



# **Southwest Voter Registration Education Project**

**United States Congressional House Committee on  
Oversight and Government Reform's Subcommittee  
on Information Policy, Census, and National  
Archives**

**2010 Census: Reducing the Undercount in the  
Hispanic Community Subcommittee Congressional  
Hearing**

**Testimony Prepared and presented by  
Lydia Camarillo  
Vice President SVREP**

**Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center  
200 E. Market Street, Room 103-A  
San Antonio, TX 78205**

**Monday, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2007**

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Chairman Clay and members Gonzalez and Rodriguez of the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Government Reform's Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, I am Lydia Camarillo Vice President for Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP), the nation's largest nonpartisan, nonprofit organization of its kind, with its mission to increase the participation of Latinos in America's democracy. Since its inception, SVREP has registered over 2.3 million Latinos throughout the southwest and southeast.

Thank you for inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee which will examine the United States Census Bureau's plans to work with community

organizations and state and local governments to ensure that Latinos and other minorities will be accurately counted in the 2010 census.

SVREP urges congress to utilize its full congressional oversight authority to ensure that the Federal government meets its constitutional mandates to count every person in the U.S. We urge Congress to protect and uphold the Constitutional obligation. Therefore, SVREP urges that the Census Bureau count every person living in the U.S., regardless of their legal status, and that the necessary resources be provided to the bureau so that they can meet this constitutional responsibility.

The Article I, Section 2, and the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution requires that every ten years, the federal government, through the Census Bureau, conduct an enumeration of every person (both citizen and non citizen) residing in the United States. This responsibility falls on the U.S. Census Bureau. An accurate count is essential for three reasons. First, it provides Congress with the necessary population data from which to determine how to apportion congressional representatives among the states. Second, it provides state and local governments population data to assist in the redistricting of state and local governmental representation districts. Third, it allows the congress and the federal government to allocate financial assistance among the states. In addition, the census data provides a wealth of information on population growth

patterns, demographic information, and statistical data to assist government and other policy makers and analysts in the shaping of public policy and legislation.

Historically, an incomplete and inaccurate census count denies Latinos and other communities of color their constitutional right to fair representation at all levels of government. An inaccurate count also deprive Latinos of the proper allocation of federal resources which are needed to assist such communities to form sound public policy to solve or alleviate issues faced in federal, state, and local governments, including counties, cities, school districts boards, water boards and so forth. An under count of the Latino and other ethnic communities must be prevented, cannot be justified or excused in this, the world's wealthiest nation. Undercounts often foster further distrust of the federal government in our community.

In the last Census enumeration, over 3.3 million individuals were left uncounted. The Census Bureau estimated that at least 1 million Latinos were not counted in 2000 count in spite of the numerous partnerships with Latino organizations, Bureau's efforts to count every person, and statistical adjustment of the census count. The undercount resulted in the loss of at least three congressional seats during the redistricting process in states like Texas, California and Florida. Moreover, Latinos also came up short during the redistricting processes of state and local municipalities, including

school districts and other political subdivisions. Thus, undercounts are unacceptable and must not be tolerated. SVREP urges congress, through its oversight function to ensure that undercounts are not repeated in the 2010 count. It violates the United States Constitution.

The 2000 undercount of Latinos resulted in the loss to our communities of thousands of federal dollars that should have been used at the state and local levels. The loss is unconstitutional and should not be accepted as common practice by the Federal Administration. Moreover, the United States congress should be diligent to prevent this type of behavior as common practice. It is up to Congress to make sure that the United States Constitution is upheld.

Over the decades, the Census Bureau has made an important commitment to work with national, statewide, and local nonprofit organizations to ensure an accurate count of the all persons in the Latino community, including U.S. citizens, non-citizens and those without legal status. SVREP urges Congress to continue this practice and hold the Census Bureau accountable for a full and accurate count of all person in the United States.

The Latino community and its leadership can be helpful partners in promoting the census among our community. Latino leaders and its organizations stand ready and committed to informing Latinos about the

importance of participating in the census and for full and accurate count of our community. But this does not mean that the Census Bureau or Congress can shirk its constitutional duties, or shift the burden of an accurate count on local communities.

Latino national organizations are prepared to advise and promote the importance of an accurate count. However, we will hold the Bureau and Congress to its constitutional obligations and mandates so that every Latino living in the United States at the time of the census is counted. Furthermore, the Latino electorate and leadership will hold the Congress responsible for its oversight on the Census Bureau for a full count.

An accurate and full count will depend on the Federal government's ongoing actions over the next years. Should the Federal government's actions contradict its assurances of a full and fair count, such that Latinos in our community feel they cannot trust the federal government gathering information, the results, I assure you, will be that communities of color not willing to participate in the Census count.

The Federal government must honor its mandate to count every person with absolute discretion, confidentiality and privacy. The information obtained during the count must be devoid of the current anti-immigrant sentiment that exists in our political environment. When one Federal agency in this case

the Census Bureau wants the Latino community to trust it and provide its confidential information. And other federal agencies, like the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are conducting immigration raids, these acts and actions only serve to relay the message that the federal government cannot be trusted to honor its word to maintain confidentiality. These actions will result in hundreds, if not thousands, of Latinos not taking part in completing their census forms. A repeat of what took place within the Latino community in the 1980's -- not trusting the federal government and taking part in the census enumeration. Therefore the federal government, all its agencies, must create an environment of trust and confidence within the Latino community and other ethnic communities.

SVREP makes the following recommendations based on the lessons learned over the last three Census enumerations and applauds these efforts if they are incorporated or once again used. We encourage the United States Census Bureau to fulfill its constitutional requirement according to the United States Constitution.

SVREP respectfully recommends the following steps to ensure a more complete and accurate count, but should not be limited to:

1. Provide legal assurances, from Congress, the President of the United States, and Bureau leaders and staff that communities can be confident

that their information will be held in complete privacy and confidentiality, and that it will not be shared with other agencies, particularly the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)

2. Allocate the necessary resources to count every Latino residing in the United States regardless of legal status
3. Provide local hearings on what the Latino community expects and anticipates from the United States Census Bureau
4. Partner with Latino national, statewide and local community organizations and leadership to promote the importance of a full and accurate count
5. Hire and train sufficient bilingual and Latino staff members early, who come from those communities that face historical undercounts -- I believe the Census *Bureau* calls these individuals *indigenous hiring*
6. Cultural awareness must be part of the training when conducting the count in high density communities.
7. Use the long form, and should not short cut by only using the short form and it should not resort to statistical sampling after the count is completed -- incomplete and inaccurate -- but should resort to making sure every person is counted from the get go.
8. During the "clean up" period of the count, if necessary, hire more individuals to help communities complete the form and if necessary it should provide more resources to ensure a complete and accurate count
9. Provide enough time to have a "clean up" period that is realistic and practical to ensure a full and accurate count.



Mr. Chairman, Congressional members Gonzalez and Rodriguez, thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Government Reform's Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives.