

OPINION

Get Counted in the 2010 Census

We can't afford to be indifferent

BY WADE HENDERSON

On April 1, the 2010 Census—the nationwide head count—begins. It is critical for African Americans, the second largest minority in the nation—and one that has been historically undercounted—to be counted.



The once-in-a-decade census is vital to the health and well-being of African-American communities. Why?

Because the census takes a snapshot of the nation's population and with that count, determines how many seats each state gets in the House of Representatives and where

district lines are drawn within each state—not to mention the distribution of more than \$400 billion in federal funds to states and localities annually.

These federal funds provide money for schools and roads, for health care for low-income children, for veterans and senior citizens, and for public services that benefit our communities.

At a time when unemployment is at its highest since the 1980s and when the mortgage crisis has undermined African-American wealth through hundreds of thousands of home foreclosures, the flow of federal funds coming into our communities is crucial.

You only have to look at the difference in the unemployment rates

to see how distressed the African-American community is from the rise in joblessness—overall, national unemployment is 10 percent but for African Americans, it's a staggering 15.6 percent.

The once-in-a-decade census is vital to the health and well-being of African-American communities.

The situation for African-American communities is made worse because state and local governments faced with huge budget deficits are likely to cut funds for programs such as after-school programs, health services and other programs vital to our communities, families, and children.

Equally important, census information

is also used to monitor and enforce civil rights and anti-discrimination laws.

That's why African Americans can't afford to be indifferent to the census. In 2000, African Americans

were undercounted at the highest rate of any group except Latinos, costing communities hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding.

Many in the African-American community didn't participate in the census in the past because they didn't understand why the government was asking for information or they were afraid that the information would be used by credit agencies or landlords.

This fear and concern is natural, but by law, all census data is confidential. No one—not landlords, not employers, not credit agencies, not law enforcement, not even the president of the United States—has access to your personal census data.

The Census Bureau has already begun working with organizations in the African-American community to help ensure that everyone in our community understands and participates in the 2010 census.

African Americans need to an accurate count. Too much is at stake. Taking 10 minutes on April 1 to fill out a census form and mail it back is worth it.

Wade Henderson is president of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights.

Letter to the Editor

Blazers Deliver on Minority Contracts

As leaders in the north and northeast community, we have a keen interest in ensuring that Rose Quarter development offers local Portlanders—and women and minority contractors—economic opportunity as our area struggles with double-digit unemployment.

That's why we're strongly encouraged by the Trail Blazers' commitment to and record of enlisting the time and talent of local women and minority business enterprises.

Given the district's history as a thriving, vibrant center of African American and jazz culture, that's the right approach.

The Trail Blazers walk the talk. During construction of the \$267 million Rose Garden and campus, the team pledged to provide contracting opportunities for MBE and WBE firms, and in fact, exceeded the city's goals.

By the numbers: The Trail Blazers achieved a 40-percent greater minority-owned business participation and 100-percent greater women-owned business participation than the city of Portland's goals at the time. This is an impressive record of ensuring that large projects don't just benefit a handful of large firms.

Given the complexity, size and scope of JumpTown, we appreciate the Trail Blazers' experience delivering on big projects. The operation of the Rose Quarter has also benefited the north and northeast community: 29-percent of Rose Quarter

operations contracts by total expenditure are with minority-owned enterprises and 35-percent of all Rose Quarter employees are residents of north and northeast Portland.

The Trail Blazers honor their commitments to be a force for good in our community. During initial construction of the Rose Garden, the team pledged \$500,000 and the services of many of the contractors that worked on the Rose Quarter project towards the construction of the Blazers Boys & Girls Club, which opened in 1995.

The facility was the first in the nation sponsored by a professional sports team. The Urban League of Portland, Legacy Emanuel Children's Hospital, and Portland (now Oregon) Sports Authority were also beneficiaries of the Trail Blazers Rose Garden construction project.

The Trail Blazers, its team, staff and owner continue to make significant contributions to programs in Portland supporting children that have garnered national recognition and awards. Most notably, their support of the Albina Head Start program to include contributions to the building of the McCormack-Matthews Center, the restoration of all basketball courts in Portland Public high schools, the assist to the Eddie Barnett Foundation that placed AEDs in all Portland Public high schools, and their on-going

commitment to the work of programs such as Self Enhancement Inc., the Urban League of Portland, the Portland Schools Foundation, and Hands On Greater Portland.

We've met with Trail Blazer president Larry Miller and heard his vision for a revitalized Rose Quarter. We are convinced that JumpTown is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for our community.

During these conversations, Larry Miller made it clear that the project's commitment to ensuring minority construction benefits is also a personal priority. The district will serve as an inclusive, accessible gathering place for ALL Portland, built by the skill and talent of hard-working Portlanders.

Rose Quarter development holds the promise of generating thousands of jobs—including women and minority contracting opportunities—creating an important, forward-looking project for our city.

We believe local entrepreneurs will look back with pride at their work helped to forge something lasting and meaningful for North and Northeast Portland. And it's not just about construction: JumpTown will help create ongoing opportunities for minority entrepreneurs for operations, services and as tenants of the district.

The Trail Blazers have a vision for the Rose Quarter and a team with the chops to make it happen. It's a vision for a project that is of, and for,

our community. And it's a vision rooted in a firm commitment to minority and women contracting, backed by a record of exceeding goals on large, complex projects.

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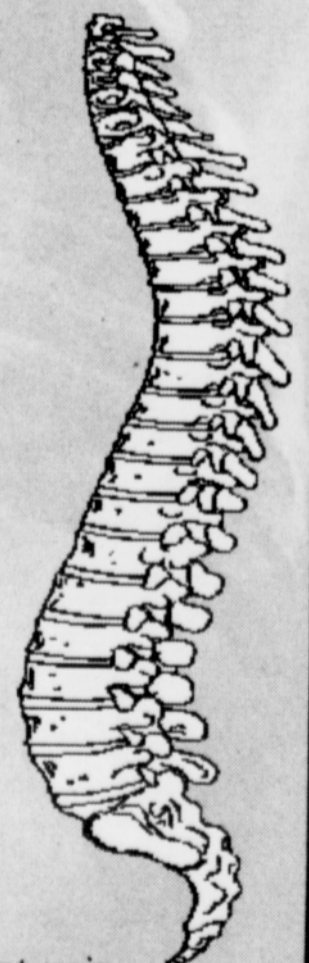
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