

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

We live here, we matter

The good news regarding the census is that we’re starting to see census takers walking around neighborhoods, knocking on doors to locate and count residents who didn’t respond to mailings or invitations to participate online.

These short-term public employees are doing their best to make this iteration of America’s important every-10-years tally as accurate as possible. Mandated by the U.S. Constitution, being counted in the census has traditionally been viewed as a kind of civic and historical duty. For as long as civilization survives, being included in the census is like having our names carved in marble: We lived here, we mattered.

Census results determine important matters for each coming decade, from distribution of state resources and \$1.5 trillion in annual federal dollars, to where lines are drawn for legislative and congressional districts. An exact count of everyone who lives here — including undocumented immigrants — can make a huge difference in community health.

The bad news about the census is a longer story.

“COVID-19 and rising mistrust of the government on the part of hard-to-reach groups like immigrants and Latinos already had made this census challenging,” the New York Times reported last month.

Sixty-one million households didn’t submit a census form, and must be contacted in person. Further complicating matters, about a third of those hired as census takers have already quit or failed to show up. And now the Trump administration wants to end the count a month early.

This is likely to result in a historically flawed final product, adding one more disaster to the others that will forever necessitate marking 2020 with an asterisk in future record books. “This is truly, truly, hair-on-fire awful,” a census expert said.

Current census officials have



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The deadline to complete the census is approaching.

an all-round rosier view of the situation, and we must hope they’re right. It’s difficult to imagine a scenario in which the final delivery of a tally to the president by Dec. 31 is postponed, and even harder to imagine a do-over after the pandemic has ended.

Neither is totally out of the question, but would require politically complex changes in weighty matters such as reapportioning congressional and legislative seats for the 2022 election cycle.

that a sample size in the many millions is good enough. But this is no comfort to a state or political party that loses or should have gained a congressional seat if the census had been correct.

Challenges in court will litigate every decision the Census Bureau makes in coming months.

The law is clear that the census is supposed to count everyone. Leaving out undocumented immigrants appeals to some, on the basis that states with high numbers of these

residency, and that many children of today’s undocumented residents already are legal citizens. In some ways, gaining the full benefits of citizenship — and incurring a citizen’s full obligations — depends on being counted.

As any genealogist will tell you, all census results linking names, nationalities and other identifying data with specific addresses are zealously shielded for 72 years after the enumeration date. The census isn’t an underhanded ploy to locate targets for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Not until 2092 will any other agency learn from the Census Bureau that “Person X” lived at “Y address.”

Here in the Pacific Northwest, climate change and other demographic factors promise to bring continuing population growth. To obtain a fair and proportionate share of government largess to cope with this expanding population, it’s all-important that our local count is complete. We otherwise shortchange ourselves for the next decade.

No matter how suspicious anyone is of our government — and we all have our reasons — we should do ourselves the favor of being counted.

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More likely, the Census Bureau will be forced to rely more heavily on statistical models and other computational tricks to build a complete picture of the nation’s population from the large sample it will end up with. On Aug. 29, this stood at an estimated 82% of the national total.

Considering that national political polls routinely extrapolate public opinion by questioning about 1,000 individuals, some will argue

unofficial residents may unfairly gain an extra vote in Congress or the Legislature, or realize some other advantage from having more people.

If enough citizens share this concern, the right response is to change the law, not fiddle the census numbers. A counterargument can be made that a person is a person — that one way or another, unofficial status usually matures into formal

GUEST COLUMN

Time is running out on the census

As the 2020 census draws to a close, I urge each one of you reading this to respond before it’s too late.

This is the final month to be counted and to help guarantee Clatsop County receives funding for essential services that will shape the future of our community for the next 10 years.

Whether you live alone, with family, or others, I’m asking you to do your part and count everyone who lives in your home if you haven’t already. And while you’re at it, remind other family, friends and neighbors to be counted, too. Text them. Call them. Share a note on your social media.

While many people know the census is what determines how many representatives each state gets in Congress, it is also used by lawmakers in Washington, D.C., and Salem to allocate funds for programs and services that impact Clatsop County — including the roads we drive on, the schools our children attend and the hospitals and health care clinics we visit when we are sick.

An undercount in Clatsop County could mean our community loses out on important federal funds that will leave us behind as others progress into the future.

The deadline to respond is Sept. 30. But don’t wait — you can respond now online



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Clatsop County urges people to fill out the census.

at 2020census.gov, by phone at 844-330-2020 for English or 844-468-2020 for Spanish, or by mail if you received a paper questionnaire. You can respond in English, Spanish and 11 other languages online or by phone.

If you don’t respond on your own, you will be visited by a locally hired census taker to make sure you are counted. If a

census taker comes to your home, please cooperate. They have been trained on federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local health guidelines, will maintain at least a 6-foot distance and will be wearing masks and carrying other personal protective equipment to keep everyone safe.

A census taker may also call you at

home, so please answer the call.

The census asks only 10 questions about you and who lives in your home with you and will only take a few minutes to complete. And remember: Your answers are confidential and can never be shared with federal or local law enforcement agencies.

Census takers will have a valid ID badge with their photograph, a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark and an expiration date. They may also carry Census Bureau bags and equipment with the Census Bureau logo. They will never ask for Social Security numbers, banking info, citizenship status, or political affiliation.

The 2020 census is so important. If we want our voices to be heard at the local and federal levels, we all need to do our civic duty and respond. If we want to continue receiving support for critical programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, school lunches and education programs like Head Start, historic preservation and wildlife conservation grants, bridges, bike paths and other infrastructure, we should respond.

Time is running out. If you haven’t already, you are about to miss this once-in-a-decade chance to shape our future and better our community for the next 10 years.

Monica Steele is the assistant Clatsop County manager.



MONICA STEELE