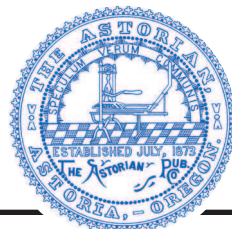


OPINION



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OUR VIEW

Keep politics out of the census

Every 10 years, as one decade transitions into the next, the U.S. government conducts a national census to count the number of people living in the country.

It's mandated by the Constitution, and since 1790 has been the best large-scale way to account for who's living where. It has also helped track demographic changes in the country, but that's not part of the constitutional provision.

And that's not to say it's perfect. Despite radical changes in technology, we still go about the census in roughly the same way as our Founding Fathers did. Households fill out a short questionnaire accounting for everyone living there. The method leaves out the usual under-represented people — homeless and transient people, or those fearful of checking in with the federal government.

But it's an important count, because it dictates how federal money is allocated and how representatives are distributed. That's why it's been mandated since our country's founding — to make sure we've got an accurate starting point for taxation and representation.

This year and next, millions of hours and billions of dollars will be spent making sure the count is as accurate as it can be. But there's an effort afoot to rig what should be a non-political undertaking.

Where past leaders have seen a tool, President Donald Trump and his administration see a weapon.

Sure, other elected officials of all



The U.S. Census Bureau is preparing to begin the 2020 census, which may contain a question about citizenship.

stripes have sought ways to skew the census results. Gerrymandering has become both an art and science as legislators redraw districts based on the numbers to secure power and diminish the ability of opponents to build support. They twist the straightforward count after it's collected.

But the move by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to add a question about citizenship to the census is an attempt to mess with the numbers before they're even counted.

It's been presented as an honest attempt to account for non-citizens in the interest of enforcing the Voting Rights Act, and a practice with a long history in the U.S.

On the second count, there's some truth. In the 1800s and early

1900s the census inquired about the "naturalization" or citizenship of respondents. In recent years, that question has instead been asked in other surveys by the Census Bureau designed to track demographics and immigration.

But on the first count, that this is merely a curious government trying to use its power of inquiry to squash potential voter fraud, we're doubtful. Especially because the data would shed no light on the Voting Rights Act.

It looks more like an attempt to limit responses from Hispanics and illegal immigrants. It surely would have that effect, regardless the intent. By the government's own estimates, as many as 6.5 million people would decline to partic-

ipate — about 2 percent of the total population.

Representation, as dictated in the Constitution, is tied to population and not citizenship. And intentionally undercounting a specific group of people is an ugly tactic.

The failure of the administration to listen to experts on the topic — the nonpolitical Census Bureau — is also concerning. Ross has attempted to place the impetus for the decision on the Department of Justice, tasked with enforcing the Voting Rights Act. But records show it was he who requested the department send a letter to the Census Bureau asking to add the citizenship question.

The debate about whether the administration can add the question is now before the Supreme Court after a judge in a U.S. District Court ruled it illegal on multiple counts — from the fact that Ross missed the deadline to adjust the census to the fact that he didn't attempt to use readily available data to address the Voting Rights Act. Skipping steps and ignoring rules are often a sign of either incompetence or malfeasance, and either way a blow to our confidence in the administration.

The Supreme Court will make its ruling. The census will be taken. And it will either be an honest attempt at a snapshot of people living in this country or a rigged count that leaves out a segment of the population.

Either way, its findings will resonate for the next decade and beyond.

Water under the bridge

Compiled by Bob Duke

From the pages of Astoria's daily newspapers



10 years ago this week — 2009

Friday afternoon's plane trip to Seattle turned into a nightmare for former Astoria Mayor Edith Henningsgaard Miller when the plane, piloted by her son, Bill Henningsgaard, had to crash-land in the Columbia River.

But the nightmare had a happy ending. They were quickly rescued and had only very minor injuries.

Henningsgaard Miller recounted the ordeal the next day. "We had just crossed over the hills in Washington, when I said, 'I didn't notice this valley before and all these houses.'"

