



**PREPARED STATEMENT OF  
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*2010 Census –Operational Assessment*

**Before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**22 September 2009**

Chairman Clay, Ranking Member McHenry, Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you and provide my assessment of the current status of preparations for the 2010 Census, as well as a general overview of the Integrated Communications Program.

Upon my confirmation I promised Congress and Secretary Locke that I would spend the first month of my directorship evaluating key components of the 2010 Census. As you know, the difficulties with the handheld computer development caused a major re-planning of the 2010 Census and led to the appointment of a new management team. Many things have happened since those events in 2008, but as the new director I needed to make my own professional assessment regarding the current state of preparation and key risks facing the 2010 Decennial Census.

To begin, prior to my arrival, plans were in development to bring on two consultants, former Census Bureau Director Kenneth Prewitt and former Principal Associate Director John Thompson, to assist in a risk assessment. I have consulted with members of National Academy of Sciences panels on the census and with its technical staff. I have reached out to half a dozen key

academic scientists with relevant technical skills. I have met multiple times with staff from the Government Accountability Office, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Department of Commerce Office of the Inspector General. In addition, I have interacted with the project leaders of the major census contracts (Lockheed Martin, Harris, and IBM), and I currently have twice weekly meetings with Mitre Corporation contractors who offer independent evaluations of the major census contracting activities. Finally, I have met with my administrative and technical leadership teams for the decennial programs.

In my testimony today I will discuss my assessment of 2010 Census preparations and outline the key challenges we face as we approach Census Day, which is now just over six months away. My comments are in three sections: a) a comparison of the designs of the 2000 and the 2010 censuses from a technical perspective, b) internal challenges to the 2010 Census, and c) external challenges to the 2010 Census.

### **The 2010 Census Design**

The 2010 Census design is fundamentally better than the Census 2000 design:

- For the first time every household will receive the short form, which is simple, straightforward and easy to understand; in past censuses short forms have had higher participation rates than long forms.
- 13 million households in census tracts with high concentrations of linguistically isolated Spanish speakers will receive a bilingual questionnaire; this should lead to higher participation among the Spanish-only speakers who receive it.
- Most non-responding households will receive a second questionnaire; for decades survey methodology has found that replacement questionnaires raise participation rates.
- The questionnaire contains two new questions that will help us understand if we are counting people twice or missing people who may be residing elsewhere, and we now have a Coverage Follow-up operation that will take advantage of those questions to improve the accuracy of census count. This should reduce differential coverage of subgroups with unusual attachments to households.

- Because the Master Address File has been maintained throughout the decade, it should provide a better frame for mailing out questionnaires.
- A new operation called Group Quarters Validation is designed to better identify places like group homes, residence halls, and unusual living situations such as campgrounds and marinas. This addresses problems experienced in past censuses.
- The additional funding provided by the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act for the paid advertising campaign and the partnership program will enhance and expand our outreach efforts.

Thus, prior to the implementation of the census, examining its design as a survey methodologist, it is my judgment that the 2010 Census has a better design than Census 2000.

A superior design alone, however, does not ensure a superior product. The Census Bureau faces both internal and external challenges, some unprecedented, that must be directly addressed in the months ahead.

### **Internal Challenges**

There are several internal challenges or risks that occupy my attention.

First, although we have a bright, well-organized senior team leading the decennial effort, the Census Bureau team has less senior experience in managing censuses than was true in some past censuses. Further, they entered their leadership positions after the handheld contract problems and the re-plan of the census. This weakness, however, is countered by a much more formal and open risk management process that was adopted during the re-planning. In addition, I have decided to continue vigorous use of external advisors, both through existing contracts, and with John Thompson and Kenneth Prewitt. Further, I am extremely fortunate to have as the Deputy Undersecretary for Economic Affairs, Nancy Potok, a former principal associate director at the Census Bureau, with whom I enjoy continual consultative activity.

Second, like many Federal agencies, the Census Bureau has experienced significant retirements in its senior ranks--in particular, senior statisticians.

While we aggressively begin to recruit new talent, I will further engage outside statisticians during key phases of the census process.

Third, because of the movement from handheld computer use for the Non-response Follow-up (NRFU) stage of the census to a paper-based design, administrative software for this phase is still being developed. This is the so-called Paper-based Operations Control System (PBOCS).

