

by the Constitution

and the Immigration and Naturalization Service by federal law. You are only a number, never a name, when the data is compiled.

A census taker takes an oath and is sworn for life to protect your data. Anyone who violates the oath may be guilty of a crime, with penalties of up to \$2.5 million in fines or a prison term of up to five years.

The information from the census is used only to produce statistics, and that information, officials say, is used for you and not against you.

When people don't take the census seriously, they are cutting themselves out of federal dollars that rightfully should come back to their area.

Twenty-three northwest Kansas counties show a population loss of anywhere from 14 percent to 70 percent since the counties

reached their peak population around 1930, mostly in the late 19th century. An interesting statistic from census figures is that in 1930, it took Cheyenne, Rawlins, Sherman and half of Thomas County to equal the population of Johnson County. In 2005, it took all 63 counties west of Salina, plus the two northeastern-most Kansas counties to equal the population of the booming, wealthy suburban county.

With similar growth in other urban counties, the state Legislature will be far less rural after this census. Since federal dollars are distributed according to population, the northwest counties need as accurate a report as is humanly possible if we're to be represented at all, or if we get any federal money to help with projects we really need.

By federal law, the census figures must be in the hands of the President by Dec. 31.

on slide since Depression

of Kansas with support from Entrepreneurship Works for Kansas. The estimates in the profile were produced by Wichita State University in 2008.

Counties included in this analysis are Cheyenne, Decatur, Gove, Greeley, Logan, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Sherman, Thomas and Wallace. The figures from 1960 to 2000 are from the U.S. Census Bureau, which is working on the numbers for the 2010 census to be released in December.

The total population for the 11 counties in 1960 was 54,406. By 2000, that had dropped to 41,706. The figure is projected to be 35,913 in the 2010 census and to drop to 28,401 by 2025. That is a drop of 52 percent over the 65 years.

Northwest Kansas is part of the High Plains region that stretches from Nebraska south through the Oklahoma Panhandle and west Texas and part of the larger Great Plains that stretches from Canada to Mexico.

A Census Bureau study of population on the Great Plains from 1950 to 2007 shows an increase in population from 4.9 million in 1950 to 9.9 million in 2007. However the report explains that the largest areas of growth have been along the western edge of the region in Colorado and in Texas.

The Great Plains stretches across part of 10 states, including Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming. The region has 376 counties covering about 18 percent of the U.S. land area.

The report said in 2007, most counties (261 of 376) in the region had a population of fewer than 10,000. Only 34 counties in the region had more than 50,000 residents. Of 22 counties with population greater than 100,000, 21 were in Colorado or Texas.

The Great Plains' share of the 10 states' total population fell from 28 percent in 1950 to 24 percent in 2007.

Norton, Sherman and Thomas counties have done better in the general decline but still will have lost nearly a third of their population from 1960 to 2010. Norton County

had 8,035 people in 1950 and is projected to have 5,345 in the 2010 census. Sherman had 6,682 in 1950 and is projected to have 5,519 in 2010. Thomas has fared the best. It had 7,358 in 1950 and is projected to have 7,178 in 2010, just 2.5 percent.

Both Sherman and Thomas had population growth spurts in 1970 and 1980, but had started to fall again by 1990. Sherman, Thomas and Norton counties have an advantage because Colby and Goodland have two-year colleges and Norton has a state prison. Colby and Goodland are busy stops on I-70, and are considered regional shopping centers, drawing people from the surrounding towns.

The city of Norton has shown a drop of 13.4 percent from 2000 to 2009, based on estimated population figures, from 3,012 in 2000 to 2,657 last year. Goodland dropped 15.7 percent, going from 4,978 in 2000 to 4,276 in 2009. Colby has dropped 13.5 percent, going from 5,450 in 2000 to 4,834 in 2009.

Smaller towns in the region such as St. Francis, Oberlin, Quinter, Hoxie, Oakley, Atwood, Tribune and Sharon Springs have lost an average of 14.8 percent from 2000 to 2009.

An indication of how the U.S. Census figures are going to reflect further drops in population can be found in the lower return rates for most counties and the cities in the 11 county region. Nationally, 72 percent were returned and in Kansas the average was 75 percent.

"People moving out of the rural areas has shifted commerce from a traditional foundation in agriculture," reported an economic discussion of the Great Plains in the New World Encyclopedia. "From 1989 to 1999, earnings ... became concentrated in areas such as services, tourism, light manufacturing, construction, finance, insurance and technology. The national average wage and salary disbursement is \$32,702, whereas in Plains states, these figures range from \$23,178 to \$27,411, in some cases nearly \$10,000 less than the rest of the country. Eight of the 10 poorest counties in the United States are in the Great Plains (five in South Dakota, two in Texas and one in North Dakota)."

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