

FOR THE RECORD ONLY

***TESTIMONY
OF
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AMERICAN SAMOA GOVERNMENT

JOINT HEARING

***INFORMATION POLICY, CENSUS, AND NATIONAL ARCHIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE***

AND

***INSULAR AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE
NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE***

"CENSUS DATA: SPECIAL ISSUES RELATED TO U.S. TERRITORIES"

***WEDNESDAY, MAY 21, 2008
2154 RAYBURN HOB
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1. Purpose

This testimony is presented to the Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on the Census to encourage the Federal government to collect timely economic and demographic information for the United States Territory of American Samoa as it does for the fifty states, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

2. Background Information

The history of census taking in American Samoa goes back to the eighteenth century when it was first conducted by explorers and then by missionaries who brought Christianity to the islands in 1830[1]. Charles Wilkes was one of the first Americans to call on the island of Tutuila in 1839, and because of its naturally protected deep harbor Pago Pago became a popular port of call for American ships. In 1872, Commander Richard Meade of the USS Narragansett made agreements with the High Chief of Pago Pago to establish a coaling station on the island. In 1900, President McKinley directed the navy to establish United States presence that eventually led to the signing of the deeds of cession. The Naval Administration conducted the census for the new territory in 1900 and 1912.

Conducted in 1920, the 14th census of the United States was the first census to include the Territory of American Samoa as part of the US Decennial Population and Housing Census Program. Since 1920 and up until 1999, the decennial population and housing census (held every ten years) included the Agricultural Census Questionnaire. American Samoa was first included in the regular Quinquennial Agricultural Census of the United States Department of Agriculture in 1999. The first Economic Census of American Samoa was completed in 2003 for the year 2002. All censuses were conducted through memorandum of agreements between the US Bureau of Census and the American Samoa Government. Federal funds were made available for census enumeration by the local government and all forms and questionnaires were forwarded to census processing sites in the mainland.

American Samoa continues to depend on the census long form for data gathering because there is no other means of capturing data. There is also no other source of data needs for American Samoa as mandated by law except the census. Census contents and tabulation needs of American Samoa follow stateside conventions except for some minor adjustments. Subjects ranging from age, birthplace, education, employment, disability, veteran status, migration, family size, housing characteristics, etc. have been asked on the census forms. However, mainland and American Samoa census forms are slightly different. These variations were necessary to customize appropriate subject matters befitting mainland and local standards. Response categories in these census forms have been modified to better describe unique socio-economic conditions of the island population.

The lack of information on American Samoa has been cited in many reports issued by federal agencies. Recently, the Department of Labor's report on the impact of the minimum wage and escalating clause stated, "the Department's research was limited due

to short time frame and the lack of timely labor market data for American Samoa.”

The Employment Statistics program provides detailed monthly information by industry sector regarding the total level of payroll employment, payroll hours of production and non-supervisory workers, and hourly and weekly earnings of production and non-supervisory workers. These surveys provide national estimates as well as estimates for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and over 400 metropolitan areas and divisions. The monthly survey of households (the Current Population Survey (CPS), a joint BLS and the Census Bureau program, provides detailed estimates of national labor force participation, employment and unemployment. The CPS also collects data on wage and salary workers’ median usual weekly earnings and publishes quarterly earnings estimates. Both surveys have been important sources of data for research regarding the impact of minimum wage increases in the United States over the past fifty years. The lack of such data for American Samoa and CNMI significantly impairs efforts to measure or to project the impacts of scheduled minimum wage increases for these territories.” (*Impact of Increased Minimum Wages on the Economies of American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands*. Prepared by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy U.S. Department of Labor January 2008.)

Another important document sanctioned by the US Congress called “The Economic Commission Report” and issued in 2002 also noted, “American Samoa lacks the necessary economic and statistical data needed to measure economic activity or to do comparative studies.” The Commission explained that since American Samoa is not able to calculate her GDP, she lacks the ability to understand the true state of her economy. The Commission recommended, “ the United States Government and American Samoa Government allocate and maintain the necessary resources to develop a systematic method to record, track, and analyze data related to GDP and other economic indicators in order to properly measure and guide the Territory’s economic growth.” [2]

As part of the United States, we ask that we are accorded at least the same benefits and programs such as the BLS Current Employment Statistics and the Current Population Survey (CPS) that the United States has made available to other US Territories.

3. Information Requirement Issues

a. The Law.

