

Entering its 23rd decade, the U.S. Census is the longest-running national census in the world. Every ten years, as long as we have been a nation under the Constitution, the United States has taken a census of everyone who lives here. The Founding Fathers ordered regular census-taking because they understood that, in order to govern ourselves fairly, we have to know how many people live here, and where.

Census numbers don't just determine how many representatives states have in Washington; they determine the amount of federal money states receive to support the roads we drive on, the schools our children learn in, and the police and fire departments that protect our homes. Representation and federal dollars are both based on population—so if we want our communities to get their fair share, we need to make sure that there is a fair and accurate count.

Unfortunately, some groups have set out to deceive Americans by disguising their own private mailings as Census documents. This month, some Americans have received envelopes marked 'Census' and 'official document,' when the papers inside are nothing of the kind—and sometimes even political fundraising appeals. Groups that send out such mailings are taking advantage of the Census to unfairly promote their own interests. And even worse, they are interfering with a fair and accurate Census by possibly depressing the response.

To stop that kind of cynical manipulation, I am glad Congress has passed the Prevent Deceptive Census Look Alike Mailings Act. It would require any mailing with an envelope marked 'Census' to clearly indicate the sender, reducing the possibility of deception; it would also trigger an existing legal requirement that the mailing include a disclaimer stating that it is not affiliated with the U.S. Census. This bill won't prevent any organization from using the word

'Census'—but it will stop private organizations from disguising themselves as the federal government. It is an important way to ensure an unbiased count of all Americans, and I am pleased that the House supported its passage.

Every community in America deserves its fair share for all of those things, and more. And figuring out the fair share depends on the absolute number of people who use such services. Washington doesn't want to take those services away from any community—but if you sit out the census, you'll be taking them away from yourself.

To ensure that you and your family are counted in the 2010 Census, please fill out your forms today. Just 10 questions, 10 minutes – and mail it back. April 1 is National Census Day and a good point of reference for sending back your completed forms. Your answers are confidential, and your participation is vital. Learn more at 2010census.gov