OVERSIGHT OF THE 2000 CENSUS: MAIL-BACK RESPONSE RATES AND STATUS OF KEY OPERATIONS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CENSUS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENT REFORM

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SIXTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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OVERSIGHT OF THE 2000 CENSUS: MAIL-BACK RESPONSE RATES AND STATUS OF KEY OPERATIONS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2000

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CENSUS,
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2 p.m., in room 2247, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Dan Miller (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Miller, Ryan, Maloney, and Davis of Illinois.

Staff present: Jane Cobb, staff director; Chip Walker, communications director; Lara Chamberlain and Amy Althoff, professional staff members; Andrew Kavaliunas, clerk; Michelle Ash, minority counsel; David McMillen and Mark Stephenson, minority professional staff members; and Jean Gosa and Earley Green, minority assistant clerks.

Mr. MILLER. Good afternoon. A quorum being present, the subcommittee will come to order. There will be a vote in a short period of time, but at least we can get started with our opening statements.

Today we continue our series of oversight hearings into the 2000 census. Coming before the subcommittee today will be Dr. Kenneth Prewitt, Director of the Bureau of the Census, and Christopher Mihm, Acting Associate Director, Federal Management and Workforce Issues, U.S. General Accounting Office.

Before I go further, I would like to say to everyone listening or watching this hearing that if you haven't mailed in your census form, long or short, please take the time to fill it out and mail it back. The census can't be a success without your participation. The money needed to ensure that you have the roads, emergency services, day care, schools and other vital services are tied directly to the responses you give on your census questionnaire.

If you don't have a questionnaire or are concerned that you might be missed, you can call the Census Bureau's telephone questionnaire assistance line for help. That number is 1–800–471–9424. Let me repeat that, 1–800–471–9424.

If you have already mailed in your form, thank you for doing your part to ensure that America is accurately counted.

I've read Director Prewitt's testimony, and I must say that I am very impressed by the complexity of the current ongoing oper-

ations. For example, the Bureau deserves praise for the mail response Web site now available at www.census.gov. The ability for virtually any city or county to look and see their response rates daily, what it was in 1990, and how it compares to the national average is an important addition to this census.

Today, there are a number of different issues that I would like to address: The ongoing recruiting efforts as we approach the most difficult stage of the full enumeration, the nonresponse followup, which will be the most demanding task facing the Bureau in the full enumeration; the current mail response rate, on which the success of the census hangs; and then the ongoing controversy regarding the long form questionnaire.

Clearly the biggest controversy surrounding the census has been the perceived intrusiveness and the invasion of privacy of the long form. In 1998, the Census Bureau distributed this binder with the long form questions and explanations to all Members of Congress and the Senate and asked for comments. Few comments were received. Clearly, Members did not know at that time what the level of dissatisfaction would be just a mere 2 years later.

However, from the moment census forms were being received, it was clear that this was the No. 1 complaint received by the subcommittee. While the long form has always been less popular than the short form, the attitudes toward the 2000 long form seem to be particularly intense despite the fact that it is the shortest ever and only differs by one new question from 1990. During the 1998 dress rehearsals, the long form response rate was between 10 and 15 percentage points lower than the short form. However, this information was not provided to the Congress until June 1999, after the questionnaire had been approved.

From the first day that the forms were being received at millions of homes around the Nation, Members of Congress were receiving phone calls from constituents who were very upset about the long form. While some in Congress tried to downplay the extent of the problem, it was clear to me that this would be the biggest issue next to sampling that we would have to deal with in this census.

Every major newspaper in the Nation has written about the long form and the privacy issue. Electronic media from talk radio to television have weighed in. It would be a mistake or a callous political move to lay the blame for this controversy at the feet of Republicans. This Republican Congress has been nothing but committed to the census. Republicans have said from the start that the Census Bureau would get the resources it needed to conduct a fair and accurate census. Republicans have kept that promise. In fact, numerous Members have promoted the census in their districts in a number of different ways, including Census in the Schools events and public service announcements like the sample you will see now.

[Videotape played.]

Mr. MILLER. The reason why there is a long form controversy is because millions of Americans aren't comfortable answering the questions, and while some are quick to wag their political finger, more thoughtful consideration on this topic will be more constructive. Long before remarks by any congressional leaders, news stories were talking about the long form problems. The News Hour on

PBS had an entire segment on the privacy issue and the long form almost 2 weeks ago. On 60 Minutes, one of the most popular news shows on television with almost 13 million viewers weekly, commentator Andy Rooney voiced to the Nation two Sundays ago his criticism of the long form. He concluded his commentary by saying, "I am not going to fill out the long form. I'll send them about what a soldier has to give if he's captured in a war: my name, address and Social Security number. Otherwise, Census Bureau, count me out."

In my hometown in Bradenton, FL, my wife and I live next to an elderly woman in her eighties. She has trouble with her eyesight, so my wife assisted her in filling out her census form. There were several questions that she simply would not answer, including giving her phone number. She noted to my wife that Florida was a State that at one time sold its driver's license list, and she simply was not going to give her phone number to the Federal Government. And while we all know that the census operates in a confidential environment, I believe we must all realize that it is exceptionally difficult for government to separate its entities. A violation of privacy on the State or local level, in people's minds, translates to all levels of government, including the Federal level. To the average person, government is government.

Another factor at work here is computer technology and the Internet age. While both have brought tremendous convenience to our lives, grown our economy and fundamentally changed the way Americans live, they each have also brought new privacy concerns. While our government reaps the benefits of our technological prosperity, government must also share the burden of new privacy concerns. I also believe, sadly, that some of the recent scandals involving this administration, particularly the misuse of the FBI files, have not helped in building America's trust in her government. And while no single cause may be blamed, clearly there has been a change in attitudes toward trust in government since the 1990 census. Unfortunately, the 2000 census is feeling some of the brunt of this distrust.

So what does this all mean? What should people do who have that long form sitting on their coffee table or kitchen counter? To put it simply, fill it out and mail it in. Congress has heard the dissatisfaction with the long form loud and clear. However, to change our approach in the middle of the census is impossible.

In the coming months, my committee will hold hearings on the long form and privacy issues. All sides will have an opportunity to come to the table and be heard. This includes privacy advocates who believe the information is not needed and government data users who say the information is indispensable.

I must say, however, that this Congress will look to eliminate the long form for the 2010 census. Of course, we can't eliminate the long form in a vacuum. There is information that government needs to make informed decisions on the allocation of resources and the planning and distribution of $185 billion in funding. A new tool called the American community survey is being developed by the Census Bureau. Is that the answer? Maybe. This is going to take careful consideration by this subcommittee and eventually the Congress as a whole.

