



NATIONAL GRANGE

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American Values. Hometown Roots.

July 20, 2020

Republican National Committee
 310 First St SE
 Washington, DC 20003

Members of the Republican National 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 our advocacy efforts, we have frequently submitted the perspective of our members to both political parties so that they can better craft their party platform and message to reflect the interests of rural and small-town Americans.

While we understand that the Republican National Committee has decided not to modify the 2016 Republican Party platform for the 2020 election, we still believe that there are a number of key issues which the Republican party should champion during the 2020 election so as to adequately represent rural Americans. In 2016 the National Grange was happy to see that many policies which are crucial to our membership were included in the Republican party's platform. Specifically, provisions designed to address the opioid epidemic, invest in rural infrastructure, and support agriculture. However, key issues such as rural broadband and rural healthcare did not receive as much attention as they require.

Reliable and fast internet access is a necessity for all Americans in the modern era. Internet connections power remote work, 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 educational opportunities. Unfortunately, an estimated 34 million Americans lack access to affordable and reliable internet service; 19.4 million of these citizens live 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 the Universal Service Fund, and the FCC's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund and the 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 an urgent 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.

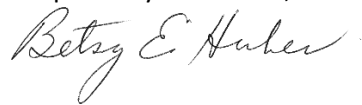
The COVID-19 pandemic has also made it certain that one of the defining issues of the 2020 election will be healthcare. While the 2016 Republican party platform spent significant space addressing healthcare needs, it failed to address the dire realities of healthcare in rural America.

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 leaving 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 Republican platform with the policies approved by the membership of the National Grange, the most significant areas of concern are rural broadband and rural healthcare. Therefore, in order to adequately represent rural Americans, the Republican party must emphasize rural broadband deployment and support for new and innovative rural healthcare, while continuing to champion key issues from the 2016 platform such as the opioid epidemic, rural infrastructure, and support for agriculture in the 2020 election campaign.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Betsy Huber
President
National Grange