

The 1990 Census- It's Here!

by Kathryn Lizik

The 1990 Census, the 21st in our nation's history, will be larger and more complex than any of the previous 20. Required by the Constitution, the census has been a part of American life since the administration of President George Washington. The 21st census will take a snapshot of America's estimated 250 million people and is the single most comprehensive source of information about who we are, where we are, and how we live.

The 1990 Census will be Alaska's 13th. Alaska was not enumerated prior to 1867, the year it was purchased from Russia.

Congressional Apportionment- Mandate for a Decennial Census

Article 1, Section 2, of the United States Constitution mandates a census every ten years to apportion elected representatives among the states. The Census Bureau both conducts the census and calculates the apportionment based on the census results. Apportionment determines how many congressional representatives each state gets, and occurs after each census. Due to Alaska's small population size, our congressional representation will not change with this census.

Alaska's Election Districts to be Redrawn Following the Census

While there will be no change in Alaska's national representation following the census, local politics will be reshaped. Alaska will redefine its legislative districts in 1991 based on the new population figures from the 1990 Census. This process is called redistricting. Redistricting determines the boundaries of the congressional and legislative districts for the state. To facilitate redistricting, the Census Bureau is required by law to submit the state's population totals to Alaska's governor no later than April 1, 1991.

Alaska's Constitution outlines the state's redistricting process. It requires the establishment of a governor-appointed reapportionment board, and delineates the time lines by which the redistricting must be completed.

Census Bureau will Employ Alaskans for The Big Count

The Census Bureau opened a Census District Office in Anchorage over a year

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1990 CENSUS



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ago to begin preparing for the 1990 Census in Alaska. The office staff spent months interviewing and compiling lists of eligible people across the state who will be hired on as census team leaders, crew leaders and enumerators. This census will emphasize the use of locally selected census takers for each community. Alaska Employment Service offices have been helping by advertising the temporary positions and referring interested job seekers to the Anchorage office. There will continue to be a need for qualified workers throughout the census operation. It is anticipated that at the height of enumeration, during March and April of 1990, over 1,250 Alaskans will be working for the Census Bureau.

Two income determination waivers were enacted during 1989 to help expand the eligible pool of applicants for temporary census work. The first, based on federal legislation, will allow postal, military, and federal retirees to accept temporary census jobs without loss of retirement pay or benefits. The second is a waiver requested by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It allows recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to engage in temporary census work without having their income eligibility or benefits altered. Both will provide temporary job opportunities to individuals who might not otherwise participate due to income considerations.

First Enumeration Begins in Mid-February

While Census Day is officially April 1, 1990, Alaska will be the first state to have its people enumerated. Remote areas of Alaska, grouped into four regional "waves", will begin the operation in mid-February. Census takers, going door to door, will fill out the forms with each household. The early enumeration is necessary to avoid the difficulties caused by "breakup". To reach most of the outlying areas, small planes, boats, snowmobiles, four-wheel drive vehicles, and dog sleds will be used.

The 1990 Census of Alaska's boroughs and cities will more closely match the census operation in the remainder of

the U.S. Inhabitants of these areas will receive census questionnaires in the mail the last week of March. For Anchorage and Fairbanks City households, the Census Bureau is requesting the completed questionnaire be mailed back as close to Census Day as possible. In the other cities, census enumerators will collect the questionnaires by going door to door the first week of April. Households that do not respond will be visited by follow-up workers later in April, May and June.

Special Place Group Quarters Will Also Be Enumerated

Not all of Alaska's population resides in housing units. There is an assortment of group quarters structures which offer room and board to both institutional and noninstitutional occupants. Each of these group quarters locations have been identified through the help of local governments. Special census enumerators with Individual Census Reports (ICRs) will visit these locations and administer the census.

Both land-based military personnel and the crews of military vessels will be enumerated with the assistance of the Department of Defense and the Coast Guard. People in on-base housing units will be enumerated by mail or the personal interview procedure. For the crews of military vessels, a project officer will distribute and collect the shipboard census reports.

Offshore and land-based fish processing operations, penal institutions, timber harvesting camps, campgrounds, dormitories, harbors, hospitals, and senior citizen homes are all examples of sites which will participate in the special place enumeration.

A Special Night to Count the Nation's Homeless

Successful enumeration of Alaska's growing homeless population will be a major challenge of the census taking process. To do this, the Census Bureau has identified a one-night operation called "Shelter and Street Night Enumeration" for March 20, 1990. During this special evening of enumeration, census takers will visit homeless shelters and other places not

intended for habitation in order to get a count of Alaska's homeless population. Lists of emergency shelter and other locations where homeless persons tend to stay or congregate at night were earlier provided to the Census Bureau by the state's major cities.

Basic Form Will Ask 14 Questions

All households will answer 14 basic questions on the "short" form that can be filled out in a few minutes. The form asks about race, Hispanic origin, age, sex, marital status, whether you rent or own your residence, and the number of rooms.

