

Critical Budget Issues Affecting the 2010 Census – Part 2

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***Perspectives from:
Census 2000***

**Information Policy, Census,
and National Archives Subcommittee**

**The Honorable William Lacy Clay, Chairman
Wednesday, July 30, 2008
2154 Rayburn HOB
2:00 P.M.**

Chairman Clay and other distinguished Members of the Sub-Committee – it is an honor and a distinct pleasure to appear before you today to share my thoughts on the impact of a Continuing Resolution or any other budgetary interruptions, on the ability of local and regional staff to conduct a complete and accurate 2010 Census.

My testimony, today, will hopefully provide context for your discussions and deliberations from the perspective gained during my tenure as Associate Director for Field Operations of the Census Bureau for Census 2000. As a point of reference, Field Operations, which include Regional Census Centers and Local Census Offices, as well as Headquarters Field staff all report to the Associate Director for Field Operations. My remarks focus on the interconnectivity of decennial operations and the impact on local governments, partners and stakeholders.

Census 2000

First, I am extremely proud to have been involved in the 2000 Census, considered the most successful Census in history. I had the privilege of working with dedicated career Bureau staff, talented temporary staff, and committed partners, stakeholders and government officials. These individuals worked under difficult circumstances that included the usual frustrations and challenges that accompany any decennial. Notwithstanding any of these issues, the 2000 Census was planned and implemented in a unique and productive manner.

We prided ourselves on conducting a Census campaign based upon a “ground-up” partnership strategy at all levels. Whether address canvassing, or recruiting, local census office management, the Partnership Program, or any of the other key operations – we engaged partners and stakeholders at all levels.

2010 Census Perspectives and Concerns

The decennial Census is one of two major acts of civic engagement that allows the American people to take an active role in the processes that directly impact their way of life. Every major part of their lives is touched through the act of completing the census questionnaire – from the schools their children attend, to the availability and access to public services; to political representation. Therefore, I still view the Bureau’s ability to perform well as a matter of great importance to state and local governments and to the general public.

Discussions that imply that the Census is far away and there is time to absorb any changes, or delays that may occur, and that the Bureau can still produce an accurate and complete count are simply not the case. The Census is the largest peace time mobilization in this Country with numerous moving parts that must be planned, tested

and implemented with precision for the overall decennial to be successful. The 2010 Census is underway and the “train has left the station”.

As Associate Director for Field Operations, whenever I thought of the decennial census, and the programs and operations, I automatically considered how our actions would impact the people we served. How does a local mayor in a rural town comply with our address canvassing and Local update of Census Addresses (LUCA) requirements? How do we better reach and motivate historically undercounted populations? What can be done to better assist Local Census Office (LCO) managers and their staffs perform amidst new procedures with untested enumerators? How do we identify and engage the most effective partners to reach the hardest to enumerate? I pondered these questions and many more with my Headquarters and regional staff in efforts to be more responsive to the folks at the local level – which is where the Census happens.

This may seem obvious but my testimony today will focus on the things that were important to me as Associate Director for Field Operations:

- ✓ **What is the importance of a Local Census Office (LCO) in conducting a successful Census?**
- ✓ **How do our actions at Headquarters impact local areas?**
- ✓ **How do we ensure a complete and accurate census?**
- ✓ **How do we reduce the differential undercount?**
- ✓ **How can we empower local partners and stakeholders to ensure a complete and accurate census in their community?**

These questions remain a concern for me today. Any interruption of funding, resource changes or schedule modifications would negatively impact each of these areas.

Let's look briefly at the areas identified:

- ✓ **What is the importance of a Local Census Office (LCO) in conducting a successful Census?**

A Local Census Office is one of the basic building blocks for all of Field Operations. There are approximately 500 LCO's that must be leased, furnished and staffed. The leasing process is essential and the space must meet size, safety, transportation and location requirements to optimally satisfy the need of each region. A 1-2 year lease for office space is usually more expensive and harder to find than longer length leases. During 2008, about a third of these offices must be opened to provide a working environment and facilities to meet the needs of address canvassing operations and to house LUCA materials submitted by local governments.