What is clear is that Republicans and Democrats must both work to promote the census. If one side or the other attempts to gain political advantage over the other during these critical weeks, then surely participation in the census will be hurt. An inaccurate census hurts America. An accurate census is in everyone's best interest. This is your future. Don't leave it blank.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Dan Miller follows:]

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE CENSUS
The Honorable Dan Miller, Chairman
H1-114 O'Neill House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515

Statement of Chairman Dan Miller
Oversight Hearing 2000 Census
April 5, 2000

Good afternoon. Today we continue our series of oversight hearings into the 2000 Census. Coming before the Subcommittee today will be Dr. Kenneth Prewitt, Director of the Bureau of the Census and Christopher Mihm, Acting Associate Director, Federal Management and Workforce Issues, U.S. General Accounting Office.

Before I go further, I'd like to say to everyone listening or watching this hearing that if you haven't mailed in your census form, long or short, please take the time to fill it out and mail it back. The census can't be a success without your participation. The money needed to ensure that you have the roads, emergency services, day care, schools and other vital services are tied directly to the responses you give on your census questionnaire.

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If you have already mailed in your form, thank you for doing your part to ensure that America is accurately counted.

I've read Director Prewitt's testimony and I must say that I'm very impressed by the complexity of current ongoing operations. For example, the Bureau deserves praise for the mail response website now available at www.census.gov The ability for virtually any city or county to look and see their response rates daily, what it was in 1990 and how it compares to the national average is an important addition to this census.

Today, there are a number of different issues that I would like to address: The ongoing recruiting efforts as we approach the most difficult stage of the full enumeration, non-response follow-up, which will be the most demanding task facing the Bureau in the full enumeration; the current mail response rate, on which the success of the census hangs; and the on-going controversy regarding the long form questionnaire.

Clearly, the biggest controversy surrounding the census has been the perceived intrusiveness and invasion of privacy of the long form. In 1998, the Census Bureau distributed this binder with the long form questions and explanations to all Members of Congress and the Senate and asked for comments. Few comments were received.

Clearly, Members did not know at that time what the level of dissatisfaction would be just a mere 2 years later.

However from the moment census forms were being received, it was clear that this was the number one complaint received by the subcommittee. While the long form has always been less popular than the short form, the attitudes toward the 2000 long form seem to be particularly intense despite the fact that it is the shortest ever and only differs by one new question from 1990. During the 1998 dress rehearsals, the long form response rate was between 10 and 15 percentage points lower than the short form. However, this information was not provided to the Congress until June of '99 after the questionnaire had been approved.

From the first day that the forms were being received at millions of homes around the nation, Members of Congress were receiving phone calls from constituents who were very upset about the long form. While some, in Congress, tried to down-play the extent of the problem it was clear to me that this would be the biggest issue, next to sampling, that we would have to deal with in this census.

Every major newspaper in the nation has written about the long form and the privacy issue. Electronic media from talk radio to television have weighed in. It would be a mistake or a callous political move to lay the blame for this controversy at the feet of Republicans. This Republican Congress has been nothing but committed to the Census. Republicans have said from the start, that the Census Bureau would get the resources it needed to conduct a fair and accurate census. Republicans have kept that promise.

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On 60 Minutes, one of the most popular news shows on television with almost 13 million viewers weekly, commentator Andy Rooney voiced to the nation 2 Sundays ago his criticism of the long form. He concluded his commentary by saying Quote I am not going to fill out the long form. I'll send them about what a soldier has to give if he's captured in a war: my name, address and Social Security number. Otherwise, Census Bureau, count me out. End Quote

In my hometown of Bradenton, Florida my wife and I live next to an elderly woman in her 80's. She has trouble with her eyesight so my wife assisted her in filling out her census form. There were several questions that she simply would not answer, including

giving her phone number. She noted to my wife that Florida was a state that at one time sold its drivers license list and she was simply not going to give her phone number to the Federal Government. And, while we all know that the census operates in a confidential environment, I believe we must all realize that it is exceptionally difficult for government to separate its entities. A violation of privacy on the state or local level, in people's minds, translates to all levels of government including the federal level. To the average person, government is government.

Another factor at work here is computer technology and the Internet age. While both have brought tremendous conveniences to our lives, grown our economy and fundamentally changed the way Americans live, they each have also brought new privacy concerns. While our government reaps the benefits of our technological prosperity, government also must share the burden of new privacy concerns.

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Unfortunately, the 2000 Census is feeling some of the brunt of this distrust. So what does this all mean? What should people do who have that form sitting on their coffee table or kitchen counter? To put it simply, fill it out and mail it in. Congress has heard the dissatisfaction with the long form loud and clear. However, to change our approach in the middle of the census is impossible.

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Mr. MILLER. Mrs. Maloney.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And welcome to our witnesses, Dr. Prewitt from the Census Bureau and Mr. Mihm from GAO. I've seen so much of you lately, it seems like we are becoming very old friends.

April 1, census day, was 4 days ago, and major census operations are now under way. Though the most labor-intensive activities are yet to come, all signs now are good. The largest peacetime mobilization in our history is under way, and I salute Director Prewitt and the census staff for an excellent job to date.

Right now, the key success indicator for the census is the mail-back response rate, how many households have mailed back their forms. As of today, that stands at 55 percent, or about 67 million households. That still leaves 45 percent of our Nation's households that have not returned their forms, and I urge everyone who has not mailed their form back to do so today, right now.

At 55 percent, however, it seems that the estimated response rate of 61 percent will be met, and I'm hopeful it might be exceeded. The Director has challenged the Nation to reach 70 percent, and I hope and think we might reach that mark. I don't want to sound too optimistic, but the hard work on the advertising campaign, the partnerships, and promotional activities appears to be paying off.

Other indicators are positive as well. Recruiting continues to go well, with the Bureau reaching its goal of 2.4 million qualified applicants by March 31, almost 3 weeks ahead of schedule. 25.5 million forms have already been scanned with continued high accuracy.

Update/leave operations were successfully completed on schedule, almost 6 million phone calls have gone to the 800 number, and 58,000 forms have been completed on the Internet.

The other night, I went out with Chairman Miller at 4 a.m. to watch the temporary employees that the census has hired from the community to count the homeless. It was incredibly impressive to see the dedication and commitment of this work force operating in the middle of the night in difficult and often hazardous areas. So, things are going about as well as could be expected operationally.

Considering the doom and gloom of just a few months ago on both the hiring needs and the mail response rate, things are, in fact, going remarkably well. The two major concerns raised by the GAO last December, hiring and response rates, are clearly on track, which makes the recent comments about the long form by senior Republicans all the more unfortunate.

