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Glover: Census data invaluable tool for shaping our future

By Federal Glover
Guest Columnist

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THE FOUNDATION OF our American democracy is dependent on fair and equitable representation in the halls of government. To achieve an accurate assessment of the number and location of the people living within the nation's borders, the U.S. Constitution mandates a census of the population every 10 years.

When I first was elected as supervisor for District 5 in 2000, the district was huge, covering almost a third of the county — from Bay Point westward to Bethel Island and Discovery Bay.

The census shows that Antioch is now the county's second largest city. Oakley has grown tremendously since it became a city. With 24,000 residents, Bay Point is the largest unincorporated community in Contra Costa County. Pittsburg is almost built-out, with thousands of new homes planned for the last open spaces in its city limits. The areas between the cities have disappeared. City boundaries have blurred, merged and become indistinguishable.

District 5 was reconfigured in 2001 to its present boundaries because the 2000 census showed enormous growth in Bay Point, Pittsburg, Antioch and Oakley. I lost Discovery Bay, Brentwood, Knightsen and Byron to District 3, which needed to

add more people to the district, which traditionally represented the area from Walnut Creek in the West through the San Ramon Valley.

By the time the 2010 census is complete, there could be another redrawing of the supervisorial districts as the county tries to create five areas that are roughly equal in population.

The census was also used to redraw the congressional and state legislators' districts to make sure everyone is represented.

More than 130 million households should be receiving the census questionnaires in March. It should only take about 10 minutes to answer the 10 questions.

It is extremely important that everyone takes the time to fill out the confidential questionnaire. By law, the Census Bureau cannot share an individual's census questionnaire responses with anyone, including other federal agencies and law enforcement entities.

The U.S. Census Bureau does not ask about the legal status of respondents in any of its surveys and census programs. To help ensure the nation's increasingly diverse population can answer the questionnaire accurately and completely, about 13 million bilingual Spanish/English forms will be mailed to housing units in neighborhoods identified as requiring high levels of Spanish assistance. Additionally, questionnaires in Spanish, Chinese (simplified), Korean, Vietnamese and Russian as well as language guides in 59 languages will be available on request.

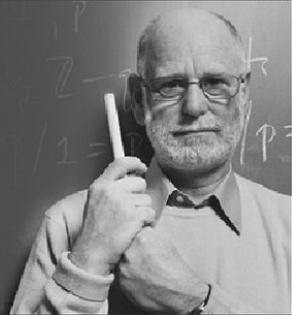
It also determines the amount of state and federal funding communities receive over the course of the decade. Census data from 2010 will directly affect

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how more than \$4 trillion is allocated to local, county, state and tribal governments over the next 10 years. In order for this funding allocation to be accomplished fairly and accurately, the goal of the decennial census is to count everybody, count them only once, and count them in the right place.

The facts gathered in the census also help shape decisions for the rest of the decade about public health, neighborhood improvements, transportation, education, senior services and much more.

For Contra Costa County, the demographics gleaned from the census help us map out long-range plans for roadways, health care delivery and the environment. It will help guide implementation and evaluation of programs like the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, the Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act.

Schools can find how many families use Spanish as their primary language at home or how many schools they will need as youngsters begin their 12-year journey through our school systems. The data will help local officials plan for new schools and programs.

Cities and counties need the census information to help governments distribute federal funds through various programs, including the Community Development Block Grant program.

From May through July, those households that have not returned the census form might receive replacement forms. In addition, census workers may visit those homes to make a count in person.

My office will serve as a questionnaire assistance center for the census. A census worker will be working out of my office on certain days and hours

in March to answer questions about the form or to provide assistance in filling it out.

In 2000, 72 percent of the people sent back their forms. There has been criticism of certain groups being undercounted, thus losing the power of representation in government and services.

People are always asking me how they can make improvements in their community and neighborhood. This is one simple way. Take 10 minutes to answer the 10 questions on the census form. I can't stress enough how important it is for everyone to return the census forms.

The information from the census helps us learn what America looks like, what we need and who we are. Those are answers we all need to know.

Contra Costa County Supervisor Federal Glover represents District 5. Reach him at dist5@bos.cccounty.us

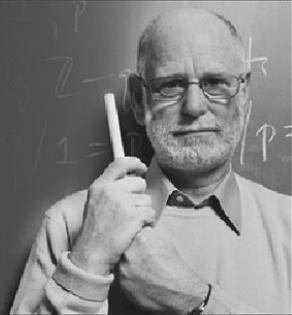
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