

LTE Response

Re: [*Rural Californians Fear Concerns Unheard by Big-City Politicians*](#)
May 30, 2017

By: **Bob Williams**
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Tehama County Supervisor

By the numbers, California is unequivocally rural. The 35 member counties within our organization, the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), represent more than half of the state's total number of counties (58), and 55 percent of the state's total land mass. Nearly 75 percent of California's available water originates in the northern third of the state, and more than 70 percent of California's U.S. Forest Service land resides in rural counties.

Given this rural landscape, why do California's rural counties continue to struggle? The answer – an unlevel playing field. California's rural counties are often left behind, and left out. Two of the biggest examples of this unlevel playing field include access to broadband, and funding opportunities for disadvantaged communities.

The lack of broadband access in California's rural counties has led to substantial local economic setbacks, leaving California's rural counties disconnected from opportunities and advancements realized by our urban brethren. Secondly, the utilization of the California Communities Environmental Health Screening Tool (CalEnviroScreen) in identifying California's most disadvantaged communities when allocating financial resources excludes 30 of California's 58 counties and the cities within from this funding source, many of those home to some of the most socioeconomically depressed communities in the state.

Recent data highlights the widening of the rural-urban divide within our state, with California's rural counties far exceeding the state average in both unemployment and poverty. Broadband connectivity, and access to grant funding for disadvantaged communities are immediate solutions to help bridge this gap, and narrow this urban-rural divide.

The greater distances, lower population densities, and geographic diversity of California's rural counties create unique obstacles, and for these reasons, 'one-size-fits-all' policies don't work. RCRC's member counties are encouraged by the discussion at the Democratic Convention in May, and we urge current and future State leadership to consider exploring mechanisms to improve rural connectivity, and allocate funding to truly disadvantaged communities.