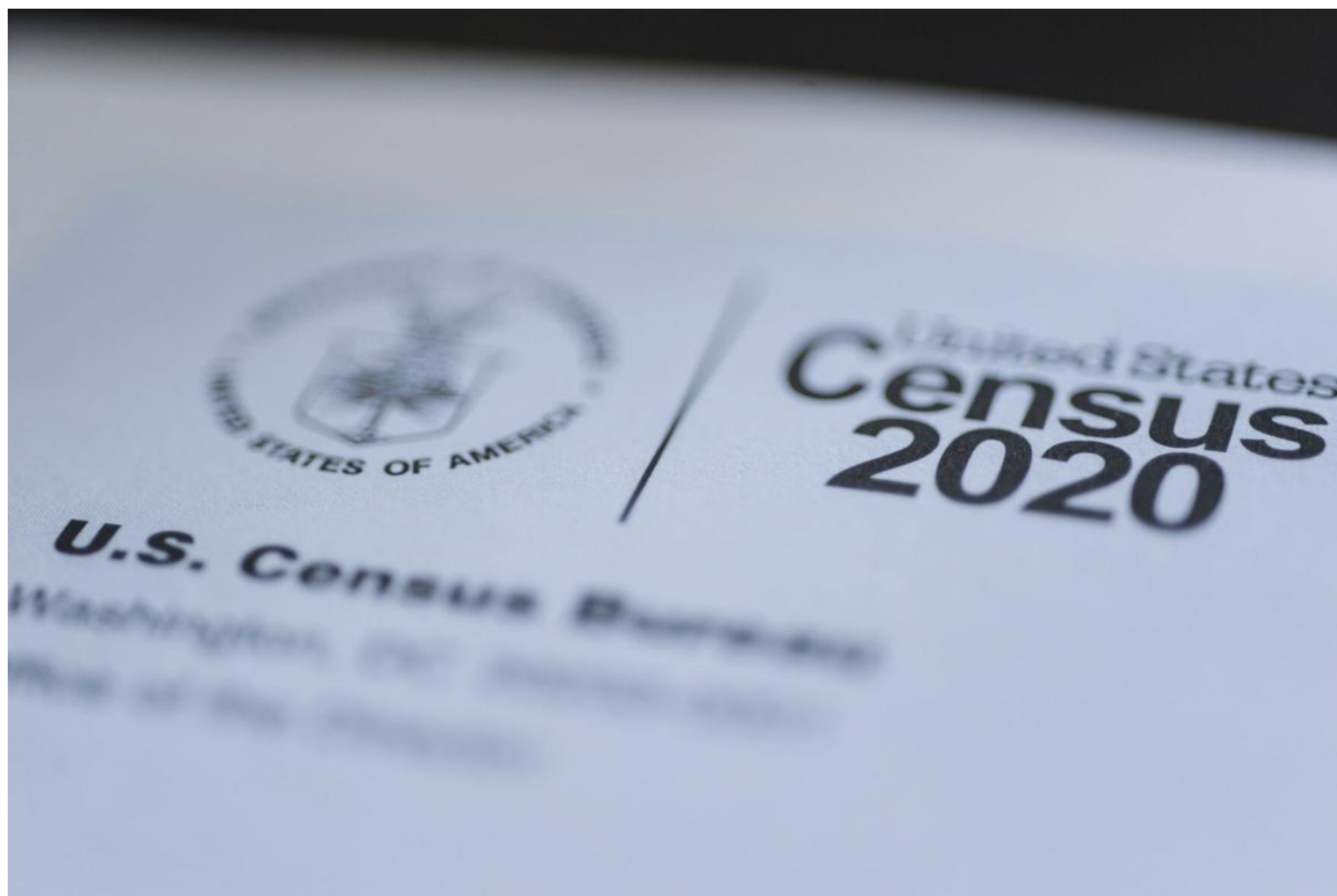


[https://journalstar.com/opinion/columnists/local-view-be-counted-make-vote-count/article\\_d945fb3c-432c-51c3-9b66-acc876850c83.html](https://journalstar.com/opinion/columnists/local-view-be-counted-make-vote-count/article_d945fb3c-432c-51c3-9b66-acc876850c83.html)

Local View

## Local View: Be counted; make vote count

GAVIN GEIS  
Sep 15, 2020



Lincoln tops other cities of more than 250,000 people for responding to the census.

JOHN ROARK, Associated Press

GAVIN GEIS

**J**ust last month, the Trump administration announced that it would halt the 2020 Census on Sept. 30, four weeks earlier than the original Census Bureau deadline.

It is one of the most important undertakings by the federal government because it determines the distribution of political power and resources nationwide that affect Americans for an entire decade.

While Nebraska has plenty of reason to worry about a loss in federal funding, we should also be concerned with how a census undercount will harm the state's redistricting process in 2021.

Every 10 years, in the year following the census, Nebraska legislators use census data to redraw the boundaries of congressional and legislative districts that affect us for the next decade. By manipulating the lines, moving friendly voters into pockets of strength and breaking up areas where they typically run weakest, members of the majority party – Democrat or Republican – can have a big impact on who'll represent you in the statehouse and in Congress.

Gerrymandering is no stranger here in Nebraska. Both parties have engaged in heated court battles over redistricting off and on from the mid-1960s. And as recently as 2010, our 2nd District was reconfigured by moving Bellevue and Offutt Air Force Base into the 1st District, thus strengthening the Republican presence in the 2nd.

To protect the map drawing process, first go to **2020census.gov** to be counted, and then ask your family and friends to do the same before Sept. 30. An accurate count of Nebraskans means not only is funding sent where it's needed but that voting districts reflect their communities.

Next, when the Legislature begins a new session in January 2021 our representatives need to get real about protecting the redistricting process from partisanship, gerrymandering and secrecy. That means a process that is publicly open and transparent, with all meetings of the commission held in public and information published on a public website.

It also means creating statutory protections against practices like partisan and racial gerrymandering. Nebraska's neighbors Colorado and Iowa benefit from redistricting laws that distance legislators from the map drawing process.

So far, 17 states have adopted nonpartisan or bipartisan independent redistricting commissions to end partisan gerrymandering. Common Cause believes it is an inherent conflict of interest for politicians to draw their own voting maps. Instead of people choosing their politicians, politicians are choosing their voters in Nebraska.

Over the years, every effort to establish a fair, open and rational system for redistricting, one that involves the public and controls gerrymandering, has failed because of opposition from the political ranks.

In 2016, for example, the Legislature passed a bill that would have set up an independent redistricting committee, only to have Gov. Pete Ricketts veto it. The bill's sponsors, one a Republican, the other a Democrat, refused to attempt an override.

Nebraskans, by and large, are proud of our one-house Legislature, and we value the service of our elected officials. But it is long past time for us to recognize that in the critical realm of redistricting, they are the problem, not the solution. Politicians cannot, and should not, be responsible for determining who will vote for them.

In America, elections are supposed to represent the will of the people – not the will of politicians. We are supposed to choose our elected representatives. Voters deserve competitive, fair elections in which every vote counts. Nebraska is a part of that growing number of states where the people no longer want to be silenced by voting maps that don't represent their communities.

This is the last chance we have to make sure Nebraskans count in our democracy and get our fair share of resources. I know the long-lasting impact of our community completing the Census. Will you do your part today?

Gavin Geis is the executive director of Common Cause Nebraska.