

## Census forms are on their way to you

The Census 2000 questionnaire begins arriving in mailboxes across the country this week. In effect, this is the chance for all of us to decide where billions of dollars in public and private resources will be spent and determine our share of political representation. The census also provides every racial and ethnic group in the US with a chance to be officially recognized as part of the American tapestry.

For most this process will only take 10 minutes; five out of six homes will receive the short census questionnaire. The remainder will get the long form requiring a little over a half an hour to complete. Given what is at stake, most would agree that it is time well spent.

The Census Bureau has

worked closely with local groups and leaders to make it easy for people to fill out the questionnaire regardless of differences in language, literacy, or culture. Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC's) have been established across the country for this purpose.

QAC's are places set up in and by community, government, civic, religious, and business organizations where volunteers are available to answer questions and provide guidance with regard to completing the census form. Translation guides and translators have been strategically placed in communities where languages other than English are prevalent. Most QAC's also double as "Be Counted" sites where those who, for

any reason, lack a questionnaire can fill out a Be Counted form. Anyone can call his or her local census office for the location of the nearest QAC. A Center's hours of operation vary from site to site.

Director of the Census Bureau, Dr. Kenneth Frewitt has challenged local government in America to increase its 1990 mail response rate by 5 percent. The program is called "How America Knows What America Needs." It has been taken up by most if not all of the country's local elected officials. More information about "How America Knows What America Needs" as well as other aspects of the Census can be found on the Census 2000 web site - <http://www.census.gov>

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vote in the House. Some think the bills don't go far enough. The Michigan Jewish Conference has argued the bills should be extended but insurance companies from considering all aspects of family medical history. The American Civil Liberties Union argues genetic information contained in patient's medical records could fall into the hands of the insurance companies.

Other pieces of the package

also address the storage and disposal of genetic samples. When genetic tests are taken in a criminal investigation, in paternity cases, or in blood testing of newborns, the law currently is not clear how or for how long the samples will be retained. The bills give the Department of Community Health orders to create rules regarding how long such records are to be retained and when they will be destroyed.

While the bills address health

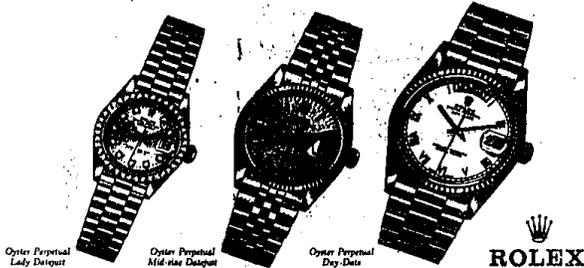
insurance, they do not prohibit life insurance companies from considering DNA information.

"That's a whole 'nother issue," Law said. "Life insurance companies do look at a number of factors that affect how long you will live. They look at medical history and whether or not you smoke. That's different. Medical insurance is seen as a necessity. Life insurance is not seen as the same thing."

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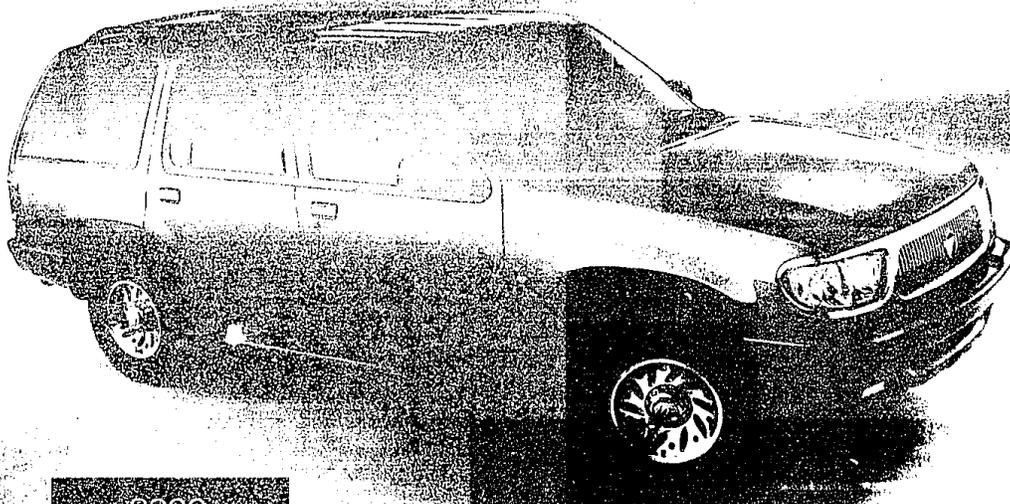
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