

The Changing Face of America

Americans, it seems, still have a love affair with the West. Texas and Wyoming were the big winners in the Census Bureau's annual population estimates, which were released recently.

In the year ending July 1, Texas added more people than any other state, and Wyoming had the highest growth rate in the nation. The population of the United States has grown more than 9% to 307,006,550 since the 2000 census. The population grew 0.86% since last year's estimates. Just three states shrank during the year. Michigan's population fell by 0.33%, Maine dropped 0.11%, and Rhode Island lost 0.03%.

The report is a kind of sneak preview of the next big 10-year census, which will be released in December 2010. The 10-year census determines congressional representation and federal aid, among other things.

"The census counts will not only determine how many U.S. House seats each state will have but will also be used as the benchmark for future population estimates," said Census Bureau Director Robert Groves.

In Nevada, for example, the population has risen 32.27% since the 2000 Census, more than any other state in the past decade. Nevada currently has three seats in the House and will almost certainly pick up another as a result of its population growth. On the other hand, large states that are growing slowly such as Ohio (1.67%), Pennsylvania (2.64%), New York (2.98%) and Michigan (3.13%) could lose at least one seat each.

The future of the so-called Sand States, California, Arizona, Nevada and Florida, are still in question, though. The rapid rise of many of these states through the

early part of the decade has been curtailed by the housing crisis.

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In Florida, which averaged about 2% a year in population growth from 2001 through 2005, residential numbers inched up only 0.62% during the 12 months ending July 1. In the previous 12 months, the state recorded only a 0.71% gain.

A similar dynamic played out in Nevada. Its average population increase was 3.6% per year in the five years through 2005, but it grew only 1% this time. And the growth was due to the birth rate, not people actually moving in. Both Nevada and Florida actually had more people leave the states than arrive. Many communities in these bubble states now have long lists of homes for sale.

Some of the once-booming cities in the Central Valley of California, such as Stockton, Modesto, Fresno, Merced, El Centro and Visalia, are now plagued by job losses. Seven out of the 10 metro areas with the highest unemployment rates are in California.

Other Sun Belt states have fared much better. Texas, for example, never went through the boom-and-bust housing cycle that devastated the Sand States. Home prices remained affordable, and the state's unemployment rate was 8% in October, a full two percentage points below the national average.

So, it's no surprise that Texas added more than 3.9 million residents during the 2000's. Its population also

grew by the greatest number of people (478,000) during the 12 months ending July 1. California was second with 381,000 followed by North Carolina with 134,000.

Wyoming boasted the fastest growth rate for the 12-month period: 2.12% to a total of 544,270. The Cowboy State was followed by Utah (2.1%), Texas (1.97%) and Colorado (1.81%).

In addition, the estimated time when whites will no longer make up the majority of Americans has been pushed back eight years, to 2050 because the recession and stricter immigration policies have slowed the flow of foreigners into the U.S. The Census Bureau figures update last year's prediction that white children would become a minority in 2023 and the overall white population would follow in 2042. The earlier estimate did not take into account a drop in the number of people moving into the U.S. because of the economic crisis and the immigration policies imposed after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks.

The total population should climb to 399 million by 2050, under the new projection, with whites making up 49.9 percent of the population. Blacks will make up 12.2 percent, virtually unchanged from today. Hispanics, currently 15 percent of the population, will rise to 28 percent in 2050. Asians are expected to increase from 4.4 percent of the population to 6 percent... Sources: *New York Times* and *The Associated Press*

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432-683-0081

suzanne@hnbmortgage.com