

Dems release new rural strategy ahead of midterms

By Rachel Shin

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Democrats are ramping up their campaign to win over rural voters, who overwhelmingly [backed President Donald Trump in 2024](#), with a new focus on affordability.

The [New Democrat Coalition](#), a caucus of 116 center-left lawmakers in the House, released a [policy agenda](#) Wednesday that prioritizes improving land access, rural health care and the farm economy. The agenda, shared first with POLITICO, comes as the party seeks to shed its association with the coastal elites and hit the Trump administration on its major cuts to safety net programs and ongoing trade wars as the cost-of-living rises.

“I think we have a unique opportunity as Democrats to put forward a vision for rural America that we might not have had the same type of opening for in past election cycles,” Rep. [Nikki Budzinski](#) (D-Ill.) said in an interview. “A lot of that is attributed ... to this administration, the way they’ve taken tariffs, which have obviously very much hurt the farm economy and a lot of our growers.”

Rural America has become an increasingly reliable source of support for Republicans, including strong backing for Trump in the past three elections. But a more recent battle [may offer a blueprint](#) for national Democrats: Abigail Spanberger’s gubernatorial victory in Virginia was aided by support from the state’s deep-red central and western counties — a feat she accomplished by emphasizing how Trump’s tariffs affect the manufacturing and agricultural industries.

Voters made clear in the recent off-year election that “this all comes down to the affordability gap,” Rep. [Jim Costa](#) (D-Calif.) said in an interview.

“My frustration is that for, in recent decades, our party has been seen more as a coastal party on the East and West Coast, and we need to do better, I think, in our efforts toward reaching out to Rural America,” Costa added.

The New Democrat Coalition’s policy agenda includes passing a bipartisan farm bill, restoring funding the [Trump administration slashed](#) for two programs that allowed schools and food banks to purchase from farmers, and reauthorizing rural broadband programs. It also pushes USDA to prioritize lending to small producers and promises to undo the [One Big Beautiful Bill Act’s cuts](#) to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Centrist Democratic lawmakers are hoping this latest move signals that their attention is now squarely on rural voters.

“I think in previous cycles, Democrats have stepped away from showing up in these communities for fear that maybe these are red counties or red communities that we’re not able to win back,” Budzinski said. “It’s showing up, it’s listening and then putting together a framework that speaks to a positive vision for rural America that can be thriving under a Democratic House Majority.”

The Democratic National Committee also released a [mini-documentary](#) Tuesday about family farmers who have struggled under Trump’s trade war. In the documentary, farmers Charlie Johnson, Shane Merrill and Frank Kloucek slam Trump’s tariffs and his [multibillion-dollar bailout of Argentina](#).

“Farmers across the country are being pushed to the brink — struggling to sell their crops because Trump’s reckless trade war has locked them out of markets that may never come back,” said DNC Deputy Executive Director Libby Schneider in a statement.