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Utah 2006 statistics, comparisons released

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CALEB WARNOCK - Daily Herald

Utah's senior citizens may be the most privileged in the nation.

The state also has the most children, the second-lowest infant mortality rate, one of the lowest personal incomes per capita, one of the highest numbers of state employees per capita, gets less federal aid than almost any other state and has the seventh-fastest growing population.

The 2006 edition of the Statistical Abstract of the United States has just been released, including a special section which ranks states against each other in a variety of categories. The abstract has been published by the federal government since 1878 as a summary of statistics on the social, political, and economic organization of the United States. The data is typically several years old because of the time it takes to gather and tabulate it.

The information paints an intriguing portrait of what it means to live in Utah.

An infant mortality rate of 4.8 deaths per 1,000 births means Utah has the second-lowest infant mortality rate in the country.

That ranking "is outstanding" and can be attributed to low substance, alcohol and tobacco abuse rates as well as a highly educated population and outstanding medical care that specializes in birthing, said Dr. Joseph Miner, director of the Utah County Health Department.

Ethnic and racial minority groups, which are not strongly represented in Utah, generally have a higher infant mortality rate and having such a homogenous population is another reason for the low infant mortality statistics here, he said.

In addition, "Utah Valley Regional Medical Center has an excellent Newborn Intensive Care Unit that keeps babies alive and makes healthy babies out of those that would have died or been left severely disabled," Miner said.

In Utah, 212 people out of every 10,000 are employed by the state, making Utah sixth among states with the most state employees per population, according to the abstract.

But that statistic does not mean the state government is just handing out jobs, said Mike Jerman of the Utah Taxpayers Association. It can be explained by the number of teachers

the state must hire.

"Since we have a large population of school-aged children, Utah has to have a lot of teachers," he said, noting the state has about 49,000 employees.

Still, the statistic is "kind of surprising," he said.

Utah gets only \$994 in federal aid per capita, the fourth-lowest rate in the nation -- but that is actually a good thing because it means Utahns are using less money from federal poverty programs, Jerman said.

"Typically states that receive a lot of federal spending are those that have either a lot of poverty or subsidized industry," he said. "Typically the more wealthy states get less money."

The low aid rate is also a result of Utahns paying lower federal taxes than most Americans, he said.

"Our federal tax burden is one of the lowest in the country because wages are lower and because the child tax credit has a big impact on families," he said.

Utah also had the second-lowest percent of seniors 65 years old and older, and the lowest number of elderly living below the poverty level, but those numbers can be misleading, said Scott McBeth, director of aging services for Mountainland Association of Governments.

"The poverty level is pretty low and a lot of people are just above it, and when you are just barely over the poverty level there are still a lot of needs not being met," he said. "That is a tough place to be."

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A selection of first, last and Utah rankings in a variety of categories from the 2006 edition of the Statistical Abstract of the United States. (Data from www.census.gov/statab/www/)

Persons 65 years old and over below poverty level (latest data 1999)

State Percent Rank

United States 9.9 --

Mississippi 18.8 1

Utah 5.8 50

Infant mortality rate per 1,000 births (latest data 2001)

State Rate Rank

United States 6.8 --

Delaware 10.7 1

New Hampshire 3.8 50

Utah 4.8 49

Federal aid to state and local governments per capita (latest data 2003)

State Dollars Rank

United States 1,307 --

Alaska 3,713 1

Virginia 842 50

Utah 994 47

Full-time equivalent state government employment per 10,000 resident population (latest data 2003)

State Rate Rank

United States 147 --

Hawaii 450 1

Illinois 116 50

Utah 212 6

Average annual pay (latest data 2002)

State Dollars Rank

United States 36,764 --

Connecticut 46,852 1

Montana 26,001 50

Utah 30,585 35

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