Clearly one contingency that GAO could not warn us about are some of the irresponsible remarks that have been in the news lately by elected officials who should know better. Let me make clear I am not referring to the chairman of this subcommittee. He has been a supporter of the census and the long form throughout this latest turmoil. But several prominent Republicans, including Senator Lott, Governor Bush of Texas and J.C. Watts, Chair of the Republican Conference, have recently complained that the long form is too nosy, that it asks too many questions. Some of these individuals have even made public statements suggesting that Americans

should not complete their forms, despite the fact that refusing to complete these forms would be a violation of Federal law.

I think these comments are outrageous, irresponsible, pandering to fringe groups and the radio talk show circuit. They threaten the success of the census by driving response down.

We have Members of Congress saying that they "believe in voluntarily cooperating" with the government, but beyond that they won't follow the law. Since when did following the law in this country become a voluntary thing? What is really disingenuous is the fact that most of the questions on the long form have been around for decades. In fact, Ronald Reagan signed off on every single question in the 2000 census during preparations for the 1990 census, except for one required this decade by welfare reform.

Over 2 years ago, as the content of the long and short forms was being finalized, every Member of Congress received this book, a detailed list of the questions to be asked, including a description of the need for asking it, along with the specific legal requirements supporting it.

So this controversy, at this late date, strikes some as intentional sabotage. At the very least it is willful disregard for a successful census. While it may not be intentional, it clearly shows an ignorance of how incredibly useful census data is, and how much of a difference it makes in the lives of millions of Americans.

Let's look at the plumbing question the talk radio shows seem to focus on. Well, it may shock some, but there are places in this country where Americans don't have plumbing, in the Colonias in Texas, on Indian reservations, and I daresay probably in rural communities in Mississippi.

Or let's look at question 17 concerning a person's physical, mental or emotional condition in the last 6 months. Are some Members saying they don't want to know how big a problem this is, how many disabled Americans there are in this country, how many disabled vets, and where there are high concentrations of them who need services?

It is my understanding that some of these leaders have started to moderate their comments. Well, they shouldn't just moderate their comments, they should be in the forefront of urging all Americans to fill out their forms completely. They should be urging their members to join them in supporting the census, all of the census. Anything less is unacceptable. Unless they move quickly to fully support the census, we run the risk of irreparable harm.

And frankly, I am not only worried about the problems presented in response rates by this controversy. I'm also concerned about the welfare of the hundreds of thousands of Americans who will be going door to door in their neighborhoods in the coming weeks. So today I am happy to hear things are going well. I sincerely hope they will continue to go well, despite the impact of this controversy over the long form.

I look forward to hearing from Dr. Prewitt today on how he thinks this controversy will impact the census effort.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Carolyn B. Maloney follows:]

14th District • New York

Congresswoman

Carolyn Maloney

Reports

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Opening Statement of Rep. Carolyn Maloney
Hearing on the Status of Key Census 2000 Operations

April 5, 2000

Thank you Mr. Chairman. And welcome to our witnesses Dr. Prewitt, from the Census Bureau, and Mr. Mihm, from GAO. I've seen so much of you lately, it seems like we're becoming old friends.

April 1st, Census Day, was four days ago and major census operations are now underway. Though the most labor-intensive activities are yet to come, all signs now are good. The largest peace-time mobilization in our history is underway, and I salute Director Prewitt and the Census staff for an excellent job to date.

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CAROLYN B. MALONEY
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April 4, 2000

Newspapers from Across the Nation Support a Complete Census

Dear Colleague:

I write to bring to your attention recent editorials and columns from newspapers around the country that talk about Senator Lott's and Governor Bush's recent comments regarding the Census:

The Seattle Times, March 29th
Tulsa World, March 30th
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, March 31st
The Washington Post, March 31st and April 4th
The New York Times, April 1st
Sacramento Bee, April 1st
The Commercial Appeal, April 2nd
Atlanta Constitution, April 3rd
David Broder, Washington Post, April 4th

Sincerely,

CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

The Seattle Times Company
Editorials & Opinion : Wednesday, March 29, 2000

Overly overwrought about the 2000 census

On any given day, citizens are bombarded with dozens of legitimate, stress-producing worries. The U.S. Census Bureau, even its much-maligned long-form questionnaire, ought not be one of them.

Census questionnaires have been mailed to 120 million American households. The seven-question short form was sent to most households; a longer, more-detailed, 52-question form was delivered to one in six households.

Then the yowling began - The Snoops! The invasion of privacy!

The complaints are nine parts hype, one part hooey.

Two important developments have occurred since the last census was taken in 1990. The long form got shorter by four questions, and talk radio got louder.

In fairness to those with census jitters, more people nowadays are concerned about personal privacy. Frequent calls by solicitors and marketing companies wear down a person's patience and goodwill.

Remember, though, the census is the head count prescribed by the Constitution.

The people who make money by whipping up fear - and those who buy into it - substitute paranoia for logic.

The loudest concerns focus on question 31 on the long form, which asks people to report wages, salaries, commissions, bonuses or tips from jobs. This is not a scary question. The federal government, the Internal Revenue Service, already knows the answer for individuals. The Census Bureau is looking for data to report in the aggregate.

Before people allow themselves to be whipped into an unnecessary froth, remember the manner in which the data is reported. It is much like a series of USA Today headlines, "We're older," "We're more mobile, more diverse" and so on. The census doesn't announce that Joe Dokes at 123 Pine Street does or says anything. Nor does the Census Bureau share personal information with other agencies.

The questions provide a telling snapshot of America and help determine how large pots of tax dollars are spent on social programs, highways and mass transit, and how congressional seats are distributed among the states.

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Smile. A big family portrait is being painted with numbers. Nothing scary about that.

Tulsa World 3/30/00
Coburn: Down for the count

Rep. Tom Coburn is never going to come to his census. Count on it.

But the Second District Republican congressman should admit that the appropriate time to protest queries on the long form of the Census 2000 questionnaire was more than two years ago when the questions, all required by law (and who passes laws?) were circulated among members of Congress.

On Wednesday, Coburn essentially urged his Second District constituents to violate federal law by refusing to complete certain portions of their long-form questionnaires. One in six homes receives the long form.

``The Census Bureau's desire for information is out of control and a violation of privacy rights," Coburn said, adding, however, that his constituents should answer the ``essential" questions on the short form covering a person's name, sex, age, relationship, Hispanic origin and race.

The long form asks 27 more questions about 34 subjects, including marital status, income, mode of transportation to work and work status for the past year.

Coburn said that if a census worker shows up to collect omitted information, Oklahomans should ``politely refuse" to give it.

Coburn's position doesn't square with that of Gov. Frank Keating and other leaders who have encouraged Oklahomans to fill out the forms so that the state can receive the largest share possible of the $2 trillion in federal funds that are handed out on the basis of census figures. Some of the questions in the long form help agencies calculate the specific needs of a community.

