



## EDITORIAL

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### Count Me In

The U.S. Census doesn't come around all that often, every 10 years in fact. It's not as rare as a Haley's Comet or a Minnesota Vikings Super Bowl appearance, yet less often than the Olympics or a presidential election. Each of these social occurrences capture the attention of us Minnesotans. We get together and await the outcome of the big event. In contrast, the Census often comes and goes without us thinking much of it.

For northern Minnesota, though, the Census is a big deal. We have a duty to be counted. An accurate count of people living in our community means better representation in the political process, a more equitable spread of financial resources for critical infrastructure and services, and better planning for the many changes facing our communities.

Minnesota is at risk of losing a seat in the U.S. Congress and electoral votes in presidential elections if we are undercounted. We now have 10 electoral votes in the electoral process, but recent projections of an undercount in Minnesota could drop us down to only seven votes. That means less attention from candidates on the issues facing our region. If we lose a congressional seat, then power becomes consolidated across even larger geographic regions of the state. It also means our local and regional issues get watered down by larger statewide issues that may not be priorities for us in northwest Minnesota. Whether we are inspired or discouraged by politics in general, these changes would mean our political representation is weakened overall.

We risk losing financial resources to support roads and bridges projects, social service programming, and tax credits that benefit us. In 2016, Minnesota brought in \$15.5 trillion from 55 federal programs. That's a big chunk of change! The top three federal programs that year were Medicaid, Federal Direct Student Loans, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Further cuts to these seniors, students, and young families would put more stress on our already strained system. Keep in mind, we already pay federal taxes into the system for these services, but if we are not counted, then we are overlooked when accessing those funds.

Lastly, we risk the ability to plan for our future. Grant writers and community planning professionals, for example, rely on high-quality data to determine the amount of funding needed for projects that benefit us all. The Census is the backbone of nearly all community-level data sources. Small cities, tribal communities, rural counties, and other small geographies already lack rich data in comparison to our metro partners. Many programs require proof that there is a need in the community for projects. If the data is weak or doesn't exist, we fall further behind in the

prioritization when compared to a community with more detailed data. Simply put, if we can't count it, it doesn't exist.

It is important that we do not sleep on this, but instead give our Census the attention it deserves. It will be here and gone before we know it, not to return until 2030. It's really easy to participate! This household survey takes no more than 10 minutes. And this year, for the first time ever, you can enter your information online. If you don't have access to the online form, you can complete the survey with a door-to-door Census worker, by phone, or through the mail. By April 1, 2020, all households will be contacted with step-by-step instructions for completing the Census. For more information about the 2020 U.S. Census, visit [www.mn.gov/admin/2020-census](http://www.mn.gov/admin/2020-census).

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