



**PHOENIX** FOR ADVANCED  
LEGAL & ECONOMIC  
C E N T E R PUBLIC POLICY STUDIES  
www.phoenix-center.org

5335 Wisconsin Avenue, NW  
Suite 440  
Washington, D.C. 20015-0234  
Tel: +1 (202) 274-0235  
Fax: +1 (202) 318-4909  
[www.phoenix-center.org](http://www.phoenix-center.org)

## Press Release

Contact: Lawrence J. Spiwak  
Phone: +1 (202) 274-0235

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Thursday – June 13, 2019

### NEW PHOENIX CENTER ANALYSIS FINDS POPULATION LOSS IN RURAL AMERICA UNRELATED TO BROADBAND AVAILABILITY

*Population Loss in Rural America is a Long-Term and Persistent Trend that is Unlikely Driven by the Availability, Or Lack Thereof, of High-Speed Internet Service*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – With mixed success, U.S. policy has tried for centuries to populate rural America. Rural areas are facing especially challenging times in the modern economy, due in part to advances in agricultural technology and manufacturing declines. While the tendency is to look for simple explanations for the problems faced in rural America, including the lack of broadband access, a new economic analysis by Phoenix Center Chief Economist Dr. George S. Ford released today entitled *Broadband as a Source of Rural Decline: A Look at the Data* suggests the problems in rural America reach well-beyond high-speed Internet access.

In particular, Dr. Ford looks at the claim that the lack of broadband has led to a declining population in rural areas as people flee to the city for broadband access. As Dr. Ford explains, if this assertion is true, then we would expect to see a change in relative population trends during the Broadband Age between urban and rural areas. Yet, population data reveal no systematic change in county-level population trends. If anything, Dr. Ford finds that the data indicate that the population growth differential has narrowed between urban and rural areas in the Broadband Age. When comparing population trends only between rural and urban counties with above average-broadband availability, however, the growth differential is larger during the Broadband Age, suggesting factors other than broadband are driving rural population loss. Dr. Ford therefore concludes that to “lay blame on a lack of broadband for the decline in rural America is unsupported by the data, at least to the extent the data and my analysis are up to the task of answering the question posed.”

“Before a multi-billion dollar tax-subsidy scheme is implemented to save rural America, policymakers need to better understand the role broadband plays in rural population declines,” says study author Phoenix Center Chief Economist Dr. George S. Ford. “Otherwise, we risk paying for a multi-billion-dollar information superhighway to nearly nowhere.”

A full copy of PHOENIX CENTER POLICY PERSPECTIVE NO. 19-02, *Broadband as a Source of Rural Decline: A Look at the Data*, may be downloaded free from the Phoenix Center’s web page at: <http://www.phoenix-center.org/perspectives/Perspective19-02Final.pdf>.

~ more ~

*The Phoenix Center is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that studies broad public-policy issues related to governance, social and economic conditions, with a particular emphasis on the law and economics of the digital age.*