

# The Washington Post

## Remote Alaska village is first eyed in census

By RACHEL D'ORO  
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NOORVIK, Alaska -- People in this remote Inupiat Eskimo community celebrate the most important events together with a community feast. Now, they've added a new occasion - being the first in line for the 2010 count of the nation's residents.

"It's very exciting. I sure like it, a lot of new faces," 81-year-old Clarence H. Jackson said at a reception Monday night in the Alaska village of Noorvik.

Earlier in the day, U.S. Census Bureau Director [Robert Groves](#) flew to the village, launching the count and a day full of festivities.

The first person tallied was Jackson's 89-year-old brother, Clifton Jackson, a World War II veteran and the town's oldest resident.

"One down, over 309 million to go," Groves said after leaving the elder Jackson's house.

Clifton Jackson said he was honored to be the first person counted.

"It's seemed, to me, OK," he said.

After their arrival, Groves and other officials were taken from the airport to the school by sled, with dog teams driven by schoolchildren. He even took a turn driving the sled in temperatures hovering just above zero - balmy compared with the minus-40 lows that settled over the village earlier this month.

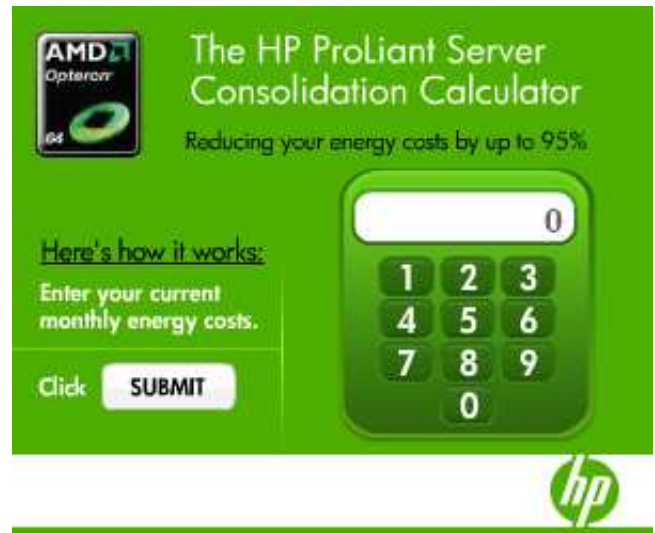
"It's much warmer than we thought it would be," Groves said.

After gathering with village officials and elders and sampling muktuk - strips of bowhead whale skin and blubber - Groves was driven to Jackson's house in a 4-wheeler. Dressed in heavy Arctic gear, he walked to the door with a small briefcase in hand.

"Hello. Thank you," he said when the door opened. He walked inside and began the confidential process of conducting the Census. It took about 10 minutes.

To celebrate the historic event, residents were celebrating with traditional dances and a feast of caribou soup and baked bearded seal, along with piles of turkey, stuffing and dressing. Groves briefly joined one of the dance groups to cheers and applause from the crowd.

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He and most of the 50 visitors were bunking down in empty school classrooms before departing Tuesday.

Census workers will interview other Noorvik residents using the same 10-question forms to be mailed to most U.S. residents in mid-March. Workers also will visit 217 other rural communities in the state.

Alaskans in rural communities not linked by roads have been the first people counted since the 1990 census.

It's easier to get to the villages before muddy conditions brought on by the spring thaw make access more difficult. Groves said it's also crucial to reach villagers before they set off for fishing camps or hunting expeditions.

Noorvik Mayor Bobby Wells said a handful of people spend winters in their camps but were expected to be in the community for the count because of its influence on federal funding and congressional representation.

Northwest Arctic Borough Mayor Martha Siitaurak Whiting appreciated the spotlight on her borough, which is the size of Indiana and has a population of about 8,000 people.

"Sometimes we feel we are a forgotten people," she said. "We're a real strong, vibrant culture. And it just brings more awareness to who we are, that we're still part of America."

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