

February 13, 2010

BE COUNTED IN 2010

To be counted or not to be counted – that is the question that can result in millions of dollars for Hawaii. More than \$300 billion a year for ten years, \$3 trillion in all, is up for grabs – want some of it?

How that money is going to be distributed and spent will be determined by the results of the 23rd Census of the United States, coming to your household soon. The data collected in this year's census directly affects how federal and state funds are allocated to states and communities for transportation, education, public health, neighborhood improvements, and much more. The information provided by the Census affects funding decisions for child care centers and programs; schools, universities and community colleges; health care clinics and hospitals; roads, bridges, traffic lights, and highway improvements; infrastructure, and many other issues. That is why it is so important that each household in Hawaii takes the few minutes to fill out and mail in their Census questionnaire. This will help ensure that your community gets its fair share of government funding.

What is the census? It is a snapshot of the country, a count of everyone residing in the country on April 1, and is required by our federal constitution. I encourage everyone to participate in the census process. The information is completely confidential, and this privacy is protected by federal law for 72 years.

Timeline. Census questionnaires will be mailed or delivered to households in February and March this year. Please return your questionnaires by mail as soon as you can. People are counted where they live and sleep most of the year. Since the census is conducted in multiple places, you should not count in your household anyone who is away at college, living in a nursing home, is on active military duty, etc. Households that do not return a questionnaire by mail will be called or visited by census takers from May to July, 2010. By December 31, the Census Bureau will present the count of the population to President Obama for apportionment. By March 2011, each state will receive complete redistricting data for them to use in redrawing the lines of each legislative district to ensure that each district is roughly equal in population size.

The way we take the count is different this time. This year the Census Bureau has bid “aloha ‘oe” to the long form. Only the short form will be used, which will take just minutes to complete. The short form will ask for a count of residents, name, sex, age, date of birth, race, ethnicity, and relationship – quick and easy. More detailed demographic information will no longer be taken on the April 1 short form census once in a decade. Instead it will be gathered continually throughout the decade by sending a survey to a small portion of the population on a rotating basis. This American Community Survey provides a more dynamic snapshot that enables government planners to have current data about communities every year.

Guiding major decisions. Census data tells the government where people are and how many there are. The government used information when making important decisions that affect you. If it's important to you which school your child attends, or if you live in an area that needs more schools, then please fill out and mail in your questionnaire. The population counts are used to determine school boundaries and whether new schools need to be built. If you live in an area that needs new roads or infrastructure construction or repair, please fill out and mail in your questionnaire. The information helps the government to plan where to invest transportation funding and what priority to assign to proposed projects. If you feel your community needs more police or emergency services, needs services for youth or the elderly, could use a health care clinic, child care facility or job training center, please fill out and mail in your questionnaire. These are just a few of the many ways that the government uses the Census' demographic snapshot of America to decide where and how your tax dollars are spent.

One person, one vote. The Census affects your voice at all levels of government. Census data is used to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and to redistrict state legislatures. Our democratic form of government requires that districts are roughly equal in population size to ensure that everyone is equally represented in legislative bodies. Every ten years, each legislative district has to be redrawn according to the new data to create districts of relatively equal population size. After each state receives the new census data by April 2011, it then has the daunting task of deciding the boundaries of each elective district. No new elections can occur until those new lines have been drawn.

Tying the right "piece of earth" with the population data and organizing it for easy use and access is extremely difficult, complex and time consuming. A wide variety and quantity of good data is essential for drawing the lines: special mapping software; databases with census, demographic and election data, and others. Technologic advances will make this 2010 Census different from any other before. Google Earth was not around ten years ago for the 2000 Census, and can now be one of the pieces of information that district line drawers can use to help make mapping decisions. Sheer numbers are not the only consideration. The effect of the boundary lines on the community, on minorities, political ramifications, and other factors are also taken into consideration. Districting plans must also comply with voting laws.

Our United States Constitution mandates a count of everyone residing here to allocate Congressional seats, electoral votes, and government program funding. Our first American Census was taken in 1790 and has been carried out every decade since. The ever-evolving complexity of our citizens' needs and interests means that those in government have the statistics and other information they need to identify and understand what is happening. Our censuses have grown and adapted to provide the data they need to help them plan. With our share of the \$3 trillion at stake, I encourage you to take a few minutes to fill out the quick, easy form and mail it in as soon as possible. How much Hawaii gets of that \$300 billion per year is up to each of us.