

Ohio and New York have the largest rural populations, with Michigan, Georgia, California, Indiana and Florida close behind.

Now, why is the census important to rural America?

First, the Constitution requires the federal government to conduct a census every ten years to help apportion the 435 seats of the House of Representatives among the states. So, states that have a large undercount are at risk of losing political representation in Congress.

Second, billions of dollars in federal aid to states and local governments are allocated using census data. In 2000, almost \$200 billion in federal aid will be distributed through 20 federal programs that range from agriculture to community development to education to health.

According to the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), rural communities are at risk of losing \$2,500 each year in federal and state aid for each person that is undercounted. That adds up to a significant amount of lost revenue for rural communities over a ten year period, especially when you consider the numbers.

In 1990, the census missed 5.9 percent of rural renters, compared with 4.2 percent of urban renters. The Census Bureau also estimates it missed about 1.2 percent of all rural residents, which is about three-quarters of a million people.

Let me put this into perspective. There are six states, plus the District of Columbia, that have populations below 750,000. So, the rural undercount is equivalent to misplacing Alaska, Delaware, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, or Wyoming.

Third, accurate census data is essential for local decision makers, whether economic development planners, school board members or business leaders. The more data rural communities have at their disposal, the better prepared they will be to serve their citizens in terms of municipal services and programs. It is also an essential ingredient in developing strategic plans aimed at attracting new businesses and industries.

With so much at risk, it is vital that we all work together to ensure that rural Americans are counted. This is not a partisan issue, but a rural issue. Stand up and be counted Rural America!

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. CHARLES A. GONZALEZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 15, 2000

Mr. GONZALEZ. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall Nos. 46 and 47, I was away on official business. Had I been present, I would have voted "aye" on each.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ADAM SMITH

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 15, 2000

Mr. SMITH of Washington. Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, March 9, I had to fly home for my wife's ultrasound and missed several votes.

On House vote 42 on H.R. 3846 (Minimum Wage/Question of Continued Consideration) I would have voted "yes."

On House vote 43 on H.R. 3846 (Minimum Wage/Two-Year Increase) I would have voted "yes."

On House vote 44 on H.R. 3846 (Minimum Wage/Recommit) I would have voted "yes."

On House vote 45 (Minimum Wage/Passage) I would have voted "yes."

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. LYNN N. RIVERS

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 15, 2000

Ms. RIVERS. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall vote 41—H.R. 3081, I inadvertently voted "yes." It was my intention to vote "no" on rollcall vote 41—H.R. 3081.

HOPE FOR SYRIA

HON. BILL MCCOLLUM

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 15, 2000

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, since its establishment, Israel has been fighting and striving for genuine and lasting peace with its neighbors so that it can concentrate on making the desert bloom, and, more recently, on developing one of the world's leading centers of high-tech industries. Israel is the United States' closest ally in the region, and the bulwark of furthering U.S. interests in the region. Little wonder that virtually the entire political spectrum in Washington is committed to supporting Israel's quest for peace and security.

However, despite this American commitment, the Middle East is in the midst of a crisis emanating from the latest developments in the Peace Process advocated by the Clinton Administration. The flagrant absurdity of this latest turn of events is an accurate manifestation of the Administration's overall policy. For nearly twenty years, the Syrian-dominated Lebanese Government has been demanding an Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon. Now, when the Israeli Government committed to just such a unilateral withdrawal by next July, Beirut and Damascus threaten war. "An Israeli unilateral withdrawal [from south Lebanon] will not work. It will lead to another war," President Emile Lahoud warned, echoing Hafiz al-Assad's position. Why? The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon will remove the primary Syrian point of pressure on Israel to accept the extremely disadvantageous "package deal" advocated by the Clinton Administration.

The Clinton Administration is pushing Israel and Syria to reach a peace agreement by next May. Both countries are under tremendous pressure to sign before the U.S. elections. The principles of the Israeli-Syrian agreement the Administration is pushing are: (1) a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights and south Lebanon; (2) enduring and now legitimized Syrian occupation of Lebanon; (3) a U.S.-dominated international force in south Lebanon and the Golan Heights; and (4) a financial inducement package to both Israel and Syria that, by conservative estimates, will ex-

ceed \$100 billion to be dispensed over a few years.

In its zeal to bring about this package deal, the Clinton Administration seems unperturbed by the widespread opposition in Israel to any withdrawal from the strategically crucial Golan Heights—particularly the kind of a total and speedy withdrawal the U.S. is trying to bring about. Moreover, the Administration ignores recent polls indicating that about two-thirds of the American public are against U.S. support for Syria and any form of deployment of troops in the Golan or Lebanon. Nor does the Clinton Administration take into consideration the significance of the pre-conditions introduced by Syria—a demand for an advance Israeli commitment to a full withdrawal with U.S. guarantees. This demand is intentionally phrased so as to bring about stalling of the peace process because, as Damascus knows well, Jerusalem cannot comply with the letter of the demand (even if Jerusalem is ready to commit to such a withdrawal) because Israeli law requires a referendum on any withdrawal from the Golan.

Most puzzling, however, is the White House's haste. The question it raises has nothing to do with the essence of the Israeli-Syrian "package deal". The Administration's sense of urgency does not make sense in the context of the internal dynamics in Syria.

Syria is in a major crisis. Hafiz al-Assad's health is in a bad shape. He is desperate to ensure that his son Bashar succeeds him and for the U.S. to provide for both averting the collapse of the Syrian economy and the payoffs to the Syrian elite Bashar must make in order not to be toppled. The U.S. is also expected to replace the virtually free oil Syria now gets from Iran. By careful analysis, these financial requirements amount to \$35–50 billion a year. Hafiz al-Assad is willing to "make peace" in order to ensure this U.S. financial support. He also expects the U.S. to legitimize the Syrian occupation of Lebanon which will also clear the Syrian drug and counterfeit trade as well as the income they provide for the Syrian ruling elite.

However, the Syrian ruling establishment, which is predominantly Allawite (a Shiite people that is a minority in predominantly Sunni Syria), is afraid of Bashar. He is young, inexperienced and weak. The Syrian elite knows that once Hafiz al-Assad dies, the Syrian Islamists and Iran may well rise up, overthrow and slaughter the Allawite elite, and establish a Sunni Islamist government in Damascus. If so, Iran and an Islamist Syria will then export Islamist subversion and instability to all other Arab countries, including such U.S. allies as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. Islamist terrorism by such organizations as the HizbAllah, HAMAS and Islamic Jihad, all of whom are already sponsored by Syria and Iran, would also escalate. The only way to prevent the rise of an Iran-dominated Islamist regime in Damascus is by securing a strong Allawite-dominated regime—something that Bashar is incapable of achieving despite all of his father's desperate grooming. The ongoing purges in Syria and Lebanon, as well as the sudden change of the Syrian Government, only highlighted Bashar's weakness and insecurity, as well as his father's trepidations.

The Syrian elite is fully aware of the Islamist threat. Indeed, there is a major segment within the Syrian Allawite elite led by Dr. Rifat al-Assad (Hafiz al-Assad's estranged brother) that is very pragmatic in addressing the forthcoming crisis. They believe that the only