Although she hadn't realized it, the plane's single engine had suddenly stopped.

"He said 'This is an emergency,' and I didn't say anything else," she said.

They were three-quarters of the way back to the Astoria Regional Airport in Warrenton when Bill told his mother, "We're not going to make it," and began gliding down toward the river where he put the plane down.

At least 182 residents and visitors, along with 272 students, headed for the hills Friday east of Seaside, and it was a lifesaving experience.

Despite the blast coming from six sirens heralding an emergency tsunami drill, most people went about their daily business.

50 years ago — 1969

A State Highway Department official said today traffic on the Astoria Bridge across the Columbia is running about 70 vehicles per day behind what was expected for 1969.

Tom Edwards, assistant highway engineer, said from Salem that much of the low figure should be blamed on the series of snow storms around the first of the year. Some loss has come, also, from unfavorable weather at times when sports fishing would have been active.

Chuck Miles of Cannon Beach will be Astoria's representative at San Francisco's first Crab Cooking Olympics May 19 and 20. Miles' expenses will be paid by Warrenton and Hammond fishermen and processors.

Reopening an historic chapter of the Columbia Riv-



2009 — Former Astoria Mayor Edith Henningsgaard Miller and her son, pilot Bill Henningsgaard, a retired Microsoft executive from Seattle, stand on the wing of the single-engine turboprop Epic LT aircraft that crashed into the Columbia River. A crew from Foss Maritime was able to pull alongside the aircraft and bring them aboard.

er's past, the Coast Guard will christen Cape Disappointment's 52-foot motor lifeboat Triumph II in ceremonies May 3 in Ilwaco.

The 52-footer is named for the Triumph, a wooden-hulled rescue boat of the same size lost at the Columbia River bar Jan. 12, 1961, carrying five crewmen to their deaths. The Triumph, and two other Coast Guard boats, capsized in an attempt to save two fishermen aboard the 40-foot crab fishing vessel Mermaid, in distress near Peacock Spit.

Astoria City Councilman Bill Wilson has an idea for the heavy demands continually made on the city treasury.

At a recent city budget session, he suggested a way to cut down future budgets: put The Pill in the city drinking water, to control population growth.

The budget committee took no action on the suggestion, which did not appear to be altogether serious.

The bill to keep the ocean beaches open for the public went through the House in Salem today with hardly a murmur — in sharp contrast to the emotional fight touched off two years ago.

75 years ago — 1944

Wayne L. Morse, Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate, repeated and affirmed his nationally known declarations of government by law in contrast to rule by executive fiat before a large Astoria chamber of Commerce forum luncheon today at Amato's supper club.

"It is my judgment that America now and immediately after the war is faced with the problem of solv-

ing the most critical issue which has faced here since the Revolutionary war, and that is the issue of executive government versus representative government."

Astoria today was named as one of 20 new cities which United Air Lines proposes to add to its coast-to-coast and Pacific coast airway network.

In an application filed with the civil aeronautics board at Washington, United asked that Astoria be connected on a feeder line with Pendleton and Portland on the company's mid-continent transcontinental route.

C.J. Simpson, Northwest manager of the national labor bureau, today disclosed members of fishermen's unions which the bureau represents refuse to travel to Alaskan salmon fishing grounds aboard Liberty ships "with a history of cracking open in Alaskan waters."

The Columbia River fishing industry this week opened a campaign to enlist services of women, with emphasis on service men's wives, for part-time employment in canneries to handle salmon and to work in cold storage operation, on filleting lines, packaging, wrapping and crab packing.

Emphasizing the importance to the war effort of producing as much food fish as possible, the industry set the keynote. "Fish production is limited to the volume that may be processed."

The government is taking more than 50 percent of the Columbia River salmon pack, directly for war purposes; and other government purchasing divisions are taking huge quantities of fillet and frozen fish.