

San Fernando Valley Business Journal

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Census Bureau Proposal Seems Senseless

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San Fernando Valley Business Journal Staff

Once again, the Valley is being short-changed.

But this time, it's not the Over-the-Hill Gang in City Hall; it's some bureaucrats in our nation's Capital. Mr. Kincannon giveth ... and Mr. Kincannon taketh away.

It seems that Charles Kincannon, director of the U.S. Census Bureau, and his numbers-crunching minions have threatened to take away the Valley's separate census designation, something that VICA, the Economic Alliance and others had been fighting to get for half a decade. The designation was finally granted just two years ago.

Normally, census figures, statistics and reports are not high up on my list of priorities. In fact, they're just about at the bottom. My eyes tend to glaze over at columns of numbers, charts and graphs. But any potential slight to Our Valley's individuality raises my hackles (wherever they are).

Recently, the Census Bureau floated a proposal to rescind the nationwide designation that established us as a distinct demographic area. It's all kind of technical, but important enough to try to understand.

There's a whole section in the Census Bureau's categories, created fifty years ago, called Census County Divisions (CCDs), the statistical identification under which Our Valley is designated as a specific place. Two years ago, they let us in (guess we weren't a specific place until then.)

But Mr. Kincannon et al are saying those categories aren't used much, based on visits to their website, so they're thinking of doing away with them.

Of course, Our Valley would be only the sixth-largest city in the nation were it not for the hardball tactics of Mayor Jimmy, located in the country's most important state (nothing personal, Idaho), so why should statistical information about us be important?

It's simple. A quick review of the recently published San Fernando Valley Economic Research Center's report shows that the Valley is clearly a different demographic from the rest of the city: more diversity, less unemployment (or, if you want to put it in the positive, more employment), higher per capita income, etc.

Data is not just a character on Star Trek; it's the distillation of who – and what – we are, and a gauge of what we can become.

Now, don't you think our realtors and others who are seeking to bring residents and businesses here find that a compelling picture of a region is helpful to them? Don't you think those considering relocating their businesses here care about our colleges and university and our well-educated workforce?

Don't you think not-for-profits across the Valley who are applying for government aid to assist their community-benefiting programs have a better chance of obtaining funding if they can present a clearer picture of the area they serve?

Don't you think we stand a better chance of getting our fair share if we define ourselves as what we are – part of the city – yet distinct from it?

Don't you think marketers could do a better job of reaching their clients and customers if they have more information about them?

It's not just a numbers game, Mr. Kincannon.

As one elected official put it in his letter to the head of the Census Bureau: "The San Fernando Valley is a unique area, facing a different set of challenges, and requiring a different set of solutions than the rest of the City of Los Angeles."

Somehow it feels that if we lose our hard-won separate designation we'll be the regional equivalent of a Soviet-era non-person. At least in the eyes of demographers (I've always wanted an opportunity to use that word) our North-of-Mulholland community will be lumped in with that South-of-Mulholland world.

Besides, think how much harder Dan Blake's job at CSUN would be without these numbers.

There are lies, damned lies, and statistics."

-- English Prime Minister

Benjamin Disraeli

(mistakenly attributed to Mark Twain)

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