

Mayors counting on Census participation

PHILLIP BUFFINGTON, Contributing Writer

3/13/2020 3:08 PM

Mayors from across the Southeastern Ohio region, including Jackson Mayor Randy Evans and Wellston Mayor Charlie Hudson, gathered at the Ohio Statehouse recently with Representative Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville) and Ohio Development Services Agency Director Lydia Mihalik to discuss the upcoming 2020 **Census** and the impact the results will have on the region over the next 10 years.

The Mayors' Partnership for Progress, a coalition of mayors and city managers from Southeastern Ohio, in partnership with the Ohio Mayors Alliance, urged residents to complete the 2020 **Census** during the Tuesday, March 10 press conference, as invitations to complete the questionnaire are expected to arrive via mail in coming weeks. Governments, businesses and hospitals will use the data that is collected to make decisions that will impact the region for the next decade.

"It is imperative that every single person is counted," said Mayor Hudson in a press release. "One-and-a-half trillion dollars in federal dollars are distributed based upon the **Census**. That money goes to fund our schools, roads and supplements several other local projects."

Mayor Evans echoed those same sentiments in a phone interview with *The Telegram*.

"The real importance of the **Census** is, a lot of our funding and grants are based on population," he explained. "We need to make sure all heads are counted to maximize those sources of revenue. If the numbers are less our funding will be less."

Invitations to participate in the **Census** will begin arriving between March 12 and 20. Households can complete the **Census** online, over the phone, or by mail. The person completing the **Census** should count all people living in their household, including all children.

A complete and accurate **Census** count ensures that states and local municipalities receive their fair distribution of more than \$1.5 trillion in federal funds. This includes money for addiction treatment, Medicaid, SNAP, schools and roads. Additionally, businesses and hospital systems use the information gathered to make decisions on where to place new locations and hire new employees.

The questionnaire should take less than 10 minutes to complete. The **Census** Bureau is required to keep information confidential and cannot release any identifiable information, even to law enforcement agencies.

Overall Timeline

Counting every person living in the U.S. is a massive undertaking and efforts begin years in advance. Following is a few key dates along the way:

January 21: The U.S. **Census** Bureau started counting the population in remote Alaska. The count officially began in the rural Alaskan village of Toksook Bay.

March 12 - 20: Households will begin receiving official **Census** Bureau mail with detailed information on how to respond to the 2020 **Census** online, by phone, or by mail.

March 30 - April 1: The **Census** Bureau will count people who are experiencing homelessness over these three days. As part of this process, the **Census** Bureau counts people in shelters, at soup kitchens and mobile food vans, on the streets and at non-sheltered, outdoor locations such as tent encampments.

April 1: Census Day is observed nationwide. Once the invitation arrives, a participant should respond for their home in one of three ways: online, by phone, or by mail. When a person responds to the **Census**, they will tell the **Census** Bureau where they live as of April 1, 2020.

April: Census takers will begin visiting college students who live on campus, people living in senior centers and others who live among large groups of people. **Census** takers will also begin following up with households that have not yet responded in areas that include off-campus housing, where residents are not counted in groups.

May - July: Census takers will begin visiting homes that haven't responded to the 2020 **Census** to help make sure everyone is counted.

In Ohio, there are two kinds of incorporated municipalities – cities and villages – with population serving as the sole distinguishing factor between the two. Municipalities with fewer than 5,000 residents at the last **Census** are villages and those with more than 5,000 are cities. As of April 1, 2010, during the last official **Census**, the City of Wellston was reported as having a population of 5,663, while the City of Jackson's population was 6,397.

Should Wellston fall below the city population threshold, a number of changes would be required, chiefly to the governing body. For a village, Ohio Revised Code states the governing body is made up of a mayor, village council, village clerk and a law director.

Though other positions would not be required, Mayor Hudson has stated Wellston would have to more closely examine what would be needed to operate in such an event. As for the Wellston Police and Fire Departments, Hudson said he does not foresee any changes to those agencies should the city become a village.