

Attendance sparse at census meeting

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Fewer than five area residents showed up for a Tuesday night community meeting in Monroe on the 2010 census and redistricting. The meeting was instead filled by state legislators and members of the media.

The sparse community attendance matches low turnout at a number of the nine meetings the House and Governmental Affairs Committee held throughout the state to raise awareness of the companion issues leading up to the April 1 census day.

Still, local officials remain confident word is getting out about the census, the results of which will determine whether the city of Monroe keeps its entitlement funding, whether Louisiana will

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lose a congressional seat, the boundaries of state electoral districts and the level of funding for many federally funded programs.

Chris Fisher, Monroe's planning and urban development director and the chairman of the local complete census count committee,

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Terrance Armstard/The News-Star
State Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, left, along with Clerk of the House of Representatives Alfred Speer, right, give a presentation during a forum held at the University of Louisiana at Monroe on the census Tuesday.

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said his committee has been reaching out to hard-to-count residents and school districts during the last few months. He said he would have liked to have seen more students attend Tuesday's community meeting, held in the University of Louisiana at Monroe's Student Union.

The meeting, which was streamed live on the Internet, addressed all the issues at play in the census, from redistricting to outreach.

Rep. Rosalind Jones, D-Monroe, said officials will have to break through the belief some residents have that their community doesn't have a say in the results of the census.

"The important thing is to stand up and be counted," Jones said.

Rep. Rick Gallot, a Democrat from Ruston and the chairman of the House and Governmental Affairs Committee, said the committee didn't expect a heavy turnout, although it was strong in Shreveport and Lake Charles, he said.

"We knew that starting this early on we wouldn't have overflow crowds," he said.

Despite the poor attendance, Gallot said the meetings across the state were useful because of the coverage they generated and the educational opportunity they provided local legislators.

"Northeast Louisiana will certainly be more aware tomorrow about the upcoming census because of the coverage," he said.

The committee will again hold community meeting throughout the state in early 2011 after the results of the census are released.