



NATIONAL GRANGE

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American Values. Hometown Roots.

November 11, 2020

President-elect Biden,

Congratulations to you and Vice President-elect Harris on a successful campaign, the National Grange looks forward to welcoming you back as our neighbor in Washington D.C. Since our founding in 1867, the National Grange has worked with administrations of both parties to create policies which support rural America. Today, the National Grange serves as the national voice of over 150,000 rural Americans from all across the country. In this mission, we have four top priorities which your administration can implement to support rural America: rural broadband expansion, rural healthcare support, rural infrastructure, and an agricultural policy which prioritizes farmers.

On rural broadband, we appreciate your campaign trail commitment to connecting all Americans. This goal is essential now more than ever, as the COVID-19 pandemic has forced millions of Americans 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 exacerbated existing challenges in rural healthcare. 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, your administration 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.

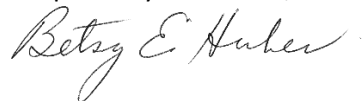
Next, we believe that one strong bipartisan challenge which can be addressed under the Biden-Harris administration is a rebuilding of rural infrastructure. Specifically, in recent years rural America has fallen behind in many types of infrastructure from power generation to water development to surface and ground transportation routes. In response to this challenge, it is essential that the federal government provides funding to build-up rural infrastructure thereby stimulating rural economic development creating thousands of jobs.

Lastly, in crafting policies which affect agriculture it is essential that farmers be prioritized. On the Biden-Harris transition website, climate change is listed as a top priority, a priority shared and understood by farmers whose livelihood depends on a healthy environment. The National Grange supports efforts to combat climate change, but only if these efforts consider the economic viability of farmers and compensate them for any new burdens climate policy creates. Furthermore, climate policy should be based in science and technology, and decisions made using data on American agriculture.

In recent years, farmers and ranchers have been harmed by trade disputes and unsettled trade policies. Under a Biden administration, the National Grange hopes to see increased stability in international trade and a consideration for the impacts tariffs can have on agriculture. In this effort, it is vital for the agriculture economy that the United States upholds the principles of free and fair trade around the world, while also standing up against unfair trade practices.

While the National Grange has many more legislative priorities for rural America on which we look forward to working with your administration, rural broadband, rural healthcare, rural infrastructure, and farmer-focused agricultural policies are the most significant. Once again, congratulations on a successful campaign, the National Grange looks forward to working with your administration to implement successful policies for rural America.

Respectfully submitted,



Betsy Huber
President
National Grange