``While I understand the reservations that some Oklahomans may have with regard to some of the questions on the long-form census questionnaire, I urge them to complete and promptly return the entire form to the census bureau," Keating said.

Coburn took his position after receiving complaints that long forms were invasive. He accused the census bureau of being ``out of control" and of violating Americans' privacy.

Even some other conservative members of the Oklahoma congressional delegation, including Rep. Steve Largent and U.S. Sens. Don Nickles and James Inhofe, do not appear to embrace Coburn's position.

If the U.S. Census Bureau is asking too many nosy questions, the time to protest is before the questions become law, not in the middle of a census. We should be able to count on our

elected officials to know what's going on in time to do something about it.

Washington Post, March 31, 2000

Census Bashing

THE CENSUS always produces complaints that an intrusive government is asking for more information than it has a right to know. Usually the complaints are scattered and come from the fringe. But this year some radio talk show hosts have taken up the issue, and now some national politicians who otherwise yield to none in insisting on law and order are telling constituents not to answer questions they feel invade their privacy.

The Senate majority leader, Trent Lott, is one such. He believes that people ought to provide "the basic census information" but that if they "feel their privacy is being invaded by [some] questions, they can choose not to answer," his spokesman says. Likewise Sen. Chuck Hagel, whose "advice to everybody is just fill out what you need to fill out, and [not] anything you don't feel comfortable with." Yesterday, George W. Bush said that, if sent the so-called long form, he isn't sure he would fill it out, either.

And which are the questions that offend these statesmen? One that has been mocked seeks to determine how many people are disabled as defined by law, in part by asking whether any have "difficulty . . . dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home." When it mailed the proposed census questions to members of Congress for comment two years ago--and got almost no response--the bureau explained that this one would be used in part to distribute housing funds for the disabled, funds to the disabled elderly and funds to help retrain disabled veterans. Are those sinister enterprises? A much-derided question about plumbing facilities is used in part "to locate areas in danger of ground water contamination and waterborne diseases"; one about how people get to work is used in transportation planning. All have been asked for years.

Earlier this year, Mr. Lott's Senate complained 94 to 0 that a question about marital status had been removed from the basic census form. That was said to be a sign of disrespect for marriage. Come on. This is a critical period for the census. All kinds of harm will be done if the count is defective. A politician not seeking to score cheap political points at public expense might resist the temptation to demagogue and instead urge citizens to turn in their forms. But in an election year such as this, that's apparently too high a standard for some.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel March 31, 2000

Census too important to ignore

It seems that lots of people are complaining about having to answer what they claim are invasive questions on this year's census form. Of course, some of these are people who willingly give their credit card numbers to telemarketers offering the latest in siding or to Internet sites that sell really cool lava lamps.

There are also plenty of members of Congress who are now all in a huff, saying they sympathize with citizens who are threatening to refuse to fill out the forms. One wonders what these guardians of the public good were doing when they reviewed - and apparently approved of - the same census questions they are now complaining about. And where they were 10 years ago, when the questions were virtually the same.

The fact is, it's important to fill out the census so the government has an accurate count and so the average citizen has adequate representation in Washington and receives his or her fair share of federal funds.

Admittedly, some of the questions are goofy, and threats to privacy should be of concern to everyone. But asking how many toilets you have is hardly sinister. Besides, the government already knows. Just ask your local assessor.

Government also already knows what race you are and whether you are a veteran. It keeps records on those kinds of things, just as businesses keep records of your commercial transactions.

It's easy to rail against government, but the greatest threat to privacy is not found in government census forms, but in the vast databases being built by private companies about their customers and potential customers.

Want something to worry about? Go to the Internet and search for information about yourself. What some of you may learn there is really scary.

And since the census gives the nation a profile of itself, determines the number of representatives a state has in Congress and decides where federal funds are distributed, the information serves a larger public purpose than that gathered by eBay or Amazon.com.

It is OK to be annoyed by the government for asking all these fool questions. But it's important to fill out the form and make sure the annoying information is at least accurate. Besides, the Census Bureau is barred by law from sharing its information about individuals for three-quarters of a century.

So the information on your toilets will be safe for at least that long.

The New York Times, April 1, 2000 Editorial

Civic Duty and the Census

Some Congressional Republicans are seriously undermining the 2000 census by suggesting that the national head count, which officially takes place today, is an invasion of privacy. That bizarre complaint could discourage the public from participating in a project that is crucial to the functioning of state and federal government. The questions on this year's long census form -- including questions on household income, plumbing facilities and physical disabilities -- have been part of the census for decades. The only new question asks for information on grandparents who are caregivers for children. In fact, this year's long form is the shortest one in 60 years. All answers on census forms are kept confidential. Yet Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska has suggested in recent days that people can simply ignore questions on the long form -- which goes to one out of six American households -- that they find intrusive. A spokesman for Senator Trent Lott, the majority leader, has made similarly inappropriate suggestions. Gov. George W. Bush of Texas has said that people should fill out the forms, but that if he received a long form, he was not sure he would want to fill it out either. These comments are irresponsible. Completing the census form fully and accurately is not optional; it is a civic duty that is required by law. Senator Hagel now says that he does not want to encourage people to break the law, but will introduce legislation to make most of the questions on the long form voluntary.

The federal government has spent billions of dollars trying to produce an accurate count as response rates have continued to decline with each decennial count. Accuracy is critical because the census is used to apportion seats in Congress, draw legislative districts within the states and distribute more than $185 billion in federal funds. The government uses information from the long form of the census to allocate money to communities for housing, school aid, transportation, services for the elderly and the disabled and scores of other programs. The data are also necessary to calculate the consumer price index and cost of living increases in government benefits.

When individuals fail to give complete information about their households, they risk shortchanging their communities of government aid that they may be entitled to. That is why many state and local government officials are working hard to increase census response rates in their communities. The mindless complaints of some politicians could well sabotage those efforts.

Sacramento Bee, April 1, 2000

Trashing the census: Irresponsible Bush comments could sabotage count

Just two days ago before Census Day, as U.S. Census Bureau officials were urging Americans to cooperate in the crucial once-in-a-decade national count, Texas Gov. George W. Bush made their job harder. If he had the long census form, Bush told a campaign crowd, he's not sure he'd want to fill it out either. How harmful to this important civic exercise; how irresponsible and unpatriotic.

Bush's remarks come on the heels of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott's advice to his fellow Americans not to answer any questions on the census long form that they believe invade their privacy. Taken together, those remarks by the leading Republican in Congress and the likely Republican presidential nominee can easily be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to sabotage the 2000 census. They raise questions about the integrity of the census that are unwarranted, unfair and irresponsible.