Title 13 of the United States Code, Chapter 5, Subsection 191 states that (a) each of the censuses authorized by this chapter shall include each State, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and as may be determined by the Secretary of Commerce, such other possessions and areas over which the United States exercises jurisdiction, control or sovereignty. Inclusion of other areas shall be subject to the concurrence of the Secretary of State. (b) For censuses taken in the Virgin Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marian Islands, or any possession or area not specifically designated in subsection (a) of this section, the Secretary may use census information collected by the Governor or highest ranking Federal official, if such

information was obtained in accordance with plans prescribed or approved by the Secretary of Commerce.

Apart from the Freely Associated States, American Samoa is the only United States Territory not specifically designated and named in the census act. The inclusion/exclusion of American Samoa in the census is solely up to the discretion of the Secretary of Commerce and since the enactment of the census act our socio-economic situation has changed drastically yet the Secretary of Commerce has not determined that these changes justify the inclusion of American Samoa in the census act. We highly recommend that the Secretary of Commerce immediately exercise his authority under Title 13, Chapter 5 USC and include American Samoa as being subject to application of all censuses authorized therein. We also recommend that the authority in all other similar statutes be exercised to specifically include American Samoa in all additional survey programs now conducted for the fifty states and other territories.

b. Information Gap and the Unfunded Mandate.

The population, housing, agriculture and economic censuses are the only federal statistics programs that are being carried out by the Bureau of Census for American Samoa. The second part of a statistical program deals with periodic surveys and sampling projects. American Samoa is excluded from any federal or Census Bureau surveys. While American Samoa has conducted local demographic, socio-economic surveys the Census Bureau in accordance with the Title 13, Chapter 5, has not sanctioned any of these surveys. The absence of any annual, quarterly or monthly statistics program acts widens the already immense information and timeliness gaps for the territory. Consequently, statistical needs and data requirements of many federal programs for American Samoa are either not available, or are seriously outdated. The third area of statistical systems deals with administrative records and government by-products. This area is totally ignored by the Census Bureau and no support whether technical or financial is given to American Samoa to address this important gap. The American Samoa Government and the Department of Interior, Office of Insular Affairs bear the brunt of all costs of this unfunded statistical mandate.

The law calls for the collection of demographic, social and economic data for States and Territories, yet American Samoa is not getting fair treatment under the law. The next census is in 2010 and American Samoa after relying on data from the previous census will finally have current statistics for federal programs and for planning. After that, we will once again have to wait for the next census in 2020 for updates. So unless funding is made available to carry out necessary and periodic surveys or we are included in the census act American Samoa will have no choice but to use outdated data to plan for its needs.

c. Critical Surveys.

States get monthly surveys while American Samoa does not. As stated earlier, American Samoa is excluded from all inter-census surveys of the federal system such as the Current Population Survey (CPS), the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), the American Community Survey (ACS), the mid-decade survey and many other surveys

carried out by federal agencies.

The above-mentioned surveys are critically needed to fill in the territory's current data gap. If the Census Bureau determines that American Samoa's population is too small for consideration in national samples, then exemptions and specialized statistical programs should be put into place to accommodate our unique needs and characteristics. American Samoa is treated as a State in matters of census taking. Therefore, it should be included and covered in surveys just like any other State.

e. Bureau of Census – Territory of American Samoa Relationship.

Many lessons have been learned from the long-term relationship between American Samoa and the Census Bureau. The first one is the swift change in cooperation from Census Bureau before and after census taking. The Census Bureau trusts the local government to conduct the census and to uphold the law when collecting information. However, once the enumeration is complete and all forms have been sent to the Census Bureau, the local government is deliberately prevented from accessing census details to compile statistical reports or to conduct detail analysis and special tabulation. American Samoa is included in the domestic process during the preparation and carrying out of census enumeration, but unfortunately it is treated under the international program for processing and tabulation of reports.

Maps were updated in the census enumeration phase that included a complete canvassing and map spotting of all housing units in the territory. This geographic information remains unavailable to our local government, and consequently prevents us from establishing and maintaining a master address filing system, as well as a sampling frame for survey projects. American Samoa is clearly at a disadvantage because our local agencies do not have access to the processed geographic information. TIGER/Line files provided by the Census Bureau are so off datum that some housing units are mapped as being in ocean waters.

Micro datasets are allowed for entities with populations over 100,000. Exemptions should be given to entities that are treated as States and with lower population than the targeted cutoff. Perhaps a 10 percent sample would be sufficient for the sake of disclosure requirements.

American Samoa waited for almost 5 years to get the census cross-tabulations from the 1980 census. In 1990, it took less than 2 years. In 2000 it was back to 4 years. The 2000 census cross-tabs for American Samoa was a special report rather than a standard Census Bureau report. American Samoa critically needs the census cross tabulation for federal funding and program planning. Yet the Census Bureau ignored the local government's recommendation for census products from the 2000 census.

f. Support from other Federal Agencies.

