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2010 Census: Nebraska Population More Concentrated, Minorities Drive Growth

Omaha – The first local results from the 2010 Census show Nebraska’s population continues its decades long trend of becoming more concentrated in its most populous counties. Since 2000, Nebraska’s largest three counties of Douglas, Lancaster, and Sarpy have grown by nearly 125,000 residents while the rest of the state lost nearly 10,000 persons.

The state’s “big 3” counties were each among the state’s fastest growing, and now comprise an estimated 52.6 percent of the state’s population, after having 48.9 percent in 2000. The nearly four percentage point increase was the largest change in any decade since the 1960s. This population shift will redistribute the state’s unicameral seats in favor of urban areas after redistricting occurs in 2011.

Population gains were greatest among minority population groups. The Hispanic or Latino population increased nearly 73,000 or 77%, non-Hispanic Blacks rose by about 13,500 or 20%, while non-Hispanic Asians and non-Hispanic persons having 2 or more racial backgrounds both increased by more than 10,000 or about 50%. Conversely, the White and non-Hispanic (majority) population witnessed minimal gains of just more than 5,000 persons or 0.4 percent.

While the state’s growth was enough to keep all three of its current seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, the boundaries of the congressional districts will change, possibly a great deal. The 2010 Census showed the 3rd Congressional District comprising the western part of the state to have lost about 9,000 persons since 2000 while Douglas and the eastern part of Sarpy County in the 2nd District has gained about 68,500 residents. As such, the 3rd District will need to be given additional territory and population while the 2nd District will have to have its current boundaries reduced to achieve districts of equal population size after redistricting, the primary reason for the Census, is completed. The 1st District containing Lancaster County and most of northeast Nebraska increased by about 55,000 persons.

Also in the top five fastest growing counties was Johnson in southeast Nebraska, where a correctional facility opened early in the decade, and Hall County, the home Nebraska's fourth largest city of Grand Island. Hall County joined 11 other counties in posting their highest ever population counts (Adams, Buffalo, Cass, Dakota, Dodge, Douglas, Lancaster, Platte, Sarpy, Seward, and Washington).

The eight-county Omaha metro area (Cass, Douglas, Sarpy, Saunders, and Washington counties in Nebraska and Harrison, Mills, and Pottawattamie in Iowa) now has 865,350 persons. The Lincoln metro area consisting of Lancaster and Seward counties reached the 300,000 person level (302,157). The city of Bellevue now has more than 50,000 people (50,137) but the city of Grand Island fell just short of that mark at 48,520.

Other notable items from today's release include:

- Nebraska's fastest growing communities are near Lincoln and Omaha, with the exception of Terrytown in Scotts Bluff County, which completed a large land annexation. Gretna gained 89% over the decade, while Waterloo (85%), Bennington (56%) and Hickman (49%) round out the top 5 fastest growing incorporated places that had at least 50 people.
- Nebraska's 49 Unicameral Districts range in size from 31,106 (District 43, Senator Deb Fischer) to 68,359 (District 39, Senator Beau McCoy). The average district size to be targeted in redistricting is 37,272. Over the decade, about 60 percent of the Unicameral districts gained population (29 of 49).
- During the 2000s decade, 24 of Nebraska's 93 counties gained population, down from 40 in the 1990s but more than the 10 that increased in population during the "farm crisis" decade of the 1980s.
- A quarter of Nebraska's counties (23 of 93) lost 10% or more of their population over the 2000s decade, compared to only 12 doing so in the 1990s. Losses were greatest in Blaine, Grant, Keya Paha and Banner counties, which each lost more than 15% of their population in the decade.
- More than 200 Nebraska communities lost 10% or more of their population during the 2000s, after only 84 had done so in the 1990s. Only 27 percent of Nebraska communities gained population in the 2000s decade, half as many that did in the 1990s when 55 percent of the state's communities grew.

- The 2010 count in Hallam, Nebraska was 213 persons, down 23 percent from 276 in 2000. This community south of Lincoln sustained major damage from a tornado that passed through the town in the middle of the decade.
- About two-thirds of Nebraska's growth is attributable to increases in the Hispanic population while non-Hispanic Whites accounted for a mere 5 percent. In the 1990s the distribution was more even among racial and ethnic groups, with Hispanics accounting for 43 percent and White non-Hispanics 26 percent of the state's overall population increase.
- Between 2000 and 2010, in 80 percent of Nebraska counties (74 of 93) the minority population increased while the White, non Hispanic (majority) population decreased. In only 11 counties did both the majority and minority populations grow, compared to 23 counties having this occur in the 1990s.

The Center for Public Affairs Research is an analytical community outreach unit of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service at the University of Nebraska Omaha. The Center leads the Nebraska State Data Center, compiling and disseminating various data for Nebraska and its communities that add to policy-making discussions.

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