

Rural Trump Voters Won't Regret Their Vote Until Democrats Fight for Them

Trump promised to address the opioid epidemic and restore small towns to health and prosperity. The president has betrayed those who placed their trust in him.

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California farmers face an uncertain financial future as the Trump administration's tariffs threaten to upend fruit and vegetables exports of fruits and vegetables and increase prices of farming equipment.(Justin Sullivan / Getty Images)

RETHINKING RURAL

The damage done just in the Trump administration's first three months could fill the National Archives—assuming that department still exists. Many of those moves, including the deportation of Kilmar Abrego Garcia to a Salvadoran gulag, have been cruel and utterly unjust. Yet public support for Trump, though declining, remains stubbornly high among rural and working-class people. Some part of that support comes from his ability to couch everything he does as retaliation against liberal elites and a blow against the “rigged system” those elites helped create—a system that has undermined the values and livelihoods of ordinary working people.

What will it take to stop Trump? It's hard to predict how many of the people who supported Trump will turn against him because of the deportation of Garcia, student activists, and others. Those fights absolutely must continue and, we hope, will awaken more and more Americans to the dismantling of democracy. But there will always be those who are moved more by negative impacts to their daily lives. Job loss, hospital and school closures, a huge spike in the cost of essential goods—these are perennial deal-breakers that outlive the daily news cycle.

As we suggested in our February column, reacting negatively to every radical idea Trump tosses out only solidifies the left's position as defenders of the establishment—the very system tens of millions of Americans blame for their woes. We also believe that protesting the bad stuff only gets us so far, and that a positive vision for bettering the lives of rural and working people must be front and center.

That said, when it *does* come to complaining loudly about the impact of Trump's chaotic nihilism, we should focus on actions that have hurt large numbers of people, many of whom voted for Trump. We need to empathize with and acknowledge their struggles and help channel it into buyers' remorse: “Trump has betrayed us” gets to the heart of the matter, whereas “Hands off!” smacks of a desire to restore the status quo.

To stop Trump and reverse the assault on our economy and democracy, we need to redeploy some of our outrage to highlight how Trump's actions are actually making the rigged system worse for the folks who put him in office: farmers, small businesses, coal miners, factory and blue-collar workers, consumers struggling with high prices and debt. Until our protest routinely includes the betrayal of folks like these, we

have almost no chance of building the broad resistance coalition needed to reverse the disastrous course we're on.

With that in mind, we offer a few examples of Trump's betrayals of rural and working-class people that we urge the left to prioritize, while also highlighting policies that will reverse those betrayals.

Farmers, a core constituency for Trump, have been among the worst hit by his actions since taking office. For midsize and larger farmers, tariffs have prompted widespread anxiety that they are being squeezed from both ends: They're facing higher costs on inputs like Canadian potash and steel for agricultural equipment, combined with a potentially dramatic loss of markets for soybeans, pork, and other commodities.

On top of that, the dismantling of USAID amounts to nearly \$2 billion in lost sales for US farmers. For smaller farmers, the termination of the Farm to School program and the Local Food Purchase Program for food banks have eliminated more than \$1 billion in markets for fresh produce, while undermining the effort to provide healthy food to kids and people in need.

And for farmers of all sizes, the suspension of contractual payments to farmers who've undertaken conservation, soil building, renewable energy, and other improvements to their farms is devastating. At least 30,000 of these farmers, who each expended tens of thousands of dollars based on USDA commitments, now find themselves in debt, unclear whether the promised reimbursements will ever materialize.

But farmers aren't the only rural folks getting screwed.

Workers and small-business owners are increasingly worried about their livelihoods. Even before the latest round of tariffs, small-business confidence had declined for all three months of Trump's presidency, with just one in five small business owners saying they expect sales and business conditions to improve in the near future. That uncertainty translates to less investment and hiring on the part of existing small businesses, and fewer new business start-ups.

For workers in bigger companies, the surge in union organizing seen under the Biden administration is running into a wall of anti-worker actions from Trump. These include the firing of pro-worker members of the NLRB such as Jennifer Abruzzo, replaced by Crystal Carey, a lawyer whose firm represents notoriously anti-union Tesla and Amazon. Trump has also eliminated the \$17 hourly minimum-wage requirement for federal contractors while working to completely dismantle unions representing federal workers.

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JOAN WALSH

Veterans, who are more likely to live in rural areas, will be hurt especially hard by the double kneecapping of Medicaid and Veterans Affairs (VA). *The New York Times* reports that, in addition to layoffs, the VA has been rocked by DOGE's abrupt return-to-work policy. VA psychiatrists who have, for decades, counseled veterans remotely, now suddenly have to conduct their sessions in open cubicles that lack privacy. Many of them are quitting in protest.

Fourteen million (nearly one in five) rural adults rely on Medicaid, a program Republicans aim to cut by \$880 billion (roughly 20 percent of the program) over the next decade. Already struggling rural hospitals and clinics rely on Medicaid funds to stay afloat. Over the past 10 years, nearly 200 rural hospitals have closed, leaving their patients stranded a hundred or more miles from the nearest emergency room. Most of the rural hospitals that do remain open have eliminated their maternity wards. Slashing Medicaid spending will trigger further hospital closures and strain already paltry substance abuse, mental health, and Indian health services.

And then there are the millions of consumers just struggling to make ends meet. They've been hit not only by continued rising prices—the inflation rate has been between 2.4 and 3 percent since Trump took office—but by the elimination of protections from junk fees from banks and credit card companies. Joined by the Republican-controlled Senate, the Trump administration is eliminating the \$8 late-fee cap instituted toward the end of Biden's term, allowing companies to once again charge exorbitant fees to people who don't pay on time. The lower average incomes of rural and working-class people make high prices and junk banking fees all the more difficult to manage.

Donald Trump carried rural America by a 40-point margin. He promised forgotten Americans he would unrig the system, address the opioid epidemic, and restore small towns to health and prosperity. Even more than most of his predecessors, Trump has betrayed those who placed their trust in him. Reversing the tidal wave of destruction he has unleashed requires that we on the left do something we should have done a long time ago: open our doors wide to the farmers, miners, truckers, house cleaners, automakers, and working folks—white, brown, and Black—who picked him over us. We don't just need them to regain Congress in 2026. We need them to save our country. **N**

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The chaos and cruelty of the Trump administration reaches new lows each week.

Trump's catastrophic "Liberation Day" has wreaked havoc on the world economy and set up yet another constitutional crisis at home. Plainclothes officers continue to abduct university students off the streets. So-called "enemy aliens" are flown abroad to a mega prison against the orders of the courts. And Signalgate promises to be the first of many incompetence scandals that expose the brutal violence at the core of the American empire.

At a time when elite universities, powerful law firms, and influential media outlets are capitulating to Trump's intimidation, *The Nation* is more determined than ever before to hold the powerful to account.

In just the last month, we've published reporting on how Trump outsources his mass deportation agenda to other countries, exposed the administration's appeal to obscure laws to carry out its repressive agenda, and amplified the voices of brave student activists targeted by universities.

We also continue to tell the stories of those who fight back against Trump and Musk, whether on the streets in growing protest movements, in town halls across the country, or in critical state elections—like Wisconsin's recent state Supreme Court race—that provide a model for resisting Trumpism and prove that Musk can't buy our democracy.

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The Editors

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