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## S.A. again census standout

[By Elaine Ayala](#)- Express-News

San Antonio, the nation's seventh-largest city and home to more than 1.3 million inhabitants, just made another Census Bureau top ten list.

The census' newest population estimates show the Alamo City added more people than all but four other U.S. cities, growing by almost 26,000 residents, or about 1.9 percent, from July 2007 to July 2008.

San Antonio came in right under New York, Phoenix, Houston and Los Angeles, respectively, and just ahead of Fort Worth, New Orleans, Chicago, Austin and San Diego.

Mayor Julián Castro called the spurt impressive, presenting both great opportunities and significant challenges.

“We welcome the value that new San Antonians mean to the community with their diverse talents, purchasing power and what it does to the tax base,” Castro said. “It also means we have more work to do.”

He was referring, he said, to “all those things a growing population requires,” including additional police and fire protection as well as infrastructure and maintenance.

New Orleans, whose population was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, grew by more than 23,000 people. But it led the nation in percentage of growth, with 8.2 percent, on that list. Round Rock, north of Austin, came in second at 8.16 percent, along with three other Texas cities.

Texas' state demographer, Karl Eschbach, found no surprises in the new data. San Antonio remains “one of the fastest-growing cities in the United States.”

What is different is that Americans, once moving to suburbs, are staying put. An Associated Press story blamed it on the recession, “making it harder for people to move.”

But Eschbach sees other issues at play in San Antonio, including “fast job growth compared to the rest of the nation.”

Eschbach stressed that the newest population estimates reflect a period that “preceded the economic crisis, which was more felt (in San Antonio) in November, December of last year.”

Job growth has slowed since then, according to Texas Workforce Commission data.

“Texas was the last place creating actual jobs,” Eschbach said. “From my perspective, we can expect to see slowdowns going into the next cycle,” or in next July's census report.

San Antonio's wide-open spaces — or what one developer called its “360-degree growth potential” — and room within its boundaries also played a role in the gain, Eschbach added. “Texas cities are physically bigger. They have more room to grow and develop,” he said. “Cities elsewhere in the country have little room to put new development.”

Then there's the issue of what Eschbach calls “a pro-growth consensus” in cities such as San Antonio, which may not

impose as many regulations on developers as in other parts of the country. The demographer said that's a formula for both affordable housing and rapid growth.

It's a point on which developers beg to differ. "San Antonio does what it needs to do to protect and ensure good, manageable growth," said Phil Crane, a commercial real estate broker with Providence Commercial Real Estate Services Inc. But it has "a pro-business attitude, and I think that's an important distinction."

Eschbach agreed with Castro that the growing population creates more demand for services.

"What you have to think about when growing rapidly are the consequences of growth," Eschbach said, including maintaining transportation infrastructure, easing road congestion and sustaining the water supply.

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