

Recession adds more new Texans

Job-seekers' influx could bring state four additional seats in U.S. House.

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Texas gained more residents than any other U.S. state as the recession deepened in 2008 and early this year, the Census Bureau said in a report that indicated job seekers migrated to one of the nation's stronger labor markets.

The state's population grew by 478,000 in the 12-month period that ended July 1, giving Texas the largest overall increase this decade, according to census estimates released Wednesday. California, the most populous state, was next with a 381,000 rise, followed by North Carolina at 134,000, and Georgia with 131,000.

The figures are the final estimates to be published before the bureau releases official 2010 population counts next December, which will determine how more than \$400 billion in federal funding is distributed and how seats in the House are reapportioned. **Texas would gain four congressional seats for the 2012 elections**, according to an analysis of the estimates by Polidata LLC, a demographic and political research firm in Corinth, Vt.

Nine states, including New York and New Jersey, would each lose a seat in projections by Polidata. Except for Louisiana, the states that would shed lawmakers are all in the Northeast and Midwest, continuing a decades-long trend.

"People like to live where the jobs are, and until they get jobs in the Midwest or Northeast, that's going to be a problem," said Clark Bensen, chief consultant for Polidata.

States that would gain one representative, based on the Census Bureau estimates, are Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, South Carolina, Utah and Washington. The other states that would lose one seat are Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota and Pennsylvania.

The Texas delegation in the U.S. House would grow to 36 members from 32, trailing only California's 53-person contingent. Ohio's representation would shrink to 16 House districts from 18. New York would have 28 representatives if it loses one seat.

A four-seat gain would be the biggest between-decades gain for Texas since at least 1900. The state gained three seats after the 1930, 1980 and 1990 censuses. It gained two seats after the 2000 census.

In addition to filling statewide offices, next year's elections will determine how much sway each party holds when legislators redraw congressional and legislative districts in the 2011 session.

Wednesday's census report underscores how the worst recession since the Great Depression has discouraged people from moving to once fast-growing states such as Arizona, Florida and Nevada, which now have the nation's highest foreclosure rates. Texas' gain has the potential to boost the state's clout in Congress and its share of federal funding.

"The state remains a magnet, drawing people from other parts of the country who are out of work and believe their job prospects are a lot better than the places they came from," said Bernard Weinstein, an economist at the Cox School of Business at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and former director of the Center for Economic Development and Research at the University of North Texas in Denton. "Let's be clear: Texas is having a recession like the rest of the country, but it's not as bad."

Texas' unemployment rate has stayed at least 1 percentage point below the U.S. average during most of the nationwide recession, which began in December 2007.

Marcial Ramirez, 29, said he moved to Houston in May after losing his job as a construction worker in Orlando, Fla. He said he arrived in Texas with two suitcases, two pairs of shoes and hopes of finding a job quickly.

"Nothing has come up," said Ramirez, who submitted 30 to 40 applications with companies that include Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Target Corp. Still, "I'm not giving up."

Texas added more jobs than any other state in November and October, on a month-over-month basis, according to the Texas Workforce Commission. That compares with a nationwide loss of 122,000 during the two-month period.

Unemployment fell to 8 percent in November from 8.3 percent, a 22-year high, a month earlier. That was below the U.S. average of 10 percent.

The state's labor force surged to the largest ever, with 12.1 million people employed or available for work.

"When Texas is doing relatively better than the rest of the country, people come here to look for jobs," said Mine Yucel, a senior economist at the Dallas Fed. "We had two months of positive employment growth, which may be an indication that we are coming out of recession. But it's too early to tell."

Jeffrey Passel, a senior demographer for the Pew Research Center in Washington, said, "Texas gets both a lot of new immigrants and people from internal migration, or movement from state to state." Though other factors may influence where people move, "jobs is the main driver."

Courtesy of JB Goodwin