

The census counts

By: DAVID LEVINSKY Burlington County Times

Households across the country will be receiving a big white envelope containing a questionnaire from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Think twice before tossing the envelope and form. Do 0 T26J9 0 0 9 54 8.d fe A .0034 -hV34 st youh

The results must be delivered to the White House by Dec. 31 and will be presented to Congress by March. Congressional redistricting will begin shortly after that presentation.

In New Jersey, a bipartisan, 12-member commission is appointed by leaders in the Legislature to redraw the congressional districts so that they have mostly equal numbers.

Traditionally, the commission has tried to redraw districts in a manner that keeps them safe for incumbents, but the loss of a congressional seat would likely complicate the task.

In the event that occurs, Ingrid Reed, a political science professor at Rutgers University, said both parties would strive to place incumbents from rival districts in the same district, forcing a runoff for the seat in 2012.

"We're all playing a big guessing game where that might occur," Reed said.

Shulman said several redistricting scenarios have been kicked around by political pundits and government watchdog groups, with many focusing on the rapidly growing areas of Ocean and Monmouth counties.

"The 3rd and 4th districts could look very different," she said.

Both include parts of Ocean County as well as portions of Burlington.

Brown said he was nearly certain that if a seat is lost, it would occur in North Jersey.

"The population is shifting south. I think the chances are slim to none that a seat would be lost here," he said.

In addition to the political and financial ramifications, officials said the census count provides useful demographic information about the people living in their communities.

"That information helps us better serve the needs of our communities," Brown said.

Mark Remsa, Burlington County's director of economic development and regional planning, predicted the census would show the county's population has increased and become more diverse over the last decade.

The county's population after the 2000 census was 423,394, but estimates since then suggest the number is now closer to 450,000.

Remsa said he's most interested in seeing where growth is occurring, particularly along the Route 130 corridor.

"We're hoping to see some favorable growth from the river towns," he said.

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March 07, 2010