While a recent GAO report called for complete end-to-end testing of PBOCS, I have learned, because of the late change to a paper-based census, there is no time to mount a full operations test using all software. Instead, the current plan for testing includes an integrated test of core subsystems. I asked for a review of the definition of what "core subsystems" means, and that review satisfied me that the definition does indeed represent what should be tested. There will be a large load test of the operational control system in late November, 2009, which will attempt to simulate the full operation load on the software. I have asked that this test include real users at the skill levels of the users of the system during production. I have asked that the testing design include sequential testing of each of the planned three releases of the software, and testing to ensure accurate transmittals of information between all system interfaces. Robust user acceptance testing will be conducted in a Local Census Office (LCO) environment established at Census Headquarters and in a test LCO in Seattle, Washington.

Many of the other software systems were tested in earlier steps of the 2010 planning cycle. All the professionals with whom I have interacted believe that risks attached to those systems are low. Thus, the critical risk focuses on the software for the Paper-based Operations Control System. We created an internal review team, led by the Census Bureau's CIO, with the Chief Technology Officer of the Department of Commerce, and other experts. They meet with me on a set schedule, provide recommendations, and give their assessments. We have already made three changes based on their input: a) embedding IT security specialists into the software development process to identify and mitigate emerging security vulnerabilities, b) building a bridge from the internal Census Bureau software development to the Harris software development to promote integration, and c) replicating testing on secondary releases of the software.

The fourth risk concerns the Master Address File (MAF), the list that is the basis for the delivery of over 134 million questionnaires. The accuracy of the census depends on a complete address list. If we do not know a household's address, it

is much harder for us to know whether we have received its census questionnaire. We successfully completed the Address Canvassing operation over the summer, whereby census staff checked 145 million addresses, making additions or deletions where necessary. This included 8 million addresses added by tribal, state and municipal governments in the Local Update of Census Addresses program. At this time, we are analyzing the characteristics of the MAF. In a matter of weeks we will know whether it appears to present any difficulties.

Our challenge now is to continue with our efforts to improve the MAF through subsequent operations, and to address areas where we may have duplicate or missed addresses and ensure that our addresses are correctly located in TIGER (Topographically Integrated Geographic Encoding Referencing). Our staff are examining data at the county level to identify areas where additional work may be needed. Their efforts are complemented by state and local demographers from the Federal State Cooperative for Population Estimates (FSCPE) who are also examining the MAF. Officials from FSCPE help us in our Count Review program as decennial data are tabulated, but this is the first time we have folded their expertise into the Address List Development operation. Local governments also have an opportunity to add addresses in the New Construction program, and I urge all Members of Congress to encourage government officials in their districts to participate in this program where applicable. Data from all three of these efforts will be folded into subsequent operations to ensure the accuracy and coverage of the census. This underscores an important point: While a high quality address list is essential to a good census, every subsequent operation builds on the MAF to help us ensure that we reach everyone.

The fifth risk concerns cost estimation and control. We need better cost-estimation and control at the Census Bureau. One finding in our review of the address canvassing operation was that the cost models used to guide the work did not forecast correctly total costs, and we experienced a cost overrun in components of that operation. We need to strengthen our cost information and management structures within the Census Bureau. I am directly intervening with my associate directors to address these issues, and I will continue to use the external groups mentioned above to develop better management systems and procedures. The Census Bureau needs to be more accountable, efficient and transparent if we are to be effective.

## External Challenges

Uncertainties surrounding the expected mail return rate are more daunting than in past censuses. Interviewing households that do not return their questionnaires is the most expensive component of the census. Scores of millions of dollars will be spent for each additional percentage point of the public that we have to visit during NRFU. In addition to the costs, an inaccurate response estimate also impacts our ability to structure and implement the NRFU operations.

First, there are a number of factors that will make it difficult to know with a degree of certainty how accurate our estimate of the mail response rate is; 1) the vacancy rate is higher than in previous censuses, and it is fluctuating rapidly due to foreclosures and economic dislocations; 2) more people and more families are doubling up in single-family dwellings; 3) the rate of people experiencing homelessness is higher; and 4) the public debate and tension over immigration issues is ongoing. In addition, we continue to see declining response rates in censuses and surveys.

