

Opening Remarks

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First, I want to thank President Obama for nominating me to this position. It is a singular honor to be asked to serve the public in this role. Second, I want to thank my family and collaborators in research projects for graciously making changes in their lives to accommodate me. Finally, I want to thank my PhD students for their understanding about the shocks that my sudden departure caused them.

Mr. Chairman, I want to talk very briefly about four topics:

1. The necessary nonpartisan nature of the federal statistical system
2. The inherent scientific nature of government statistics
3. The management of large scientific organizations
4. The intersection of legal and statistical perspectives on the decennial census

Why the country needs a federal statistical system independent of partisan politics

I believe that a key attribute of a successful democracy is an informed citizenry. Throughout the world, government statistical agencies are one source of such information. Two key attributes of this information are important – credibility and accuracy. If the information is believed to be slanted by partisan influence, the credibility of the statistics is destroyed. Once destroyed, the public trust cannot be easily or quickly restored. In short, when the people do not believe statistics from the government, the very foundation of the “informed” citizenry is destroyed. Hence, government statistical agencies must be independent of partisan politics. Trust and professionalism breeds credibility; credibility breeds use of data for decision-making; use is key to the informed citizen.

I am pursuing this post because I believe strongly that this country needs an objective, nonpartisan, professional Census Bureau. If confirmed, I will give my full energy toward that end.

The Inherent Scientific Nature of Government Statistics

Credibility of government statistics also depends on their accuracy. My research career has been devoted to the improvement of the quality and cost efficiency of sample surveys and censuses. I’ve learned that good scientific measurement of a dynamic population requires continuous research and development. Surveys as I studied them at the beginning of my career are inadequate to the task; constant scientific innovation is needed. Hence, at this time surveys and censuses are undergoing rather massive changes, forced by changes in societies that reduce participation in voluntary surveys, on one hand, and new measurement tools being developed, on the other. I want the Census Bureau to be viewed as a leader in these developments. Science and a scientific organization must be creative, transparent, self-critical, open to new ideas, and wise to grasping ultimate success from intermediate failures. The director of a federal statistical agency must be free to speak on scientific matters unfettered by political influences. If confirmed, I intend to do so.

The Management of Large Scientific Organizations

The 2010 Census is upon us; it is, appropriately, a design that was set some years ago. I will not seek to change this. I know full well that right now the talented staff of the Census Bureau are working night and day to assure the best 2010 possible. If confirmed, I can and will lead the necessary tactical and quick management decisions that are inevitable in an operation as large as the Census. In this regard I will work with the executive team already assembled; I will be quick to seek advice and counsel from the brightest minds in the country; and I will be transparent in these activities with respect to the many stakeholders of the census. Management wisdom simultaneously extracts the best out of existing teams and seeks complementary help when necessary. I will do both. Beyond the decennial, the Census Bureau has over 12,000 staff members. They are engaged in providing key economic and social indicators, most important to this country at this time of economic difficulty. All of these face ongoing scientific issues of measurement and estimation. Effective leadership of a scientific organization must coalesce the staff about a common vision, consistently and repeatedly articulate that vision, and remain engaged in leading the activities. I look forward to this challenge, should I be confirmed.

The Intersection of the Legal and the Statistical on the Decennial Census

The constitutional and legal foundation of the decennial census must be respected. The US is one of the few countries that specifies a census in its constitution: a census in “the manner that Congress shall so direct.” Congress delegates to the Secretary of Commerce through Title 13 the authority to conduct the census; the Census Bureau director performs duties specified by law or orders of the Secretary. Further, the Supreme Court has ruled on matters affecting the Census, most notably the banning of the use of statistical adjustment for reapportionment use. Thus, all three branches of government play roles in the decennial Census, but Congress is granted the explicit primary responsibility in the constitution.

I understand the legal bases of the decennial census; I agree fully with Secretary Locke’s testimony that statistical adjustment of the census is eliminated as an option for reapportionment and further that statistical adjustment will not be used for redistricting. The 2003 decision of director Kincannon, consistent with this, assured that no implementation infrastructure for adjustment was put in place for 2010.

There is also the science-side of the job of the Census Bureau. Congress, through this committee and others, has consistently demanded innovation and increased accuracy in the Census. My job must be to constantly search for improvements in the ways censuses and surveys are conducted. When the Census Bureau discovers tools to improve the decennial census, then I believe its obligation is to describe these tools to the Secretary, Congress, and the scientific community. Given the constitutional responsibility of Congress, transparency and public comment are required for any acceptable change in the decennial census.

Mr. Chairman, those are my remarks on:

1. The necessary nonpartisan nature of the federal statistical system
2. The inherent scientific nature of government statistics
3. The management of large scientific organizations
4. The intersection of legal and statistical perspectives on the decennial census

In closing, let me note that as a statistician I welcome the attention that the 2010 census has generated. It is a wonderful opportunity to describe to the public how important good statistics are to the welfare of the nation. The widespread call for 100% participation in the Census by all parties is heartwarming. I hope that such interest in the federal statistical system will continue throughout the coming decade, and that the staff of the system be appreciated for what they give to the country. I especially look forward to working with this committee throughout the decade to assure the strongest Census Bureau this country can produce.
