

Bureau of Indian Affairs Conference plenary session

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

November 28, 2023

INTRODUCTION

- Good morning, everyone. We—myself and my Census Bureau colleagues—are honored to join you today.
- I to offer many thanks to the BIA Alaska regional office for the opportunity to speak to everyone today.
- Special thanks to Gary Hanson who worked with our tribal affairs coordinator Dee Alexander and her team for all they did to make this happen.
- And before I go further, we at the Census Bureau offer everyone here in invitation to participate in a tribal listening session scheduled for tomorrow morning at 8 a.m. in **Room** Tikhtnu ***Tih-kah-new B.***
- OK, I'd like to start with a statement I make whenever we have the privilege of meeting with tribal leaders and tribal representatives.
 - Our work together is of the highest priority.
 - We are reaching out in the hope that we can strengthen our nation-to-nation relationships.
- You see, we are public servants and as such, we serve all tribal nations.
- We serve you.
- And, no, we are not perfect at this.
- But we do aspire to improve, and to learn from past experience.
- We realize that by using data we produce, tribes and, more generally, the people of Indian Country can better understand who they are, their challenges, their accomplishments, and their needs.
- In fact, data-driven knowledge promotes better, informed decision-making in areas such as economic development, infrastructure, public health, and education.
- Now, as you know, we conducted a decennial census in 2020.
- This was done during the early part of the pandemic, before vaccines...when there was much uncertainty about the disease.
- And during this tragic period, we all faced unprecedented challenges.
- The world suffered.
- During this tragic period, we learned a great deal about working with diverse communities, especially tribal nations.
- We heard from our partners throughout Indian Country.
- We appreciated feedback from all tribes, especially critical feedback on where we needed improvement, or even where we needed to rethink our approach altogether.
- We saw firsthand that we cannot complete our mission alone.
- We need a community-of-the-whole approach.

- That means working closely together on a common, shared goal...working with tribes on a nation-to-nation basis as well as with communities across the nation.
- We acknowledge the need for continuous dialogue and collaboration.
- That's why we'll continue to seek your feedback as well as your ideas to help address concerns and to better serve tribes, tribal citizens, and the people of Indian Country.
- And *that's* why tomorrow morning's listening session is so important.
- We are best able to address your data needs by understanding your needs and concerns.
- Now, we're not limiting ourselves to a single or even a few listening sessions to gather feedback on serving the people of Indian Country better.
- We are committed to continuous engagement.
- We are listening.

TRIBAL RELATIONS SPECIALIST PROGRAM

- In fact, it was Indian country partners who wisely pointed out that our nation-to-nation relationship requires ongoing communication.
- That is, continuous engagement that occurs throughout the decade, not just before a decennial census.
- As a direct result of this feedback, we established a new Tribal Relations Program at the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Last year the program hired several full-time staff who are dedicated to tribal support continuously...between decennial censuses.
- All four of our tribal relations specialists are enrolled tribal citizens.
- We are honored to have them as colleagues.
- In fact, one of them is here today.
- Allow me to introduce Alaina Capoeman ***ah-LAY-na CAP-oh-man Davis***, a citizen of the Quinault Nation.
- Ms. Capoeman ***CAP-oh-man Davis***, please stand so we can see you.
- This wonderful human being serves tribes for the state of Alaska.
- Please, please—don't hesitate to reach out to her for any issues or concerns.
- Our tribal relations specialists meet with tribal leaders, officers, and urban Indian partners across Indian Country.
- They allow us to have more ears on the ground to listen to your concerns and to better understand them.
- Ultimately, they help us to provide tribal nations and the people of Indian country with better, more relevant data...your data.
- The work they do includes things like:
 - Building and growing our partnerships with tribal governments.
 - Assisting with geographic programs that include tribal boundaries, including trust lands, which can affect data tabulations that may be important to your communities.
 - Connecting tribal nations and tribal communities to data products and services for community planning.
 - Providing tribal cultural awareness training to Census Bureau staff, especially our Field staff.
 - Exploring permissions from tribal nations to access tribal lands for surveys and the decennial census.
 - Gathering input on planning the upcoming 2030 Census.

