

Metro Atlanta's Diversity Complicates Census Count

By Khalil Abdullah
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Clarkston, GA - Inside the Clarkston Community Center, a 20-minute drive from downtown Atlanta, Mayor Ted Terry talked about canvassing for votes in that neighborhood five years ago. A woman from Bhutan, South Asia, he told his audience, had invited him into her apartment for a cup of sweet tea and cookies, apparently to practice the little English she knew. It was small talk. Her mother, draped in a sari, joined them. She spoke no English, but nodded politely.

Some pundits deemed Terry's European ancestry a handicap in his eventual mayoral victory. His claim that Clarkston, a small city of about 13,000, is "the most ethnically diverse square mile in America," is no idle boast. According to census data, more than 50 languages are spoken there, likely because of the city's willingness to serve as a refugee resettlement community since the 1990s.

Terry recalled his good fortune the day he canvassed, not so much for the cookies and tea that sated his sweet tooth, but for his host's 15-year-old son, who returned during the visit. "He was dressed like Justin Bieber — tight jeans, baseball cap," Terry said. More important, his English was excellent, he was able to convey the issues at stake to his mother and grandmother — in their language — and he linked his high school friends to Terry's Facebook page.

The import of encountering a multigenerational immigrant or refugee family with a member fluent in English — and at ease with technology — wasn't lost on Terry's audience, who had been co-convened by the Leadership Conference Education Fund and Ethnic Media Services.

This meeting's objective, said EMS Executive Director Sandy Close, was "to forge a sense of excitement and common purpose among the influencers, media, elected officials and, above all, the frontline organizers crucial to getting as complete a count as possible for the 2020 census."

Fair Count, an organization taking dead aim at increasing census participation in Georgia, was recently launched by Stacey Abrams, who narrowly lost her bid in the state's gubernatorial race. Her sister, Fair Count Program Director Dr. Jeanine Abrams McLean, said that 86 of Georgia's 159 counties have been designated as hard-to-count census tracts. Also, McLean reported, roughly 30% of the state's population didn't participate in the last census, and in some Georgia areas "20% of the population has no or limited access to the Internet."

The latter is of serious concern: Census 2020 will be the first to introduce Internet response as a critical method of enumeration in a state that has seen a significant population in-



crease.

Erik Woodworth, a senior planner with the Atlanta Regional Commission, told attendees that Atlanta, trailing only Dallas, Houston and New York, is fourth among the top 10 U.S. metro areas experiencing the largest population gain since the 2010 census. "We've added almost 600,000 people to the Atlanta metro region," he said.

Clarkston's DeKalb County sits east of and adjacent to Atlanta's Fulton County. Combining DeKalb's demographics with neighboring Gwinnett shows a pronounced presence of foreign-born residents and a decrease in those whose primary language is English. As reported by the Census Bureau, "by 2016, more than two-thirds of the foreign-born resided in the South or West." That geographic shift, reflected in the DeKalb County region, portends a possible repeat of Georgia's census undercount in 2010.

Even with the Census Bureau's multiple language-assistance initiatives, the concept of the census is unfamiliar to some communities and its benefits seem far removed. For others, concerns

about privacy issues might impede census responses, particularly in households where immigration status may be in flux among occupants.

"Why should I participate in the census, as a foreigner, as an immigrant, or as a refugee?" That's the feedback Doris Mukangu from the Amani Women Center in Clarkston said she expects to encounter among the primarily African refugee population her organization serves. Restricted Internet access and lack of computer skills, added Mukangu, are hurdles to achieving high response rates. Another is illiteracy: "You give me the form and I can't read it."

To these and other challenges, Kevin Sinha, of Civic Georgia, insisted that organizations work together to "fill in the gaps" for better coverage and to be persistent about going back to neighborhoods and communities that may have avoided or declined discussions about the census.

"Go back again," Sinha said, urging attendees not take an initial reluctance to discuss census issues as final.

The two elected state officials at the meet-

ing, Rep. Carolyn Hugley and Rep. Brenda Lopez, cited the high stakes for their constituents' future. Hugley, a 27-year veteran of the legislature, also serves as board chair for Fair Count. She said she learned from her mother, a school teacher, that it's important to tell people what they need to remember.

"There are three R's and two U's," Hugley said of the census: research, resources, representation, underfunded and underrepresented. Research yields the census data essential for planning school expansions, roads, and other infrastructure efforts. Resources that support various federal programs, like Section 8 housing or supplemental food programs, are derived from census data. Representation that enables constituencies to elect officials who reflect their aims and aspirations relies on census data for accuracy and fairness. In order to reap benefits, Hugley stressed, "you have to be counted. If you are undercounted, you will be underfunded and underrepresented."

Lopez concurred, and emphasized how participating in the census affects federal funding for school systems and social services — things that touch people's daily lives and particularly their children's quality of life.

Indeed, data show that, up to the age of four, Hispanic children lead the undercount at 8%. That rate is higher than even the historically undercounted African American child population, at 6%. White children have the lowest undercount at 3%. Children invisible to the census may not bring dollars to their communities, but they still have needs that cost money, or, as Hugley observed, "services still have to be provided."

The enthusiasm generated by the event was palpable, despite the session concluding with a discussion of whether a question on citizenship status will be included on the census form. On a request from the Trump administration for an expedited decision, the Supreme Court heard oral arguments on this issue in April. A ruling is expected in time for census forms to be printed July 1.

Whether the question is included or not, Rep. Lopez said the complete count work needs to continue. She encouraged the media to be fully engaged with what Sonum Nerurkar, Get Out the Count manager for the Leadership Conference Education Fund, calls "one of the most pressing civil rights issues in our country."

"If we don't get the census right," Nerurkar said, "we will see these impacts over the next 10 years. ... We want to make sure our communities are seen and heard."

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Mayor Ted Terry
Rep. Carolyn Hugley Bottom of Form



圖片新聞

2020 Census 已經開始全面進行, 5月11日上午, 由 The International Community Council (ICC) 組織, 在黃唯律師樓舉辦 2020 Census 講座及提問與回答有關人口普查的有關規定和注意事項。

美國人口普查, 聯邦政府用 4000 億美金的經費要分配到 50 個州, 這充分說明人口普查的重要性。聯邦政府的經費是來自每個人的賦稅所得, 得知國家有多少人口與社區利益緊緊聯繫在一起。聯邦經費到了州政府, 還要分配到縣政府, 市政府。公園、社區中心、圖書館、老人中心、學生課後服務計

劃、非牟利組織的免費服務等與民衆生活息息相關的項目, 都與人口有關。

ICC.WIN 主席 Kenneth J Kovach 主持了會議, 人口普查負責人 Stephen Shope 做了專題演講, 他表示: 美國人口普查歷史也是美國民主進程的寫照, 我們到社區宣傳時都會強調, 參加人口普查是憲法賦予每個在美國居住的居民 (不一定是公民, 只要在美國居住都算) 的權利和義務, 確保每個人被統計, 才能準確反映美國的人口現狀, 是一件利國利民利己的事情, 人口普查關係到美國各行各業的發展。