About one out of six households in the larger cities and one out of two in cities with populations less than 2,500 and all Alaska Native Villages will receive a longer form. Referred to as the sample questionnaire, the longer form asks an additional 45 questions about ancestry, education, income, disability, labor force participation, type of housing, utilities. It should take 45 minutes to an hour to fill out.

Census officials spent years debating what questions to ask in this census. The final version is the result of considering government agency needs, repeating as many questions as possible to maintain consistent statistics, and limiting the number of questions so as not to burden households with excessive paperwork. The process required close scrutiny and approval by Congress of both the questionnaire's general topics and specific questions.

Some of the questions on the 1990 form are new, others questions were changed or expanded. In some cases questions that appeared in 1980 were dropped from the questionnaires. The new questions will seek information on condominium and mobile home fees, home equity loans, pension income, physical disabilities and cohabiting couples.

Your Answers are Confidential

The census questionnaire does not ask for an individual's Social Security number. The only reason names and addresses are asked is to make sure no one is missed or counted more than once.

Census Bureau employees take an oath to keep individual answers to the questionnaire confidential. An employee breaking this confidence is subject to severe penalties up to \$5,000 in fines and five years imprisonment. Furthermore, Title 13 of the U.S. Code prevents any agency — Immigration, the FBI, the IRS, the courts, the military, or welfare agencies — from getting any specific information about any person from a census form. Only census answers go into computer records. Names and addresses are not part of the computer file. In fact, personal information from the 1990 Census will be locked up for 72 years until the year 2062.

What Happens to Your Answers?

Once the Census Bureau has collected all the completed forms either by mail or census takers, the answers from the questionnaire are then combined to produce statistical totals for various geographic areas. It is these combined numbers, not personal answers, that are published and put to thousands of uses.

Not Being Counted Can Cost You Money

For a number of reasons, about 3.5% of Alaska's population was not counted in the last census. An undercount contributes to flawed decisions, a loss of revenue and lower funding for community programs. Over the years, hundreds of federal programs have been developed that disperse money and projects on the basis of census statistics. Welfare programs and highway funds, job training and mass transit projects, education and urban renewal all depend on the census for raw data. Often, those who could benefit most are those who are shortchanged when there's an undercount.

Census Bureau Conducting Programs to Battle Undercount & Promote Accuracy

To counteract the conditions which often contribute to an undercount, the Census Bureau has developed programs to promote the 1990 Census as well as review its accuracy. Much of

this improvement is being linked to a greater involvement by local communities. These programs include:

The Census Education Project — Promotes awareness by providing elementary and secondary educators with teaching materials that will expose students and their families to the importance of the census.

Complete Count Program — Local communities and officials across the state have been invited by the Census Bureau to publicize the importance of the 1990 Census and encourage cooperation with answering the census questionnaire.

The Local Review Program — Will improve the census through local government review of their preliminary housing unit counts and group quarters populations. Most of Alaska's major cities will complete their review during the fall of 1990. Rural places will conduct their local review immediately following the completion of the census in their area during February and March.

The Boundary and Annexation Survey — Collected legal boundary information from Alaska's incorporated places during 1989. Accurate census information for Alaskan cities is highly dependent on correct city and borough boundaries. Local governments were asked to review computer generated Census Bureau maps and certify that the boundaries reflected the cities' legal corporate limits.

The Census Awareness and Products Program — Employed specific strategies to reduce past undercounts of hard-to-enumerate populations. Community awareness specialists have been bringing the bureau's Alaska Native Village Liaison Program to 218 native communities scattered throughout the state.

TIGER- Integrating Census Data with Computer Mapping

The 1990 Census will be technologically advanced over 1980 due to the creation of TIGER. Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing, TIGER is a digital street map of the country. The TIGER will be the system

responsible for producing the computer generated maps for the census enumeration process. In 1980 the enumeration maps were hand drawn.

But TIGER will provide more than just enumerator maps. Since it contains data for political and statistical boundaries, features such as roads, rivers, railroads, and feature names and geographic codes, TIGER will be the backbone of countless operations. The TIGER database in conjunction with a geographic information system (GIS) will be able to produce geographic and thematic maps at any scale. It will allow the integration of census population and social characteristics data with any geographic or statistical area in the file. And it will allow the countless redistricting scenarios necessary for compiling a successful redistricting operation.

Data Products will be Released As they Become Available

Due to the discontinuation of preliminary releases coupled with improved technological processing, basic population and housing information (100% data) should be available six months earlier than it was after the 1980 Census. Sample data will follow in early 1992. Sample data will include tables on such topics as education, disability, ability to speak English, labor force status, income, value or rent of the housing unit, and other detailed characteristics.

Traditionally, census information has been released in three forms: publications, computer tapes, and microfiche. Two new forms are expected for 1990, compact laser disks and, to a lesser degree, on-line information systems. The Alaska State Data Center will be the initial recipient of all census data as it is released, and will be reformatting much of the computer tape information into easier to use reports, both in paper or on diskette.