulated private investment. I.e., how you picked yourself up but some fed resources helped you complete things.

I urge the President to refrain from reducing the federal support which drives progress and prosperity in rural areas, small towns and mid-sized cities across America. And, I urge all of our federal leaders to focus on proven solutions that will stimulate the kind of economic growth that will create vibrant, healthy communities; bring prosperity to all of our residents, families, and workers; and produce the rising tide that lifts all boats in [TOWN] and other communities like it across the country.