



**Robert M. Groves' Remarks
Swearing In Ceremony
7-22-09**

Thank you Secretary Locke. It seems many months ago that you and I talked about this position. I want to thank you both and Under Secretary Blank for helping launch the new director of the Census Bureau.

We invited important people to this event from outside the bureau; my family, whom I thank for their love and support, former directors of the Census Bureau, presidents and representatives of scientific professional associations related to the mission of the bureau, heads of other federal statistical agencies and members of various organizations that provide advice to make the Census Bureau better.

They form a family, a support group, counselors, constituencies, critics, and translators of our work to the larger world.

We need them to do the wonderful work of this agency; their attendance at this meeting, leaving their incredibly busy schedules to spend a few moments of this time of transition of leadership at Census.

I want to begin, however, not addressing our guests, but addressing the staff of the Census Bureau.

I want to begin with words that, in my belief, you may hear too seldom. They are simply words, "Thank you, thank you for your service to the American public."

You have devoted your skills to making this country better, through providing information about itself.

You do this despite the fact that you and your families see the media coverage about "bureaucrats" who waste the taxpayer's money by their laziness. You know that's not you but it hurts.

You've seen your own institution attacked and it challenges your enthusiasm.

Well, I promise you that while I'm around here we're going to treat each other with respect, and we will celebrate our joint mission to serve the American public with the most cost efficient, highest quality statistical information we can produce.

The worldwide scientific community that produces demographic and economic statistics is at a crossroads.

The wonderful invention of the standardized sample survey in the 1940's (partly at this institution) appears to be increasingly out of sync with the diverse society and economy we measure.

The one-size-fits-all design of these tools is fraying at the edges. For example, our economic surveys quite efficiently rely on ongoing panels of sample establishments to measure the volume of economic activity, but we now know that a large part of the dynamics of employment growth comes from small firms that go in and out of business rather quickly.

Capturing births and deaths of economic units needs new approaches.

In the demographic area, we have seen throughout the western world an erosion of participation in traditional face-to-face telephone surveys, leading to uncontrolled inflation of cost and threats of non-response error.

We need new designs.

Most surveys methodologist envisions a much more complicated world of government statistics, one relying on complicated mixes of administrative record data, alternative modes of data collection, multiple phases of sampling and model-assisted estimation.

Most of us feel that we are on the cusp of a paradigm shift, a step-change that will get our methods realigned with the rapidly changing phenomena we study.

There is no better institution capable of leading the scientific community to that new world than the U.S. Census Bureau. If I didn't believe it, I wouldn't be here.

In the midst of this growing breach between how we measure and what we measure, the Internet is creating data at a rate that exceeds our ability to comprehend them.

In some countries of the world, volunteer Internet survey panels are now offering central government input to policy-makers.

These tools were rushed to production before their quality aspect were understood, in my belief.

It is said that "a rose is a rose" but it's not true that "data are data are data".

The Federal statistical system has a new challenge because of these developments.

Never before it is more important that we help the public understand the difference between misleading data and useful data.

I think of no better institution to play an important role in this effort than the Census Bureau.

The entire Federal statistical system is facing another crisis- that of skilled personnel.

I have noted that it is estimated that about 45% of current Census staff eligible to retire in the coming year.

This means we currently enjoy a wealth of experience in our senior staff.

It also means that we face immediate critical challenges of recruiting their replacements.

I am very concerned about this.

I will seek every legal way possible to attract the best new highly skilled staff that we need.

There are, however, two things you can do.

To those nearing retirement, as a legacy to your career, take a little time to pass your experience on to those you leave behind.

Document a little more than usual your work.

Tell the stories of key moments in your career that gave you the wisdom you now possess.

For those who are new to the Bureau, seek out the wise elders, listen to them, ask them about their experiences.

I have left, deliberately, the most obvious focus of my attention to last.

In a matter of moments, the Census family will be jointed by hundred of thousands of new members, as we enter the every-10 year national ceremony, time-honored, constitutionally based, a gift to democracy from us — the U.S. decennial census.

As we all know, there is no other federal agency charged with such a large undertaking, under such time constraints, with such social and political scrutiny.

I give special thanks to those who have devoted themselves to this task.

To those with several censuses under their belts, we need your wisdom over the next 18 months.

We, in this building, know that while the product of a census can be beautiful statistically (in its integrity and quality), the process of producing it is always messy, complicated — fraught with difficulties and temporary setbacks.

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Set backs will happen; the test of our professionalism is how we react to those events.

I am happy to report that for this census, we are supported by leaders of the new team at Commerce that understands this, that have the good will and judgment to recognize that production problems are best solved at the level that has the most information and control over those processes.

With Secretary Locke and Under Secretary Blank, we can get through the tough times over the next 18 months with clear heads, calmness, quick decisions and continuing support for the staff conducting the census.

For those staff watching this event who have been here for awhile...who have seen directors come and go...who have seen zero-based budgeting, total quality management, reinventing government...and have been left skeptical of any good coming from remarks I've just delivered...I ask you to suspend your disbelief for a bit.

Reach back to the first years you entered the bureau, remember the excitement of talking about the big problems for the first time.

We need you to rekindle that enthusiasm, because we need your ideas to meet the challenges of the future.

In closing, I am honored to join you as the 23rd Census Bureau director. I look forward to meeting all of you. Thank you.