

Senate Democrats Deliver for Rural America



Democratic
**Policy &
Communications**
Committee

Chairwoman **Debbie Stabenow**
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In the 117th Congress, Senate Democrats are delivering transformative rural policy that's growing rural economies, lowering costs for families, and tackling the climate crisis. Small towns and rural communities are stronger thanks to critical investments Congress passed for rural families, farmers, and small businesses.

Lowering Costs for Rural Families

Lowering Energy Bills

Rural households across the United States spend a disproportionately high share of their income on energy bills — about 40% more than their metropolitan counterparts, according to a [recent report](#). Thanks to the historic investments in the Inflation Reduction Act, Americans could see at least a \$300 per year reduction in energy costs. Democrats have also provided \$500 million to improve biofuels fueling infrastructure. Higher blends of biofuels can mean major fuel cost reductions for customers.

Reducing Food Costs

When outbreaks of COVID-19 shut down meat processing plants and put workers at risk, it exposed the dangers of a supply chain concentrated on just a small handful of giant and in many cases foreign-owned conglomerates. Democrats took swift action to reduce food costs and tackle consolidation in our food supply chain by providing \$1 billion to improve and expand local and regional food processing. This will increase competition in meatpacking while creating good-paying jobs in rural America.

Feeding School Children and Addressing the Baby Formula Crisis

No matter where children live, they need affordable and reliable healthy foods to fuel their school day. Rural students often face unique barriers to accessing healthy foods, especially those without transportation to access summer feeding sites. Congressional Democrats extended important funding and flexibility for communities to provide children healthy meals this past summer. These flexibilities also allow schools and daycare providers to respond to supply chain challenges and high food costs during the school year.

Democrats also [delivered bipartisan legislation](#) to improve baby formula access in the WIC program during the nationwide shortage. Over 6 million women and children depend on WIC each month to buy healthy and nutritious foods.

Lowering Health Care Costs

According to [a new report](#) by the U.S. Census bureau, about 10.6 million older adults live in rural communities—roughly one quarter of all seniors.

Democrats took action to lower drug costs for seniors and people with disabilities by allowing – for the first time – Medicare to negotiate drug prices as well as capping the cost of insulin and out-of-pocket prescription drug costs for Medicare beneficiaries. In addition, Medicare will also provide free vaccines for seniors. See more on how Democrats have lowered the cost of prescription drugs [here](#).

Expanded premium tax credits passed by Democrats will continue to help Americans afford health insurance. Residents of rural counties lack insurance at higher rates than those living in urban areas, and [about 15%](#) of Marketplace enrollees live in rural areas.

Due to the expansion of these tax credits, [65% \(1.3 million\)](#) of the 1.9 million rural uninsured Americans in states using HealthCare.gov had access to a \$0-premium health insurance plan for 2021. Under this extension, the average marketplace enrollee will save more than \$800 a year in health insurance costs, and millions of Americans will maintain affordable coverage.

Improving Rural Quality of Life

Connecting Rural Americans to High-Speed Internet

More than 35% of rural Americans and Tribal communities [lack wired access to broadband](#) at acceptable speeds. To compete in the 21st century economy, rural small business owners, farmers, healthcare providers, and families need high-speed internet. In the 117th Congress, Democrats invested in internet infrastructure that is ready to meet future technology demands. Democrats delivered over \$70 billion to connect every American to high-speed internet, especially rural Americans who have long been underserved. Additionally, [over 13 million low-income households](#) have received assistance through FCC's Affordable Connectivity Program to connect to high-speed internet.

According to the Federal Communications Commission, [nearly 17 million school children lack internet access at home](#). Rural students [were twice as likely](#) as urban students to lack adequate technology to keep up with their schoolwork during the pandemic. Democrats delivered over \$7 billion to help schools and libraries provide the tools and services their communities need for remote learning.

Cleaning Up Rural Drinking Water

Clean drinking water is a necessity. Unfortunately, rural communities struggle with aging water infrastructure that threatens the health and safety of residents. Senate Democrats delivered record investments in water and wastewater infrastructure to clean up drinking water. This includes reauthorizing the Assistance for Small and Disadvantaged Communities grant program. It provides grants to improve drinking water quality, including the installation of filters and removal of emerging groundwater contaminants. Democrats have also delivered \$1 billion for rural water infrastructure through the Bureau of Land Reclamation and increasing rural water funding at EPA.

Improving Rural Transportation Infrastructure

While only 30% of total vehicle miles traveled were in rural areas, [rural areas account for 45% of all traffic fatalities](#). Investments in rural roads save lives and improve rural driving conditions.

Rail is critical for the movement of goods made and grown in rural communities. Democrats invested in commercial and passenger rail by establishing a rural surface

transportation grant program. It will invest an average of \$400 million per year to improve and expand rail infrastructure. Democrats also extended the Secure Rural Schools program, which provides funding for critical projects for rural schools, roads, and municipal transportation services.

Modernizing the U.S. Postal Service

The Postal Service is a lifeline for rural communities. While people living in rural areas account for only 16% of the United States' population, [57% of post offices are in rural areas](#). The USPS Inspector General [has consistently found](#) that rural postal customers value and depend on mail service more than urban customers. Democrats protected retirement benefits for rural letter carriers and provided critical resources to ensure that the Postal Service can continue serving rural areas.

Supporting Small Town Economic Development

Since President Biden took office, rural economies continue to grow. More jobs were created in rural communities in 2021 [than in any other year in the last two decades](#). Democrats have delivered significant economic development investments to help rural communities rebound from the pandemic. Democrats provided \$350 billion in funding to state, local, and tribal governments through the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund - the single largest investment in rural communities in decades.

