

Published: 12.22.2006

Arizona now tops the nation in growth

3.6% rate breaks Nevada's 19-year grip on the title

By Howard Fischer

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

New figures today from the U.S. Census Bureau show Arizona is now the fastest-growing state in the nation. Its 3.6 percent population increase between July 2005 and July 2006 broke the stranglehold Nevada had on the title for the prior 19 years.

The addition of 213,311 Arizonans during that period boosted the official state population to 6,166,318 — good enough to bump Tennessee, which added only 83,058 new residents, from its spot as the 16th-largest state in the nation. When the last formal census was taken in 2000, Arizona was just 20th.

The figures mean new political clout for Arizona, to go along with a bit more crowding on the streets and in the stores, because it virtually guarantees Arizona will get a ninth congressional district after the 2010 count, to go with the two the state picked up in 2000.

And there's a chance Arizona could pick up a 10th seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. The state is only about 300,000 residents behind Massachusetts, which has 10 House members and is growing at just 0.6 percent a year.

The new numbers are pushing the state's political leaders to try to figure out how to keep pace with the growth.

Lawmakers pumped an extra \$345 million into the budget last session to accelerate road construction.

But they were able to do that only because the state was running a surplus, permitting legislators to provide a tax cut and finance new programs.

Preliminary estimates suggest the state's coffers won't be in the same robust condition next year.

Gov. Janet Napolitano has promised to find more money without resorting to higher taxes or toll roads.

Getting people around is only part of the problem.

The Arizona Department of Housing said that in 2000 about 47 percent of renters and 27 percent of homeowners paid more than 30 percent of income for housing — a figure the agency considers the benchmark of affordability.

fastest growth

Increase in population from July 2005 to July 2006.

- Arizona: 3.6%
- Nevada: 3.5%
- Idaho: 2.6%
- Georgia: 2.5%
- Texas: 2.5%
- Utah: 2.4%
- North Carolina: 2.1%
- Colorado: 1.9%
- Florida: 1.8%
- South Carolina: 1.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

arizona's population

- July 2006: 6,166,318
- July 2005: 5,953,007
- July 2004: 5,745,674
- July 2003: 5,582,252
- July 2002: 5,445,333
- July 2001: 5,300,266
- July 2000: 5,166,693
- April 1, 2000: 5,130,632 (official census)

Since then, the agency reports housing costs have increased 74 percent, compared with a 15 percent rise in median family income.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

So far, all that growth has not translated into higher unemployment.

In fact, new figures released Thursday by the Department of Economic Security put the state's seasonally adjusted jobless rate for November at 4.1 percent, down from 4.7 percent a year earlier. The nationwide rate is 4.5 percent.

But Don Wehbey, the agency's senior economist, said there's no simple answer to the question of which comes first: growth or jobs.

New residents also mean new schools — lots of them.

The state School Facilities Board already is planning to build 31 schools this budget year to accommodate 29,000 youngsters.

John Arnold, executive director of the agency responsible for school construction, said that if the 3.6 percent annual growth rate holds, the number of new schools — at \$11 million each — will similarly increase each year.

According to the Census Bureau, 129,987 people moved here from other states. Another 31,662 are international migrants.

By contrast, there were 97,176 people born in Arizona, offset by 44,272 deaths during the same time.

While Arizona's percentage growth rate topped the nation, the actual number of new residents placed only fifth.

Texas led with 579,275 new residents during the 12-month period.

Texas also mirrored Arizona's growth pattern, with interstate and international migration outpacing natural growth.

In fact, one out of five new Texas residents is from outside the country. In Arizona, the figure is close to one out of seven.

Census Bureau figures show nearly 290,000 people moved out of California to other states during the 12 months measured.

But that was nearly offset by almost 267,000 new residents from outside the United States.

Overall, the Census Bureau figures that the 2.9 million year-over-year population change for the country includes 1.2 million people from elsewhere.

Louisiana's total population continues to drop even a year after Hurricane Katrina: Another 241,000 people left the state.

Even with more births than deaths, Louisiana still wound up with 220,000 fewer residents in 2006 than 2005.

Other states posting year-over-year population losses include New York, which dropped 9,500 residents; Michigan, down almost 5,200; and Rhode Island, whose population shrank by nearly 6,000.

Vote in a poll on what you think of Arizona's status as the nation's fastest-growing state at [azstarnet.com/metro](http://www.azstarnet.com/metro)

fastest growth

Increase in population from July 2005 to July 2006.

- Arizona: 3.6%
- Nevada: 3.5%
- Idaho: 2.6%
- Georgia: 2.5%

- Texas: 2.5%
- Utah: 2.4%
- North Carolina: 2.1%
- Colorado: 1.9%
- Florida: 1.8%
- South Carolina: 1.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

arizona's population

- July 2006: 6,166,318
- July 2005: 5,953,007
- July 2004: 5,745,674
- July 2003: 5,582,252
- July 2002: 5,445,333
- July 2001: 5,300,266
- July 2000: 5,166,693
- April 1, 2000: 5,130,632 (official census)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

All content copyright © 1999-2006 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.