One in six households receives the census long form. Beyond the basic eight questions about the number, age, gender and race or ethnicity of people living in the household, the long form asks other questions designed to measure the well-being of Americans, to help government agencies to plan where to put schools or highways or health funding. Included in the long forms are 53 questions such as: How many bedrooms in the house? Has anyone been disabled by health problems in the last six months? Is there a telephone? What is the income of the household? Is there indoorplumbing?

By law the responses are strictly confidential. The U.S. Census cannot share individual household answers with the IRS, FBI, INS or any other government agency or private entity.

Moreover, every single question on the long and short forms is there because of a specific statutory requirement. Most of these questions have been on the form for decades. The only new question added since 1990 was put there at the behest of Republicans in Congress, including Lott. It asks grandparents whether they are caregivers for their grandchildren. The wording of each question was reviewed by Congress in 1997 and 1998. Lott, who now raises objections, pushed a resolution urging the Census Bureau to return to the short form a question about marital status that it had moved to the long form.

The census is the law of the land, enacted by the first Congress. When Bush says he wouldn't fill out the form, he's saying he's prepared to break the law. When Lott advises Americans not to answer questions they don't want to answer, he's telling them to break the law. And although both Lott and Bush limit their specific objections to the long form, the impact will inevitably reverberate more widely -- to those who only receive the short form.

In Sacramento, census officials report that the response to the census is already lagging. Only 39 percent of Sacramento households have returned the form so far. Every man, woman or child not counted costs $1,600 in lost federal funds. That's money that would go to our schools and highways and mental health and police protection.

Participating in the census is a civic duty, like voting, serving on juries and defending the country. As duties go, it's not burdensome; for most people, filling out the long form is a once-in-a-lifetime chore. With their thoughtless comments that feed mindless anti-government sentiment -- do they really think they can govern better by knowing less about America? -- Bush and Lott have done a disservice to the census and the country.

The Commercial Appeal (Memphis, TN), April 2, 2000

CENSUS - POLITICAL BASHING WON'T HELP ACHIEVE FULL COUNT

MISSISSIPPI has the lowest response rate of any state so far to this year's federal census: 38 percent as of late last week - and 48 percent in DeSoto County - compared to a 50 percent national rate. (Memphis has nothing to brag about, either; just 39 percent of Memphians have returned their census forms.)

At the same time, Mississippi is threatened with the loss of one of its five U.S. House seats in the population-based reapportionment that will follow the 2000 Census. So you'd think that officials throughout the state would be bending over backward to urge residents to take part in the fullest and most accurate count possible.

Why, then, did Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) propose that citizens refuse to answer any census questions they find too "invasive"? Although the senator insists he supports maximum participation in the census, it's easy to see how people who already are suspicious of the federal government might interpret Lott's suggestion as an invitation to blow off their civic - and legal - duty to take part in the national headcount.

Census bashing has become something of a national sport in recent days, as critics such as Lott allege that the initiative too often amounts to an invasion of privacy. Texas Gov. - and presumptive Republican presidential nominee - George W. Bush said last week that if he has gotten the long (53 question) census form that one of every six households has received, he wasn't sure he would fill it out.

These defenses of personal privacy ignore the fact that members of Congress reviewed each of the questions that appear on the long and short census forms two years ago. Instead of striking "intrusive" questions then, senators voted unanimously this year to protest the Census Bureau's removal of a question about marital status.

So it ill behooves lawmakers such as Lott to complain now about the questionnaire. Remember, too, that many lawmakers have opposed the use of statistical sampling to correct the census undercount of millions of Americans because they said it would violate the "integrity" of the process they now condemn.

It's understandable that some Americans might object to revealing their income on the census questionnaire, although individual census data must remain confidential as a matter of law. It's time-consuming to gather the information needed to answer some of the long-form questions accurately, such as annual utility and insurance costs.

But many of the questions routinely ridiculed by census bashers - whether residents of a given household have indoor plumbing, whether they have difficulty dressing or bathing, how they commute

to work - have been asked in previous censuses without generating controversy. This year's long form has six fewer questions than the 1990 version.

The questions will yield data that will help federal officials fairly distribute aid to help disabled Americans, to fight water pollution and to improve local transportation planning. Are these illegitimate activities?

Bush has proposed allowing parents to use federal Title I money under some circumstances to send their children to private or charter schools. That money is distributed according to census data.

Many Mid-South residents insist they haven't returned their census forms yet because they haven't gotten them. If that is a systematic problem, then the Census Bureau must deal with it, fast.

But that is a different matter from encouraging citizens not to cooperate fully with the national enumeration.

Census officials are making special efforts to get millions of households to return their census forms this weekend. In light of the complaints, Census Director Kenneth Prewitt said he fears many Americans have decided "this information is not very important at all."

AMERICANS have learned to their chagrin that there isn't an issue, even the constitutionally mandated census, that politicians can't turn into a matter of partisan division, especially in an election year.

But how will Sen. Lott respond if Mississippi, because of a below-average census count this year, does wind up losing a House seat?

And what if it's a Republican seat?

Atlanta Journal Constitution April 3rd

Constitution: Keep the census from becoming political fodder and participate

Roughly half of America's households did their civic duty and answered the U.S. Census Bureau's Year 2000 postal survey by its April 1 deadline. That level of participation is not nearly good enough if America is to get the accurate picture of itself essential to governing fairly and efficiently at local, state and federal levels.

Fortunately, the bureau still has a "final, final deadline" for mail and e-mail replies. It's April 11, the day it will send out its enumerators to count Americans who didn't respond. So if you have yet to fill out your census form, please do so and mail it this week.

Participation in the census may also be harmed by the political grandstanding it continues to inspire. Presidential candidate George W. Bush and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) have criticized the long census --- sent to one in six American households --- as some sort of government intrusion on privacy.

However, the Census Bureau takes very seriously its responsibility to keep individual census responses confidential. Leakers inside will be sought out and prosecuted, as will hackers on the outside. In fact, the bureau is working with leading computer-security experts to make sure its data remain untapped.

Is this year's census survey exceptionally burdensome or intrusive, as its critics suggest? No, the questions on the long form are almost all similar to those asked in previous censuses, including the 1990 census conducted when Bush's father was president. And every question on this year's long form was presented to members of Congress for their comments two years ago. To find fault with those queries at this late date is a cheap shot.

The information being gathered will be used to redraw political districts, calculate how government benefits like Medicare are to be shared equitably, and predict public needs such as mass transit, roads, libraries, schools, fire and police protection. Census figures from 1990 helped federal emergency officials determine quickly where shelters were most needed after Hurricane Andrew smashed south Florida in 1993.

The alternative, as urged by Bush, Lott & Co., would be to operate government uninformed of its people's needs.

