

Dear America,

Happy 250th birthday. By the time anyone reads this, you'll be turning 500 — and Eugene-Springfield, Oregon will still be figuring out how to hold two ideas at once: that we are a region with an outsized sense of what's possible, and that the work of building a community never actually finishes.

We wanted you to know what it looked like from here.

Eugene grew up on timber. For most of the last century, that was the answer to almost every question about who we were and how we made a living. Then the industry that built this valley contracted, and the town had to decide what came next. We didn't get a script for that. We got a university, a running culture that turned this place into Track Town USA, a river system that shapes how people spend their weekends, and a stubborn, sometimes contrarian streak of people who kept starting things — bakeries, breweries, biotech, software — because starting things is what this place has always done, even when the ground underneath it shifted.

That is the real inheritance we're passing forward: not a single industry, but resilience.

Right now, in 2026, our region is in the middle of a push we call Elevate 2028 — a five-year, four-goal effort built on a belief we can back with numbers: business strength and community wellbeing are not competing priorities. They are the same priority.

Here is where we stood the year we sealed this letter. Lane County wages ran 20% below state and national averages. Home values had climbed 40% since 2020, putting a median home at \$440,000 and out of reach for most people who work here. Homelessness had grown 17% in three years. Downtown foot traffic was down a quarter from that in 2019. We didn't minimize any of that, and we're not editing it out of this letter for the sake of a tidier story. We named it, and we went to work on it — projecting 3,800 jobs and \$299 million in new labor income by 2028, on the conviction that every direct job created ripples into roughly one and a half more across the local economy. We don't know at the time of writing this how much of that target we ultimately hit. We know we showed up for it — business leaders, educators, elected officials, and neighbors, in the same room, arguing in good faith about how to make this place work better for more people.

Onward Eugene, our region's economic development organization, exists because we believe the answer to "who is responsible for the region's future" should be "everyone with a stake in it, working from the same plan." That's not a small bet. We're leaning into bold leadership and building it.

This year, 2026, the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives named the Eugene Area Chamber a national Chamber of the Year. We're proud of that, and we're mentioning it here not to boast but because it's a marker of the moment: in the same year we sealed this letter, the way we chose to do this work — honest about the gap, specific about the plan, in the room with



people who don't always agree with us — was recognized as some of the best of its kind in the country. We'd rather you judge us on what we built between now and 2276 than on any single award. But it felt true enough to this moment to belong in this letter.

We are a chamber of commerce, which means our job has always been a strange mix of the practical and the hopeful — helping a small business make payroll this month while also arguing for the kind of infrastructure, workforce, and housing that won't pay off for a decade. Both of those things are true at once, every day, and we've stopped apologizing for holding them together.

If there's one thing we'd want you to know about the Eugene-Springfield community at 250, it's this: we are a place that keeps choosing to reinvent rather than retreat. The timber economy taught us that the ground can shift under a community without ending it. We've carried that lesson forward — through recessions, through wildfire smoke that now colors our summers, through every version of "what happens next" this region has had to answer. We keep answering it by building.

We don't know what Eugene will be solving for in 2276. We suspect some of it will look nothing like today's challenges, and some of it — housing, opportunity, who gets to belong here — will look uncomfortably familiar. Either way, we hope whoever reads this can say the same thing we're trying to say now: that the people here were willing to do the unglamorous work of building something better than what they inherited, and that they did it together.

Happy 250th birthday, America. From a region that has never stopped starting over.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brittany Quick-Warner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "B" and "Q".

Brittany Quick-Warner

President & CEO, Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce

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