

*The Sense of the Census: Rural Representation at Risk*

In 1790, the first United States census was taken. This Constitutionally-mandated Act requires a census every ten years. By doing this, the Founding Fathers hoped to create equal representation in the House of Representatives and the Electoral College. In short, “one person, one vote.” However, as populations shift towards urban and suburban areas, political representation in rural areas is being threatened. Political interests increasingly favor urban areas financially as these locations become more densely populated. However, through a series of economic development programs, this issue could be solved, bringing populations back to an aging rural America, creating a much more robust, rural representation in all levels of government.

The first of these potential economic programs would be to bring high-speed internet into rural communities. With urban areas already having access, high-speed internet (also known as broadband) would open up the full potential of the internet for rural Americans. By implementing this, rural businesses could establish a larger online presence and establish a closer link to do business in urban areas. The e-commerce brought upon by the presence of this high-speed internet could help create an economic boom in rural America, fostering economic growth equivalent to \$47 billion in the US GDP. With this new economic prosperity, people will migrate back to rural America to fill in a potential 360,000+ new jobs and in return, rural areas increase their representation in the census. This will help to ensure that rural America gets a proportional amount of funds and representation after the next census.

Another program that would economically benefit rural America is the expansion in the funding of the USDA’s Rural Development Programs. These programs allow low-cost loans for rural businesses and homeowners who may not get proper funding from a traditional bank. Doing this would help businesses grow, add jobs to communities, and create an incentive for people to move back to rural areas with affordable housing loans. The USDA’s Rural Development programs also encapsulate the building of infrastructure in rural America by improving water treatment facilities and building hospitals and clinics. By doing this, more residents from urban areas might move out to rural parts of the country because the issues of affordable housing loans and healthcare would both be improved. In return, this population growth would positively increase the rural representation on the census.

With the 2020 census approaching, it is important to understand the steps that need to be taken to ensure that rural America is being fairly represented. Through economic programs such as bringing broadband internet and expanding the USDA’s Rural Development Programs, populations of urban dwellers will return to rural areas and bring with them the representation for the census. This higher rural representation will also help politicians more closely relate to their constituents as their district would be smaller. This robust representation at all levels of government would help establish funds and programs to benefit rural America.