



Participation in Census 2010 Lagging in Four-County Valley Region

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McALLEN, March 26 - The participation rate in the 2010 Census in the Rio Grande Valley is currently lagging behind the state of Texas as a whole.

In turn, the participation rate in Texas is lagging behind the national average.

In the U.S., the Census Bureau reports, 34 percent of households have filled out the forms. In Texas the rate is 27 percent. In Cameron County it is 18 percent. In Hidalgo County it is 20 percent. In Starr County it is 13 percent and in Willacy County it is 19 percent.

"I read somewhere that arrests and deportations are up 40 percent this year. Why would people believe that it is 'safe'?" said Mike Seifert, head of the Census 2010 outreach campaign mounted by Equal Voice for America's Families.

Every year the federal government distributes \$400 billion to local, state and tribal governments, based in whole or in part on Census data. The figures for the Rio Grande Valley need to improve dramatically if the region is to get its fair share of federal and state dollars.

The census is taken every ten years. According to a report of a study of Census 2000 by PriceWaterhouseCoopers for the U.S. Census Monitoring Board, Hidalgo was among seven counties in Texas and 112 across the nation with the largest funding loss for eight federal grant programs.

Frances Deviney, director of Texas KIDS COUNT and senior research associate at the Center for Public Policy Priorities, was in McAllen on Tuesday to promote the census in the Valley.

"By filling out your Census form, you are saying 'I'm here. My kids are here. And we matter'," Deviney said. "It also ensures that your community receives its share of federal tax dollars for transportation, health care, education, veterans benefits, energy programs and housing."

The amount of money the Valley receives depends on how many people are counted, Deviney pointed out. "Texas will lose over \$12,000 over the next decade for each person missed. The areas of the country and the state that have a more complete count will get more money. We must make sure we have a full count so that we can reap the full benefits."

The CPPP is working with the Children's Defense Fund-RGV on the Count Children First campaign, in partnership with the school districts of Donna, Edinburg, Hidalgo, McAllen, Mercedes, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo and Valley View. More school districts are expected to join the campaign.

"We are promoting Count Children First campaign to ensure maximum Census 2010 participation," said Luisa Saenz, director of CDF-RGV. "Our hope is that this initiative will reinforce the great effort of all grassroots, faith and community-based organizations that work in hard-to-reach areas every day and know where the need among children is greatest."

Meanwhile, the McAllen 2010 Census Complete Count Committee, headed by McAllen Police Chief Victor Rodriguez, has announced a Regional Census Rally for Thursday, April 1, from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m., at the McAllen Convention Center. April 1 is National Census Day.

The McAllen event, featuring school bands, public personalities and various activities, is expected to be broadcast live by TV and radio stations.



McAllen Police Chief Victor Rodriguez heads the McAllen Complete Census Committee.

“Census counts form some of the basis for representation in U.S. Representative, State Senator, State Representative and City Commission seats. Census counts also form some of the basis for sharing federal funds such as public education, transportation and grants,” Rodriguez said. “A complete count will assure us all the best opportunities for our communities. Please stand up, be counted and encourage others to be counted as well.”

On Saturday at 10 a.m., Univision TV will be giving over one hour to Census 2010, with explanations on how to fill out the census forms.

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