



# NATIONAL GRANGE

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*American Values. Hometown Roots.*

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June 30, 2020

Democratic National Committee  
430 South Capitol St SE #3  
Washington, DC 20003

Members of the Democratic Platform Committee,

The National Grange is one of the nation's oldest grassroots advocacy organizations, founded in 1867 to represent the interests of rural Americans and their communities. Today, the Grange represents over 150,000 rural Americans across the country, with advocacy efforts ranging from local town councils to the halls of Congress. As part of this advocacy we have frequently submitted the perspective of our members to both political parties so that they can better craft their party platforms to reflect the interests of rural Americans.

In 2016 the National Grange was happy to see that many policies which are crucial to our membership were included in the Democratic party's platform. Specifically, provisions supporting the US postal service, increased infrastructure deployment, and investment in rural communities are key priorities of our rural membership which were reflected in the 2016 platform. However, on key issues such as rural broadband and healthcare we were disappointed to find little if any support.

Reliable and fast internet access is a necessity for all Americans in the modern era. Internet connections power remote work and education, smart agricultural practices, and e-commerce opportunities for rural companies. The importance of internet access has never been clearer than during the COVID-19 pandemic as millions of Americans have been asked to work and learn from home, leaving those without a connection at risk of losing their job or missing out on class. Unfortunately, an estimated 34 million Americans lack access to affordable and reliable internet service, 19.4 million of which are located in rural communities.

To address this digital divide in access to broadband more support must be given to programs which support deployment of broadband in rural areas such as Universal Service Funds, and the FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund and Connect America Fund. More urgently, to address the possibility that this pandemic will extend into next year action must be taken to rapidly deploy temporary broadband service in underserved communities so that rural Americans can work and learn remotely. Specifically, there is currently a need to create Wi-Fi hotspots in rural and small-town America to support the critical

infrastructure required by distance learning, telemedicine, and telebusiness. Hotspot locations must not only be deployed in schools, school busses, and libraries but to country crossroads parking lots and rural business common locations such as farmer cooperatives.

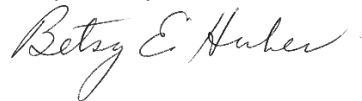
The COVID-19 pandemic has also made it certain that one of the defining issues of the 2020 election will be healthcare. While the 2016 Democratic party platform spent significant space addressing healthcare needs, it failed to address the dire realities of healthcare in rural America.

Rural Americans face two dramatic disparities in healthcare: they are older, poorer and sicker on average, and they have less access to healthcare compared to their urban and suburban counterparts. At the same time, healthcare services in rural America are rapidly disappearing, with 128 rural hospitals having closed since 2010 and another 700 vulnerable to closure. This dynamic has been exacerbated by COVID-19 which has led to outbreaks in rural areas overwhelming limited hospital resources, and millions of Americans shut out of healthcare facilities altogether.

To combat this growing healthcare disparity and prevent a rural healthcare crisis, lawmakers must provide more support to rural healthcare by funding telehealth services (which requires increased high-speed broadband deployment), supporting struggling rural hospitals, creating virtual medical clinics where communities lack access to healthcare, and incentivizing healthcare workers and companies to work in underserved rural communities.

While more could be done to align the 2016 democratic platform with the policies approved by the membership of the National Grange, the most significant areas of concern are rural broadband and healthcare. Therefore, in order to adequately represent rural Americans, the Democratic party's 2020 platform must emphasize rural broadband deployment and support for rural healthcare, while continuing to champion key issues from the 2016 platform such as support for the postal service, infrastructure deployment, and investment in rural communities.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Betsy E. Huber".

Betsy Huber  
President  
National Grange