The Washington Post, April 4, 2000

Don't Toy With the Census

BYLINE: David S. Broder

Something about the census makes Republicans crazy. For the better part of two years, they battled the scientific community and the Clinton administration to prevent the use of statistical sampling techniques to correct for the undercount of people--mainly low-income, minority, immigrant, transient and homeless--that marred the 1990 census.

After reaching an impasse in Congress, the Republicans took the issue to court and had to be satisfied with a Supreme Court ruling that barred the use of sampling for apportionment of seats in the House of Representatives but approved it for everything else.

Then last week, just as the publicity effort to persuade people to return their census forms was reaching its peak, several prominent Republicans said that Uncle Sam was getting too personal in some of the census questions and suggested that it would be okay for people to skip over those items they found offensive.

Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott told Mississippi reporters that if he had received one of the long forms (delivered to one of every six households) he might have demurred at answering some of the questions. Texas Gov. George W. Bush, the GOP's presidential choice, said he hadn't opened his census form yet but wasn't sure if he would fill out the whole thing.

Later, both men retreated part-way from their positions (Bush after learning that he was in the short-form majority) and said people should return the forms with as much information as they could in good conscience provide. But Rep. J. C. Watts of Oklahoma, chairman of the House Republican Conference, blamed the bureaucracy for including questions that "have raised an unprecedented level of concern," and other Republicans said they would introduce legislation to make responding to the census voluntary, rather than requiring it by law.

All of this is basically nonsense--the kind of politicians' talk that gives hypocrisy a bad name even as it has serious policy consequences. Every single question on the census 2000 form was vetted with Congress two years ago, and every one has its origin and justification in a requirement included in a law passed by Congress.
In my files on census topics, I have a March 1998 report (that's two years ago, folks) titled "Questions Planned for Census 2000." That same report, I am informed, went to every member of Congress.
In the back of that report is a table showing the first census in which each category of questions was asked. One of the questions on census 2000 to which some Republicans have objected asks for the family income. That has been asked in every census since 1940.

Another, the subject of much ridicule, asks, "Do you have complete plumbing facilities in this house,

apartment or mobile home; that is, hot and cold piped water, a flush toilet, and a bathtub or shower?" That question, too, has been on the long form since 1940.

The plumbing question is asked, along with other measures of housing adequacy, as a way of targeting federal grants to the communities where the need for decent housing is greatest. Is there anyone who doubts that more help should go to South Central Los Angeles than to Beverly Hills?

The income question is used for a much wider variety of federal programs. In all, more than $ 185 billion of federal grants to state and local governments is distributed on the basis of census information. One of the major concerns about the 1990 undercount--which later surveys suggested may have missed 8 million people while double-counting 4 million others--is that it deprived areas with large numbers of low-income people of the assistance they deserved.

A study released last month by the U.S. Census Monitoring Board and done by the accounting firm Price-waterhouseCoopers estimated that in 169 metropolitan areas where the poorly counted demographic groups are concentrated, the likely net loss of federal assistance may well reach $ 11 billion in a decade.

Some of the estimated losses are enormous. The Los Angeles-Long Beach area, where hospitals, schools and other public facilities are chronically facing financial crisis, could be a $ 1.8 billion loser. Miami has a $ 300 million stake in an accurate count; New Orleans, $ 97 million. And it is not just the big cities. Flagstaff, Ariz., is at risk for $ 25 million--in effect, a 3.5 percent local tax or penalty for the undercount.

There's not a bit of evidence to justify the expressed concerns that the Census Bureau professionals will violate the privacy of individual families' responses. There is all too much proof that a flawed census hurts the most vulnerable Americans.

It is time the politicians stop messing around with the census.

Mr. MILLER. I am sure that you are pleased to see the public service announcement that Senator Lott and Representative Thompson put together to encourage Mississippians to complete their form.

Mr. Ryan.

Mr. RYAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wasn't planning on doing an opening statement, but given the controversy and discussion over the long form, it is prudent to make some suggestions.

I am doing a PSA for the State of Wisconsin with my Democratic colleague from Milwaukee, Tom Barrett, urging everyone to fill out all of their census forms. I agree with you that, and as a person who believes in limited government, I think it is very important that you fill out the census forms.

You heard a lot about this on talk radio, and a lot of letters that I am getting in my office are, "why do they want to know so much about me?" A lot of the talk radio hosts—and I think it is a simplistic, but interesting way of looking at it—say, "if you want the government to do everything, then they need to know everything about you." That is the simple thing, and we are hearing that throughout the country today. We are hearing it more in the year 2000 than in 1990, I think, because there are more legitimate privacy concerns related to the technology that we have in this country today.

E-commerce, the Internet, these things I think are symptomatic of the new technologies that are emerging in our economy and our society that are cause for a rise in personal privacy concerns. So I am not sure that this is all some kind of asperity against our government, but more a general concern about privacy rights that is rising throughout the entire country.

These are basically the same questions that we had in 1990. It is a different country now in the year 2000, but I hope we can get through this and learn some lessons on the long form. Now that we are in the information age, hopefully we can take some lessons from this long form issue on a bipartisan basis and work forward to make sure that the next census addresses these privacy concerns. I think it is important that everyone fills out every part of the questionnaire.

I look forward to hearing your testimony.

In Wisconsin we had a 59 percent initial response rate, and we are proud of that. The reports are showing that you are on your way.

Mr. MILLER. You had to bring up that they beat Florida, didn't you?

Mr. RYAN. Yes, sorry.

Mr. MILLER. If you would stand, Dr. Prewitt, and the three senior staff members with you, Mr. John Thompson, Mr. Marvin Raines, and Mr. Bill Barron, will also be sworn in case they are needed to answer questions.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. MILLER. For the record, all four answered in the affirmative.

Director Prewitt, would you proceed with an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF KENNETH PREWITT, DIRECTOR, U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, ACCOMPANIED BY JOHN THOMPSON, MARVIN RAINES, AND BILL BARRON, U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Mr. PREWITT. If I may preference my opening statement with a statement of sympathy for the unhappy evening that you spent Monday night.

Mr. MILLER. At least we made it into the finals.

Mrs. MALONEY. I thought you were talking about our homeless count night.

Mr. MILLER. The Florida Gators.

Mr. PREWITT. Mr. Chairman and Mrs. Maloney and members of the committee, when I last testified, the focus was on whether the Census Bureau could pull off the many complex and massive operations—all of these operations were conducted successfully with no major problems that would put the census at risk.

In your letter of invitation, you ask for the status of nationwide mail response rates and what those rates translate into for the nonresponse followup [NRFU], workload, hiring and other operations, and associated costs. As of this writing, the national mail response rate as posted on the Internet is 55 percent. In a few hours, we will update it to 57 percent.

