

VIEWPOINTS: Census participation ensures Tom Green County gets its share

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SAN ANGELO, Texas — Census questionnaires arrive in mailboxes beginning in March. “The future is in our hands,” says the Census Bureau to encourage residents to take time filling out the forms. The bureau has it right. The census really puts a big part of the future in the hands of the people who stand up to be counted.

To highlight the importance, the Census Bureau trumpets that more than more \$400 billion of federal funding is allocated annually to communities based on the census count. It is a strikingly big number — so big, in fact, that it is hard know what it actually means as a share to a local community like ours.

That is why we broke down federal expenditures coming to Tom Green County for the 2008 federal budget year. We wanted to see how much money came to the local community as a result of the last census count in 2000. We wanted to know what purposes are served by the funding.

Total federal expenditures flowing to Tom Green County in 2008 reached \$806 million. Not all of that money was allocated based on the census. For example, \$322 million came to the county as payments for retired and disabled individuals. Allocations for Goodfellow and other national defense purposes accounted for another \$161 million.

About \$178 million (22 percent) of total 2008 federal expenditures in Tom Green County was based on the last census count. There were 104,010 people counted for the county during the 2000 census. The result was that each one of them brought \$1,707 back to the local economy eight years later in 2008.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the majority of the federal dollars ending up in our local community are census-driven. Still, census-based funding is immensely important, especially for certain purposes.

Census-driven funding, for example, is crucially important for local education. Schools across Tom Green County received more than \$6 million in 2008 to provide school lunches, and another \$3 million was received to help improve the achievements of disadvantaged students in local school districts. Head Start programs to help preschool children succeed were supported by more than \$5 million from census-based funds, and local college students received nearly \$7 million for college grants.

All together, each of the 29,720 local students of all ages counted in the 2000 census brought \$783 back to the county in 2008 to help schools and advance education.

Social and health services are another part of community life benefiting in a big way from census-based funding. Almost \$100 million went to a variety of medical assistance programs across Tom Green County in 2008.

Other funds helped community health centers, substance abuse prevention and treatment programs, emergency food and shelter programs, child support, senior volunteers and small business development. Each of the 104,010 residents counted in the 2000 census brought \$1,250 back to the county in 2008 to provide for health and social services.

The 2000 census counted 39,503 occupied households. In 2008, each of those households yielded \$207 to help local communities with housing needs and neighborhood revitalization. Another \$155 for each person counted in the 2000 census was allocated in 2008 for water projects, highways, airports and other public infrastructure across the county.

The 2010 census is important because it determines how many representatives each of the states gets to send to Congress. It is important because it tells us how many people live in the United States, what cities and states they live in and what their basic characteristics are.

All of us care about schools, health care and the social life and environment of the community. The 2010 census is important because it puts the future in our hands. Each person can help provide for a better quality of life by being counted.

When the 2010 census questionnaire arrives in your mailbox, fill it out and return it. Stand up to be counted for your community, your family and yourself.

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DID YOU KNOW ...

- * Census data is used to identify the low-to-moderate income areas of the city to enable planning and action for neighborhood revitalization.
- * The city has received Federal Community Development Block Grant funds ranging from \$1.3 million to \$2.1 million per year over the last three years to help take action toward neighborhood revitalization and community development.
- * The city has paved more than 65,000 square yards of streets over the last three years using funds allocated on the basis of census data.
- * The city has rehabilitated more than 400 homes in the last five years using funds allocated on the basis of the census.
- * In the last five years, the city has assisted more than 460 special-needs people with housing problems using funds based on the census.
- * Over the last five years, the city helped build 12 affordable new homes for low- to moderate-income families with funding allocated on the basis of the census.

* Based on census data, the city has the ability to fund micro-business enterprises in low- to moderate-income areas.

* The census is used by the San Angelo Police Department to help evaluate and ensure adequate staffing needs for the city, to help determine the boundaries of patrol districts and to help decide police equipment needs and allocation of police resources.

BREAKING IT DOWN

The following are examples of community initiatives funded in Tom Green County in 2008 based on the 2000 census count of 104,010 residents:

EDUCATION

* Federal Pell Grant program — \$6,974,777

* National school lunch program — \$6,076,887

* Head Start — \$5,162,065

HOUSING

* Section 8 housing choice vouchers — \$3,943,015

* Section 8 housing assistance payments program — \$1,385,351

* Community development block grants — \$916,217

INFRASTRUCTURE

* Highway planning and construction — \$6,473,488

* Airport improvement program — \$3,741,606

* Federal transit formula grants — \$2,160,551

* Environmental quality incentives program — \$1,605,503

* Water and waste disposal loans and grants (Section 306C) — \$1,179,000

* Water and waste disposal system for rural communities — \$521,000

* Federal transit-capital investment grants — \$259,000

SERVICES

* Medical assistance program — \$99,747,336

* Food stamps — \$13,563,119

* State Children's Insurance Program (CHIP) — \$2,963,439

* Temporary assistance for needy families — \$2,688,384

- * Community health centers — \$2,085,047
- * Foster Grandparent Program — \$377,044
- * Senior Companion Program — \$226,188
- * Block grants-prevention and treatment of substance abuse — \$204,641



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