- Spreading the word to the people of Indian Country—especially on tribal lands—about employment opportunities at the Census Bureau.
 - These can range from professional positions to local “work from home” part-time jobs.
- The work of our tribal relations specialists is already beginning to bear fruit.
- For example, this year we had the highest ever response by tribal nations to our Boundary and Annexation Survey.
- This is an annual survey we conduct to maintain up-to-date legal boundaries of tribal nations.
- The tribal relations work with tribes—
 - To answer questions about how to provide boundary updates.
 - To verify that we’re reaching with the best tribal contact.
 - To communicate the importance of participating.
- We are doing all we can to develop more accurate tribal boundaries.
- And that will benefit tribes and tribal citizens through more accurate data.

IMPORTANCE OF TRIBAL DATA

- Now, I’ll talk a little about tribal data.
- We know that you use data for governance, for public health, and for economic planning.
- Our tribal relations specialists can help you navigate your data to fit your needs.
- We also will be engaging tribes in the design and development of new statistical products that specifically meet your needs.
- We realize that no single survey can capture all the areas that are important for your planning needs.
- Think about topics such as climate extremes, broadband deployment, the gig economy.
- Historically, we churn out statistics from individual censuses and surveys...one at a time...often in the form of tables.
- We want to change that.
- Instead, we’d like to find out the information *you* need for *your* planning and governance.
- We want that to guide the development of statistical products that are tailored to better fit your needs.
- We’ll be engaging tribes to explore statistical products with the American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) community in mind.
- We’ll use the tribal listening sessions as the starting point for this feedback.
- In turn, that feedback will be used to assemble existing data assets and methods that specifically address tribes’ needs, as well as the needs of the broader AIAN community.
- This effort is called *Statistical Products First*.
- The name reflects our starting point...the data needs of the user.
- In fact, tomorrow’s listening session will cover this program in more detail.
- Please note that this approach also represents our commitment to data equity and access.
- And of course, this data effort is just one as part of our commitment to larger, continuous engagement with tribes.

RECENT DATA RELEASES

- Next, I want to mention a few recent data releases that may be of interest to you.
- One is the 2020 Census Detailed Demographic and Housing Characteristics File A, or Detailed DHC-A.

- Released in late September, it's a rich treasure trove of data for detailed racial and ethnic groups and AIAN tribes and villages.
- It provides population counts for 300 detailed race and ethnic groups, and about 1,200 AIAN tribes and villages.
- Last June we released another product—the 2017–2021 American Community Survey AIAN tables for tribes.
- The tables include characteristics like educational attainment, occupational status, and poverty status for specific population groups for tribes.

CENSUS/BIA MOU

- I also want to mention that the Census Bureau and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs have revised our previous Memorandum of Understanding.
- This agreement improves data sharing between the agencies on geographic boundaries for American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.
- We know that updated boundaries are highly relevant to tribes.

2030 CENSUS

- And finally, we've begun preparing for the 2030 Census.
- We look forward to tribal consultations seeking your input.
- In fact, if your tribal nation would like to host one our 2030 Tribal Consultation sessions, please let us know.

CONCLUSION

- I'll close by reiterating that we very much look forward to a continued partnership with you.
- We are absolutely committed to a strong, ongoing working relationship.
- We're confident that we can better meet your needs and produce useful statistics about the American Indian and Alaska Native population.
- We invite your tribe to reach out to us to give you and your staff a presentation on any census data products we have released or soon to be released.
- I'll end by again encouraging you to attend our tribal listening session tomorrow morning, beginning at 8 a.m. in **Room Tikhtnu *Teh-kah-new B.***
- I look forward to our discussion and do have other census data experts here with me to help with questions or clarifications.
- Thank you again for inviting me to speak to you.