Federal assistance for statistical and data needs of Territories should be considered a priority and must be revisited for thorough examination. The statistical programs carried out by the Bureau of Labor for wage and hour, OSHA, labor force and employment,

unemployment, consumer price index, cost of living and many other surveys should include American Samoa. While the local government currently carries out some of these programs, review of standards and procedures and sanctioning of local government information for federal use must be carried out by this and other federal agencies. The support of the Bureau of Economic Analysis is warranted for improving economic statistics and a better understanding of island economies. USDA must consider inclusion of non-commercial agricultural activities in its regular programs particularly for geographic entities with substantial subsistence activities.

g. Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) Responsibilities

American Samoa was very fortunate to receive from OIA technical and financial support for many of its statistical development and capability programs. This successful relationship led to the establishment of the Statistical Enhancement Program (SEP) in 1986. Since then the SEP has assisted us in many statistical programs that include work studies, training, enumeration, data processing, statistical yearbooks, population monographs, etc. The SEP program was staffed mainly with islanders working on island statistics. Unfortunately, OIA no longer saw the value of this program and decided to cease funding of the OIA-Census Bureau reimbursement agreement. With the absence of technical and funding support from the Census Bureau and the recent closure of the SEP, American Samoa is left with an incomplete Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) report conducted in 2005. At the same time, the Census Bureau refuses to release the American Samoa 2005 HIES processed data so that American Samoa can seek other means of completing this important report.

h. Other concerns.

Like other US Insular Areas, American Samoa cannot participate as a full member in many United Nation programs where technical assistance and funding support is readily available simply because we are a Territory of the United States.

The Puerto Rico and Outlying Areas Branch of the Census Bureau should extend full coverage and support for not just Puerto Rico, but American Samoa and the rest of the US Territories as well. The branch should include support for census planning and all other statistical inquiries related to Island Areas. Centralizing Island Areas' unique statistical needs within one domestic branch program should streamline special needs and statistical system modifications that fit unique Island situations while maintaining and conforming to national norms.

4. Summary.

American Samoa requires the same US Census services available to the 50 states and other territories. American Samoa is especially interested in annual economic and demographic information. The absence of such information has prevented American Samoa from creating an annual time series to track economic and population on an annual basis. Consequently, when there is a need for information to track major economic conditions and trends, it must be done on an ad hoc basis by splicing together periodic benchmark information.

This annual information is especially important to our government at this time to adequately quantify the needs of our people before the US Department of the Interior and the Congress. It would have been very useful in attempts to gauge the impacts of recent federal increases in our minimum wage. In their study of this matter, the US Department of Labor cited the lack of such data in their inability to prepare such economic impact estimates. In this study, the US Department of Labor cited the lack of timely data on American Samoa as one of its major constraints.

As part of the United States, we ask that we be accorded at least the same benefits and programs such as the BLS Current Employment Statistics and the Current Population Survey (CPS) that the United States has made available to the fifty states and other US Territories. American Samoa remains patriotic to this great nation. Our sons and daughters have committed their lives to the protection of American values and a free world and our local populace remain committed to unconditional support of U.S. policies and troops deployed abroad. The United States Territory of American Samoa has the highest per capita fatality rate for the protection of freedom and world peace. It is only fitting that American Samoa be officially designated and named in the census act. As loyal people, who have unselfishly served the United States well since 1900, we ask that we be treated just like any other state of the Union and accorded all benefits and privileges every state so enjoys.

5. Recommendations

American Samoa recommends that Title 13 be amended to specifically designate and name American Samoa as a US Territory. We recommend American Samoa be included in all federal periodic surveys conducted by the Bureau of Census and Bureau of Labor Statistics that includes monthly surveys of employers and households for economic information, as are conducted in the 50 states, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. The laws providing for these programs should be amended to explicitly include American Samoa.

In the meantime, we recommend that the Secretary of Commerce immediately exercise his authority pursuant to Title 13 Chapter 5, and designate American Samoa for inclusion in all censuses authorized therein. Additionally, all similar authority in other statistical statutes should also be exercised to specifically include American Samoa in the same statistical and survey programs now conducted for the fifty states and other territories.

[1] Population of American Samoa, Country Monograph Series No. 7.1. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and South Pacific Commission, Chai Bin Park, 1979.

[2] American Samoa Economic Advisory Commission, Transforming the Economy of American Samoa Volume II, 2002.