

## ANOTHER VIEW

## *A robust census benefits community, gives piece of mind*



**Laura Eastes Akers**

**N**o matter who you are or what your politics might be, it's likely that you've been frustrated with the health care system and its rising costs. Or perhaps irritated with crumbling highway infrastructure and spending cuts to public education.

What if there was something you could do about it? Something that would take only about 10 to 15 minutes to do and could mean Oklahoma would have more federal funds for hospitals, roads, schools, public works, and other vital programs, including the social safety net. Would you do it?

The opportunity to help our community get its fair share of more than \$675 billion in federal funds is now. Oklahoma households have received their U.S. Census questionnaires or invitations to fill out the 2020 Census online. The goal of the 2020 Census is to count everyone who lives in the United States as of April 1, 2020, which is known as Census Day. The information provided by the households who complete the nine questions informs how billions of taxpayer dollars will be allocated by federal, state, and local lawmakers for the next 10 years.

The census asks people where they live, including how many people – adults and children – live or stay in each home, and the sex, age and race of each person. It sounds easy enough, but the reality is that Oklahoma faces

significant challenges in achieving a complete and accurate count. Ten years ago, in Carter County, the self-response rate was 72.6 percent, according to The Ardmoreite. Children under age five and families living in poverty were believed to be the largest groups undercounted in Carter County in 2010.

Not everyone will complete the questionnaire. For some, their reasons may be related to their distrust in government or concerns of data confidentiality and privacy. Foreign-born residents may hold immigration-related fears despite the dropped citizenship question. Others wouldn't give the questionnaire a second look and toss it in the trash.

The census really does matter. It affects our lives and community in ways that many of us may not recognize – Medicaid and Medicare funding, the Federal Pell Grant program, highway planning and construction, food stamps, Title I school grants, and Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, just to name a few.

The federal government bases a large number of its spending decisions on census data. Let's make sure our federal leaders have the right numbers to work with and invest it wisely in Oklahoma. It's a win-win situation as the community benefits and our own frustrations are eased.

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