After a lease is signed, each LCO may require a lead time of 3 to 6 months or more to become Field operational. Each office has electrical, telecommunications, security, and special field infrastructure needs and must pass a comprehensive checklist prior to being declared operational. Once operational, the staff of each LCO must conduct a series of systems and equipment tests to ensure that payroll, personnel, and administrative systems work as planned. Office furniture, materials and supplies and maintenance support must be scheduled for each office before work can begin.

Now that the manner in which non-response follow-up will be conducted has changed, it will be more important than ever to ensure that each LCO meets new specifications required for this important operation. The LCO will also serve as the center for outreach and partnership activities for each local census area. Partnerships specialists will use the LCO to store census awareness materials, to serve as the center for establishing complete count committees, and to conduct other local community and government partnership activities.

Finally, each LCO must be configured to meet stringent operational specifications. Transportation, size, cost and location considerations require that the leasing process take place early enough to meet operational deadlines. Systems, furniture and materials must be scheduled for delivery to coincide with each LCO opening. A continuing resolution would be catastrophic and have a domino effect throughout all of Field Operations.

✓ **How do our actions at Headquarters impact local areas?**

When the Bureau develops decennial operations, strategies and programs they are tested and evaluated to ensure that all state and local governments are capable of complying. The effectiveness of a strategy and program is measured for application and consistency. Any delay or interruption of funding would impact state and local governments in ways that they may be unable to recover from. For example, delays in address canvassing increase the likelihood that other changes would be made to the operational schedule and therefore impact a local government's ability to participate. The growth and expansion that most towns and cities have experienced since Census 2000 means that address canvassing is even more important to ensure that questionnaires are sent to valid addresses.

Economic challenges, gas prices and the housing crisis have certainly impacted the living arrangements of many Americans and address canvassing and the Partnership Program are critical to the accuracy and completeness of the addresses, in such situations. Fuel prices and the housing crisis have also impacted the local tax base, which has squeezed local and state government budgets and staff. Therefore, the ability of these offices to take a more active role in many decennial operations is limited, and any Bureau changes or delays would be devastating for them.

✓ How do we ensure a complete and accurate census?

To ensure a complete and accurate census, decennial operations, key strategies and programs must be fully funded and work in concert at the headquarters, regional census center and local census offices to be most effective. The Census Bureau regional census centers and local census offices must recruit, hire and train thousands of staff. Background checks must be performed and training must be arranged and conducted. These may seem like simple tasks but they are far from simple or easy. Consider this, with approximately 500 LCOs and 12 regional census centers, thousands of people must be recruited, tested, interviewed and trained. Hundreds of suitable, free space must be secured to conduct testing and training. Trainers must be trained and thousands of pages of material must be printed before any of operation can begin. Adequate training and preparation is never an area that the Bureau compromises on and I'm sure they will not do so now.

I have briefly highlighted general tasks that must be performed prior to the start of any operation and each of these tasks is conducted by staff already in place. Partnership Specialists assist with recruiting, community awareness and are responsible for securing space for testing and training. Delays would impact the Partnership Program's ability to hire and training the Partnership Specialists needed to establish the infrastructure for a complete and accurate Census.

Likewise, local governments, partners and stakeholders must work together with local Census staff to identify the hard-to-enumerate areas and populations and implement an effective strategy specific to that community in order to be successful. Ensuring a complete and accurate census requires ongoing education, outreach and awareness of a community. Each community is different, with unique challenges and concerns that are addressed via local census office operations and Partnership Specialist strategies. In most cases, those issues and concerns must be focused on and planned for long before Census Day.

✓ How do we reduce the differential undercount?