It does not reflect what we expect to be an April 1 effect. We are not yet certain, but we are cautiously optimistic that we will achieve the 61 percent on which we based our budgeting and staffing program. April 11 is the cutoff date for identifying housing units that have not mailed back a questionnaire so we can include them in the nonresponse followup workload. We will continue to process mail returns after that date. On April 17, we will produce a late mail return file that we will transmit to the Local Census Offices so they can delete those addresses from their nonresponse followup assignments.

You asked, sir, for an update on the status and a brief overview of the census 2000 operational time line, and readiness for key activities and dates that lay ahead. On many of these issues, the GAO will be testifying, and thus I will be very brief.

We began and completed the update/leave operation as planned.

Telephone questionnaire assistance centers also began on March 3 and will run through June 8, and outbound calling from the TQA sites as part of our coverage edit program will continue into mid-June. We have answered nearly 6 million calls. Just over 4 percent of those calls were unable to get through; almost all of those were on the first 2 days. There were also some early problems in validating the questionnaire data that was taken over the telephone. These problems have now been resolved. The advance letter provided an opportunity for those who want a language form. We have received about 2.5 million such requests.

In the mail out/mail back areas of the country there were some households that received duplicate questionnaires. This occurred because during all of the overlapping processes used to build the master address file, we wanted to minimize the chance that we would eliminate an address that should be retained. We have procedures in place to eventually remove these duplicate addresses from our files before the final census data are tabulated.

Enumerators are visiting about half a million housing units in list/enumerate areas, an operation similar to that initiated in Alaska on January 19.

Last week, we completed the Service-Based Enumeration. Census enumerators interviewed people in shelters, at soup kitchens, mobile food van stops and at targeted outdoor locations. We enumerated about 22,000 such places over the course of the 3 days.

We have initiated the transient night operation, which will extend until April 14 for a few very large and relatively stable locations. We have initiated, and will continue through May 6, the count of about 7 million people in about 125,000 special places during group quarters enumeration—college and university dormitories, hospital and prison wards, migrant farm camps and nursing homes. We are on schedule with regard to the enumeration of land-based and shipboard military personnel and people aboard U.S. flag-bearing merchant vessels, about 1,000 ships and over 500 military reservations in all.

In your letter of invitation, you asked about the status of data capture systems for all four sites. Data capture is working very well. We have scanned about 24 million forms, and scanning accuracy is exceeding expectations.

We have received nearly 60,000 responses through the Internet.

Questionnaire Assistance Centers opened on March 8 and will be open through April 14. To maximize use of staff, we have eliminated redundant sites and currently have 24,000 in operation.

Be Counted Forms became available on March 31 at approximately 19,000 sites in addition to the QACs, where they are also available.

Your letter also asked about any difficulties confronting Local Census Offices. None of the 520 LCOs is experiencing problems that have prevented normal operations. Some LCOs are reporting minor problems with their telephone systems, and headquarters staff are working closely with the General Services Administration and telecommunications service providers to resolve the problems. At present, all systems are up and running.

Nonresponse followup [NRFU], is scheduled to begin April 27. Enumerator training begins April 24, and NFRU will continue for 10 weeks until the first week of July. Extending NRFU beyond that date would not only increase census costs, it could lead to a reduction in data quality. Experience teaches us that the longer we are in the field, and the farther we get from census day, the more the quality of respondents' answers deteriorates. We will stay in the field until we have exhausted all of our established procedures.

You asked about the status of the hiring process for NRFU. While we have met our national goal of having 2.4 million qualified applicants well in advance of our April 19 target date, we are continuing to accept applications and to actively recruit in local areas where we have not yet met our recruiting goals.

I would now like to describe in some detail the enumerator's job and our procedures for assuring the quality and completeness of their work. Each NRFU enumerator is assigned a specific area in which to work, called an assignment area, and is given a binder of addresses in that area that includes all those addresses for which we have not received a completed questionnaire, and in rural areas

enumerators also receive maps that have the housing units' locations spotted on them.

If the current household lived at the address on census day, the enumerator interviews a household member at least 15 years of age and completes the assigned questionnaire. If the unit was occupied by a different household on census day, the enumerator completes a questionnaire for the occupants who lived there on census day by interviewing a knowledgeable person, such as a neighbor. If the current occupants were not enumerated elsewhere, the enumerator will also complete a census questionnaire for them at their census day address. If the housing unit was vacant on census day, the enumerator completes appropriate housing questions on the questionnaire by interviewing a knowledgeable person, such as an apartment house manager.

The enumerator must make up to six attempts to complete a questionnaire. If no one is home at a housing unit, the enumerator obtains as much information as possible about how to contact the occupants. The enumerator leaves a notice at the address that they have been visited and provides a telephone number so the occupant can call back. He will make up to two additional personal visits, three in all, and three telephone attempts at contacting the household before obtaining as much information as possible to complete the questionnaire from a knowledgeable source.

Enumerators are instructed to make their callbacks on different days and at different times of the day. They must obtain at least the status, occupied or vacant, and the number of people living in the unit. If an enumerator submits a questionnaire which contains that minimal level of data, the crew leader must check the enumerator's record of callbacks for the housing unit to determine that procedures were properly followed. The crew leader also holds these cases for possible further followup to obtain more complete data.

In order to prevent falsification of the data by enumerators, a percentage of each enumerator's work is verified for accuracy by staff. An enumerator who is discovered falsifying data is dismissed immediately, and all the work must be redone by another enumerator.

Daily production levels begin to decrease during the end of NRFU. Sometime enumerators complete the easiest cases first, finish the work closest to their homes first, or believe that the quicker that they finish, the sooner they would be out of work. In order to bring the NRFU to closure within schedule, we implement a procedure known as "final attempt." Within the area covered by a crew leader, approximately 2,200 cases, when that area has completed 95 percent of its workload, the crew leader consolidates the remaining work and gives it to the most productive and dependable enumerators. They make one final visit to each outstanding address and do some of the housing units for which only minimal data was collected to complete as much of the questionnaire as possible. This procedure takes advantage of our best enumerators and will improve both the count and the data quality.

Final attempt must resolve all outstanding cases. NRFU is not over until every procedure has been completed, and this, of course, includes the check-in of every census form.

Let me then turn quickly to the long form issue.

Mr. Chairman, I pledged to you and this subcommittee several meetings ago that I would bring to your attention any development which could put the census at risk. Nothing in our current operations poses such a risk, but the widespread attack on the long form could have serious consequences. Indeed, I alerted you to this in our phone conversation early last week. First a few background comments.

Concern with overburdening respondents with too many questions led the Census Bureau to introduce a long form on a sample basis in the 1940 census. We have used this approach in each decennial census since. The selection of a sample based on established scientific methods means that not everyone is asked every question. The majority receive only the short form.