To respond to these challenges we are analyzing the American Community Survey data to simulate the mail response rates at low levels of geography. I am also asking census experts to review the impact of the replacement questionnaire, as well as our operations to enumerate people in transient living situations or without conventional housing.

The new media environment represents a second external challenge for us, and it is unprecedented. More and more people get the news from non-traditional social media sources like blogs, YouTube®, Facebook® and Twitter® rather than from the networks and newspapers of decades past. The sheer volume of these media sources makes it far more difficult for us to get out the facts about the 2010 Census. We are doing all we can, including the establishment of a media response team at the highest levels of the Census Bureau, and the upcoming launch of a 2010 Census Blog, to which I will be contributing, to help strengthen census messaging.

There is an external challenge on which we desperately need your help. I am asking all Members of Congress and all census stakeholders to work with us to ensure that the census is not tainted by the intense political debates driving the news media. I cannot stress this point strongly enough. If the public believes that census data are slanted by partisan influence, the credibility of the statistics

is destroyed. And once destroyed, public trust cannot be easily or quickly restored.

Finally, the digital environment we now live in also raises the threat of Internet scams and cybercrimes like “phishing” and the widespread misuse of the Census Bureau’s logo and brand. To combat this, I have directed the Census Bureau’s Chief Information Officer to establish a team that unites our IT security officials with experts from the private sector. I will be reporting to Congress and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on our plans in the near future.

### **New Experimental Initiatives and Modifications**

In my assessment I determined there are areas in the Census design that need specific attention. The first concerns the large sample survey, called Census Coverage Measurement (CCM), which is used to measure the differential undercount of the census. Some time ago, the interviewing of the households in this sample survey was placed late in the schedule of the census. This decision, which regrettably cannot be changed at this point, can lead to more difficulty of respondents recalling where they were on April 1, 2010. In addition, I am concerned about the quality of the matching process following this late interviewing. I have consulted with some of our finest academic statisticians on this point. I will make changes in the design to give us more insight into the over and under-count processes of the census.

In addition, we will develop and implement a Master Trace Project to follow cases throughout the decennial census cycle from address listing through tabulation so that we have a better research base for 2020 Census planning. We also will be conducting an Internet measurement re-interview study, focused on how differently people answer questions on a web instrument from a paper questionnaire. Finally, we will mount a post-hoc administrative records census, using administrative records available to the Census Bureau. All of this will better position us for the developmental work we must conduct to improve future decennial census operations.

### **Conclusion**

These are my judgments on the operational status of the census. Two internal uncertainties now form the critical risks – the software development on the Paper-based Operations Control System and not-yet-known quality of the Master

Address File. But those uncertainties, Mr. Chairman, are swamped by the uncertainties about the likely participation of the American public in the 2010 Census. While our attention must be on these internal risks, I cannot overemphasize the need for every political, corporate, and religious leader to get the message out that the cost and quality of the 2010 Census is in our hands. We all have a part to play in achieving a successful 2010 Census. I look forward to working with you in the months ahead to make this happen.

### **Communications and Outreach Plans Update**

With respect to the Integrated Communications Program (ICP), I recognize that there is considerable interest in the planning and implementation of this program, and rightly so. As you know, this integrated strategy is central to our ability to increase mail response, address the differential undercount, and ensure cooperation with the 2010 Census field staff conducting interviews with non-responding households. I understand the Subcommittee received a thorough briefing on the ICP last spring. Rather than describe the program again, I would like to take a few minutes to provide a status update.

In addition to the assessment I have been discussing, I also directed Associate Director Steve Jost to conduct a complete review of the Communications Program. As a result of his review we have made modifications to the communications plan design with two principal goals in mind; first, targeting traditionally hard to count or linguistically isolated populations to achieve an increase in their mail back response rate; and second, to help increase the overall mail back response rate and mitigate the cost implications of the FDCA re-plan by doing all we can to reduce the workload in the Non-Response Follow Up (NRFU) operation. As part of our ongoing assessment efforts, we established an Academic Assessment Panel to provide us with an objective evaluation of the work done to date on the communications campaign.

