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October 2, 2007

The Honorable Jim Nussle
Director
Office of Management and Budget
252 Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Nussle:

We are writing to express our extreme concern and disappointment that the White House did not request language in the recent Continuing Resolution (CR) for FY 2008 which would grant the Bureau of the Census the spending flexibility necessary to stay on time and on track with the Administration's approved Plan for the 2010 Census.

We note that the Congress has routinely exempted the Census from the flat-line funding requirements of a CR in other years, most notably in 1998 and 1999 prior to Census 2000. Earlier this year, Commerce Department officials testified before both the House and the Senate and made it clear that a CR which did not exempt the Bureau of the Census would have significant, negative consequences for the intricate decade-long plan for the 2010 Census. Administration witnesses emphasized that without such language, a CR would dramatically jeopardize the accuracy, cost and coverage of the 2010 Census.

As you know, the Dress Rehearsal for the 2010 Census is scheduled to occur in just over six months. This is the last chance to test the vast changes in the census design -- what the Administration touts as the "re-engineered Census."

Census officials tell us that the CR may make it impossible to fund the final phase of the Dress Rehearsal, which could mean that for the first time in 40 years, we can't test the final Census design, even as we undertake the most significant reform of the Decennial since the advent of the Long Form.

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October and November are critical decision points in several major contracts of the re-engineered Census, including the handheld computers which will reduce the enumerator labor-force, and make the Census more cost efficient and accurate. The scope of this contract awarded to Harris Corporation in March 2006, includes 500,000 handheld computers with GPS capability providing a geographic link to the national Master Address File, an office computing environment for 12 Regional Census Centers, a Puerto Rico Area office, and some 455 Local Census offices.

The public record of Administration testimony suggests that without the ability to test this new technology in the Dress Rehearsal, we risk turning back the clock to a paper and pencil Census. Such an outcome would require the Census Bureau to double the enumerator labor force to almost a million, and add billions of dollars to the total cost of the Decennial Census.

We can not overstate our concern for these risks, and our commitment to a full, fair, complete and accurate count in the 2010 Census.

Therefore, we are requesting an expedited response from the Office of Management and Budget regarding what steps you are taking to permit the career professionals at the Census Bureau to stay on time, on track, and on plan with the 2010 Decennial design.

Specifically, we ask for your personal written assurance that:

1. There will be no scaling back, cancellation or delay in the Dress Rehearsal as planned.
2. Nothing in the CR language will hinder, delay or deny the planned funding and execution of the contracts for the handheld computers, the advertising program, the partnership program, or the data capture program.
3. That OMB will use every means necessary to grant Bureau of the Census officials any waivers or exemptions from Administration spending restrictions in order for them to meet these requirements.

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The Subcommittee requests your response no later than 5:00 p.m., on Friday, October 9, 2007. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Darryl Piggee, Staff Director/Counsel, at 202-226-0541, or Alissa Bonner, Professional Staff Member at 202-226-3507.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Chair
Oversight and Government Reform Committee



Wm. Lacy Clay
Chair
Information Policy, Census,
and National Archives
Subcommittee



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