Historically, there are segments of the population that have been undercounted. Traditionally, those most likely to be undercounted have been minorities, the poor, individuals living in rural and urban areas, undocumented immigrants, the transient and homeless and children. Those undercounted have been divided into two basic categories: a) **hard to count** and b) **hardest to count**. Typically, the **hard to count** are those considered apathetic, uninformed, misinformed or disinterested in participating. These individuals could be informed, educated and motivated to complete and return the questionnaire. The **hardest to count** are individuals with some barrier (s) that prevents them from participating in the census. For example, individuals with language isolation or literacy challenges; are hard to locate or those who do not wish to be counted for other reasons.

In the last ten years, our population has grown and individuals considered **hard to count** and **hardest to count** has also grown. We have become a more diverse Nation and since Sept. 11th, we have become a more protected and withdrawn society. To effectively reach these populations, the Census Bureau must be in a position to implement the most robust Partnership Program and Communications campaign possible. Individuals in these categories require more localized, community-based awareness, education and motivation efforts. The Bureau must be provided the resources needed in the timeframe recommended, to reduce the differential undercount.

From our Census 2000 experience, we learned that the Partnership Program is the most effective means of reaching the **hard and hardest to count**. Groundwork, networks and trust must be established in challenging communities and re-established in others to engage the “right” partner or community leader to join in efforts to count everyone. Although the Bureau will hire indigenous individuals as Partnership Specialists, the number of new communities and isolated groups has grown since 2000, thus requiring more time and resources to be effective.

The Communications Contractors need time to prepare materials, reproduce and distribute materials for Partnership Specialists, partners, stakeholders and local Complete Count Committees. Any interruption in resources would have a devastating impact on the efforts of those working in **hard and hardest to count** areas. The outreach, education and motivation processes are time consuming, time sensitive and necessary to change behavior.

Regional Census Centers and LCO staff depends heavily upon the productivity of Partnership Specialists who would be severely challenged by any funding delays. The current Partnership Program staff is small but the workload and performance requirements do not change. The Bureau’s inability to hire additional Partnership Specialists could very well be an insurmountable circumstance. Time is the independent, uncontrollable variable that impacts every operation, strategy and program that is exacerbated by delays.

✓ **How can we empower local partners and stakeholders to ensure a complete and accurate census in their community?**

During Census 2000, the Census Bureau successfully engaged over 140,000 partners to ensure a complete and accurate census count in their communities. As phenomenal as that is, it demonstrates two important things:

- ✓ Local communities, leaders, and organizations were willing to join and initiate efforts to get a complete count. And
- ✓ Census Bureau’s ability to communicate a consistent Census message that local communities could take ownership of and promote.

As concerns and issues about the 2010 Census are discussed in the media, the public will become increasingly wary of the overall census process and the accuracy and credibility of the data. State and local governments, local partners and stakeholders must have confidence in the decennial process and the Bureau's ability to conduct a complete and accurate Census in their communities. The Census Bureau needs the adequate resources and the time needed to engage the community in ways necessary to ensure an accurate and complete count. Public trust is a concern of local partners and stakeholders and should be a concern of everyone.

Any funding shortfalls and subsequent time delays would leave the Bureau and the Nation with a critical and necessary "product" (2010 Census) that the public does not trust, and without trust the Census is doomed. No amount of money or advertising can overcome "distrust of the product" within sixteen months. Trust is built through other sources that believe in the "product". For that level of trust to be shared, the Bureau's partners and stakeholders must be confident that the 2010 Census is on schedule and local assistance is available to them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I realize, from first hand experience that planning and implementing a decennial Census is complex, time consuming and rewarding. However, in order to get to the part that is rewarding, you must endure and work through the complex, challenging and time consuming parts. To do that, the Census Bureau staff needs adequate resources and support to move completely into decennial operations and programs without interruptions.

As proud as I am of our work during the 2000 Census, I am more proud of the quality and integrity of the data that was collected. The public deserves the Bureau's highest and best service and local communities depend upon the accuracy and completeness of that data.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hope I was able to add another perspective to this hearing. I am available for questions.