Democrats also created a new federal block grant program to empower persistently distressed communities with flexible 10-year grants to meet local economic development needs and create good-paying jobs. More information [can be found here](#).

Improving Access to Behavioral Health Care

[Two-thirds of rural adults](#) ages 18 to 44 said in 2020 that they experience more mental health challenges than they did in 2019. In addition, rural youth are twice as likely to die by suicide as their urban peers. In 2020, over 81,000 Americans died from drug overdoses – the highest number ever.

Democrats transformed behavioral health care, including care for substance use disorder. Congress expanded the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic program nationwide. These clinics provide a comprehensive set of services including: 24/7/365 crisis services; outpatient mental health and substance abuse services; immediate screenings, risk assessments, and diagnoses; and care coordination including partnerships with emergency rooms, law enforcement, veterans' groups, and community health centers. The 435 currently operating Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics have shown a 73% reduction in hospitalizations, a 69% reduction in ER visits, and a 60% reduction in time spent in jail for the patients they serve.

This bill also improved access to mental health services for children, youth, and families through the Medicaid program and CHIP, increased access to mental health services for youth and families in crisis via telehealth, and provided major investments to programs that expand provider training in mental health, support suicide prevention, and provide crisis and trauma intervention and recovery.

Caring For Our Veterans

[Almost a quarter of all veterans](#) in the United States, 4.7 million, return from active military careers to live in rural communities. Democrats established a national recruitment and hiring plan for rural VA clinics and medical centers to improve service for rural veterans. Improving access to toxic exposure screenings will help protect our men and women who have served from long-term health complications.

Fighting the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since President Biden took office, the national COVID-19 death rate has dropped [by nearly 90%](#).

Democrats increased access to COVID-19 vaccines, testing, and treatments, and will continue taking action to fight COVID-19 and save lives. Democrats invested \$20 billion for vaccine procurement, distribution, outreach, education, and administration to ensure vaccines reached communities that needed them. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Democrats provided \$8.5 billion for rural health care providers to increase vaccine distribution, provide medical supplies, and support grants to expand access to telehealth.

Supporting American Farmers and Workers

Protecting Markets for Our Farmers

For far too long, farmers have been hurt by the rising cost of ocean shipping, causing delays and slowing sales overseas. Democrats recently passed new legislation to reform our ocean shipping laws. The law promotes the growth and development of U.S. exports and improves the manufacturing supply chain by cracking down on international shipping operators imposing unfair price hikes. Farm groups, [including the American Farm Bureau Federation](#), applauded Democrats for their work to address bottlenecks in the supply chain that may limit the movement of American farm commodities.

Keeping Farmers on the Land

Because of the hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic, many borrowers struggled to make their farm loan payments. Democrats passed financial assistance for tens of thousands of distressed farmers who need to stay on their land. Democrats also helped farmers who have suffered past discrimination from USDA in its farm loan programs.

Protecting Food System Workers

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed how much our food supply chain depends on the men and women who process and package our food, get food to stores, and stock grocery store shelves. Democrats passed billions for purchases of personal protective equipment for farmers and food workers; as well as financial support for farmers, small- and medium-sized food processing companies, farmers markets, and other food businesses.

Revitalizing American Manufacturing Jobs

Nearly [700,000 new manufacturing jobs](#) have been created during the Biden Administration. Manufacturing is especially [important](#) in rural America. Manufacturing earnings represented 21% of rural private nonfarm earnings. Democrats have delivered transformative legislation to bring semiconductor manufacturing back to the United States. Currently, the U.S. manufactures 12% of the world's semiconductors, down from 37% in 1990. Democrats are ensuring that semiconductor technologies – which power our phones, cars, and appliances – are made in America.

Senate Democrats and the Biden Administration are working hand in hand to strengthen Buy American provisions. Senate Democrats and the Biden Administration have ushered in the most significant expansion of Buy American policies in decades. These policies will ensure that federally funded infrastructure projects use American-made steel, iron, manufactured products, and construction material.

Tackling the Climate Crisis

Conserving American Farmland

Democrats passed over \$20 billion to give farmers and ranchers the tools they need to address the climate crisis. With existing conservation programs [oversubscribed by as much as 3 to 1](#), these funds help farmers and ranchers implement and expand conservation practices that reduce potent greenhouse gases like methane and increase storage of carbon in soil and trees. These investments also incentivize sustainable practices – like optimizing fertilizer use and expanding cover crops – that are a win-win for conservation and for producers' bottom line.

Bringing Clean Energy to Rural Communities

Democrats made historic investments in rural power to lower costs for families and support good-paying clean energy jobs in rural communities. Democrats delivered \$10 billion to help rural electric cooperatives transition to clean energy. Rural electric cooperatives serve 42 million customers and [rely more on coal than other power providers](#). In 2020, co-ops sourced 28% of their electricity from coal, compared to the 19% national average. And for the first time, these co-ops will now be eligible for direct-pay clean energy tax credits. Democrats have also expanded USDA's Rural Energy for America Program to bring more affordable, distributed clean energy to American farmers and rural small business owners.

Preventing Wildfires

Democrats delivered \$5 billion to protect communities from wildfires while combating the climate crisis and supporting the workforce through climate-smart forestry. Democrats made investments in forest health projects on both public and private lands and equipped firefighters and rural communities to be more resilient to wildfire.

Supporting Energy-Producing Communities

Democrats recognize the need for good paying union jobs in areas that have long

powered our country in the gas, oil, and coal industries. Democrats are committed to supporting these workers during the clean energy transition by targeting tax credits and other federal assistance to clean energy manufacturing, utility retooling, and clean energy development in fossil-fuel dependent communities. Additionally, Democrats reinstated funding for the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund to assist coal miners battling respiratory conditions.