The 2010 Census communications campaign plan has also been greatly augmented due to the funding increase of \$100 million from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (Recovery Act). With this additional funding, we will be able to increase our paid media efforts – including \$43 million directed specifically to local advertising buys focused on hard-to-count populations. The balance of the Recovery Act funding will be directed to partnership support, public relations, Census in Schools and the implementation of a 2010 Census Road Tour. With this additional funding, the Census Bureau will now exceed the scope of the Census 2000 communications campaign.

Moreover, because funds are available in fiscal year 2009, which can be used for advance purchases of advertising time, these funds are expected to provide significantly greater exposure to the Census Bureau's message than in Census 2000. At this time, our contractor for paid advertising believes the Census Bureau will be one of the top advertisers in the country during the critical January – April time frame in 2010, and that for each one of the targeted audience markets the Census Bureau will be the #1 advertiser based upon current budget allocations. The contractor estimates that 95% of American consumers will see at least 15 Census Bureau advertisements during the Awareness Phase of the paid advertising in January – February, and over 30 advertisements during the Motivational Phase of March – April. Because media will be targeted to areas with low return rates, --which are not known at this point--we do not yet have Reach<sub>[RML1]</sub> goals for non-response follow-up. Therefore, the NRFU media buys have not been fully planned, negotiated, or bought. However, our target Frequency is more than five contacts over the course of the non-response follow-up campaign.

This campaign is multi-targeted, multimedia, multilingual and research-based. One part of the plan already in place that will allow us to assess and respond to any potential issues stemming from the FDCA re-plan is the continuous monitoring and tracking research system. This system will allow us to rapidly respond to areas with low mail return rates and adjust and refocus our communications efforts in these areas to increase response.

As part of our comprehensive review, we have recently made the following enhancements to the communications strategy:

- We expanded the number of languages for the paid advertising from 14 to 28, a substantial increase over the 17 languages in the 2000 Census design.
- We revamped and enhanced the 2010 Census web site to make it more interactive and user friendly and to take advantage of social media and to expand the promotion of the census through local, individual support of the decennial.
- We upgraded the Census in Schools program and expanded it from K-8 to K-12 (stateside, Puerto Rico and the Island Areas), added additional teaching materials in both printed and electronic form and translated the

take-home materials into 28 languages, and made them available on our web site for production and distribution by local school districts.

- We expanded the plans and scope of the Census Road Tour from 12 to 13 vehicles, assigning one vehicle to each of our 12 Regional Offices and for the first time designating a National Vehicle with enhanced audiovisual capabilities to expand Census public relations and news media outreach.
- We doubled the staffing of the national partnership office and co-located staff from other offices in the Bureau to upgrade our outreach to national organizations and leverage their full support to promote the 2010 Decennial.
- We expanded our language assistance program by including information in the Advance Letter on language assistance, and there will also be a four-pronged targeted outreach in local neighborhoods with high concentrations of households that speak Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Russian through a postcard mailing, expanded partnership efforts, and targeted mailings of language assistance guides through paid in-language media vehicles.

It is important to remember, however, that Census Bureau communications efforts alone will not allow us to reach those populations that are most reticent and therefore hard to count. The 2010 Census Partnership Program is critical because partners are trusted sources of information in the community. Our partners – representing community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, local businesses, educators, tribal organizations and governments, disability groups, local and state governments, media outlets, race and ethnic organizations, social service providers, advisory committees, and Members of Congress – are already communicating a compelling message of census participation to inspire and motivate their constituents to be counted. With the additional \$120 million in Recovery Act funding, the partnership staff in the field has almost quadrupled, allowing us to improve outreach to hard-to-count communities and thus expand our efforts to reduce historical undercounts of minority populations.

Chairman Clay, Ranking Member McHenry, in your recent letter you asked for updated budget estimates for advertising among the specific population groups. Staff is currently reviewing and finalizing creative decisions for the use of the ARRA funds, and media negotiations are now underway for national and local

advertising buys, both of which will have an impact on resource allocations. We will be in a much better position to discuss the budget estimates by population group in late October or early November. I would be happy to discuss the specifics of the budget with you at that time.

I thank the committee for this opportunity and would be happy to answer your questions.