The census 2000 long form is the shortest in history. The law requires that 3 years prior to census day, the Census Bureau report to Congress the subjects proposed for inclusion in the census. The Census Bureau reported this information to Congress in a letter accompanying materials dated March 28, 1997. The law also requires that we report to Congress the specific questions we intend to ask 2 years prior. We did that March 30, 1998. The materials that we submitted to Congress described each question we included on the long form and, more importantly, provided detailed legal citations that indicate each item is mandated or required by congressional legislation or Federal judicial decisions in the book that the ranking member and indeed you referenced as well.

Accurate census data provide the underpinnings for other Federal surveys and data collections. The decennial census forms a sampling base for other national surveys and is used to compute rates of various indicators. Therefore, it is directly linked to the statistical system's ability to provide current unemployment data, to provide data for making cost-of-living adjustments, to calculate numerous vital statistics and rates for health services, to calculate crime and victimization rates and the like.

I now bring the subcommittee up to date regarding our concerns about the fate of long form data in the current census environment. Some of the information I now have available is so recent that I could not include it in the written testimony submitted earlier this week.

The current differential response rate between the short and long form household is approximately double the 1990 rate. This differential may close, and we are doing everything we can to assure the American people that long form data are important and confidential. Every 5 percent differential in the response rate between the two forms translates into a 1 percent reduction in the overall response rate. In other words, if a differential today were what it was in 1990, the overall national response rate would be a percentage point higher.

If the lower than expected response to the long form persists, there will be operational and budgetary implications. It takes more time to enumerate a long form. A lower than expected response rate will, consequently, place an unanticipated burden on the nonresponse followup phase of the census. Moreover, given the public atmosphere that has trivialized and discredited the long form, we

have to be concerned about the morale of the field staff who will now be trying to get information that many public voices, including a few Members of Congress, are saying should be voluntary. We have to be prepared for higher than expected turnover, especially in rural areas with the higher than average number of long forms.

Given the public commentary, there is also the possibility that we will have a higher than expected item nonresponse on the long form. This could have serious consequences for a decade. The Census Bureau has high quality standards. It would not release data that it believed were insufficiently reliable to perform the functions expected of them. This has never happened with census data, but it has with certain survey information. If the two issues just mentioned—high nonresponse to the long form and high noncompliance with particular items on the forms returned—combine to push data below our quality threshold, the Census Bureau would be placed in a very difficult position of deciding what to release.

Mr. Chairman, I know you are concerned about whether the ACE will provide the quality of data required to adjust for the undercount. At a public session organized by the National Academy of Sciences, I said if the ACE effort did not meet Census Bureau quality standards, it would not be used. This holds for all Census Bureau efforts. If, for instance, the income data were to fall below our quality threshold and we could not release it, more than two dozen statutory uses ranging from the Energy Policy Act of 1992 to the Business and Industry Guarantee Loan Program of 1980 to title I funds and Head Start programs would be affected. So also would be the calculation of the Consumer Price Index and the unemployment rate for the next decade.

You, Mr. Chairman, and the ranking member and Mr. Ryan and Mr. Davis have made strong statements about the importance of the long form data, but now I urge you to ask the entire U.S. Congress to step forward and explain to the American people why the Congress has required, authorized and paid for the collection of these long form data. There were no viable alternatives to having a long form for census 2000. No other data source could provide all the information that a Nation needs in a cost-effective manner. In the long term, we hope that the American community survey will replace the long form, and indeed by 2010. The ACS scheduled for nationwide implementation in 2003 is one of the most important improvements in Federal statistics, and it is the cornerstone of our efforts to keep pace for timely and relevant data.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Prewitt follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF

KENNETH PREWITT

DIRECTOR, U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS

Before the Subcommittee on the Census

Committee on Government Reform

U.S. House of Representatives

April 5, 2000

Mr. Chairman, Mrs. Maloney, and Members of the Committee:

It is a pleasure to be here today, 4 days after Census Day, to report on the status of Census 2000. When I last testified, the focus was on whether the Census Bureau could pull off the many complex and massive operations--questionnaire mailout and delivery, telephone questionnaire assistance, reminder card, data capture--that would occur between early March and now. Mr. Chairman, all of these operations were conducted successfully with no major problems that would put the census at risk.

- We successfully delivered some 24 million questionnaires to housing units in the update/leave areas on schedule.
- The U.S. Postal Service completed the delivery of some 98 million questionnaires to housing units in mailout/mailback areas.
- Telephone questionnaire assistance (TQA) has worked well since we became fully staffed. We have about 6,000 agents working in 22 centers and they have answered nearly 5 million calls since TQA became active on March 3.
- The U.S. Postal Service completed the delivery of 120 million cards reminding people to mail back their census forms.
- Data capture operations are performing well, without any major problems.

- Other operations, which I will discuss later, have also begun on schedule and are progressing.

In short, Mr. Chairman, the Census Bureau is keeping its part of the civic bargain. Operations are progressing on schedule, within budget, and without any disabling problems. Now the census is in the hands of the people and we hope they will answer the call to civic duty and respond. This is one of the few cases where the personal decisions of individuals could have a tremendous impact on governmental operations. The Congress has made response to the census mandatory. We will make repeat calls and visits to every housing unit that does not mail back a questionnaire. I urge everyone to help his or her community have the most complete count possible.

In your letter of invitation, you ask for **The status of nationwide mail response rates and what those rates translate into for the Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) workload, hiring, other operations, and associated costs.** As of this writing, the national mail response rate as posted on the Internet is 55 percent. The current estimates for nonresponse followup workload, hiring, and costs are based on achieving a 61 percent mail response rate; as you can see, we are not there yet. It is not too late for people to mail back their form, but time is running out. April 11 is the cutoff date for identifying housing units that have not mailed back a questionnaire so we can include them in the nonresponse followup workload. We will continue to receive and process mail returns after that date. On April 17, we will produce a late mail return file that we will transmit to the local census offices so they can delete those addresses from their nonresponse followup assignments.

On March 27, we successfully posted mail response rates on our Internet site--**www.census.gov**, have updated the numbers every day since, and will continue to do so daily until April 11. We will post final mail response rates on April 18. In January, Secretary Daley and I announced a new initiative to encourage grassroots participation in Census 2000 in every town, city, county, state, and tribal area in the nation. We are calling this initiative "How America Knows What America Needs." We are providing local elected officials with tools to use in encouraging their constituents to complete and mail back their census forms and to cooperate with enumerators. These tools include sample news releases, articles, talking points, and other written materials; a dedicated website to enable participants to obtain updated information and download promotional materials; and a toll-free number to allow elected officials to call for additional information. We are also challenging communities to increase their overall response rates in Census 2000 by at least five percentage points over their 1990 level. We are calling this component *'90 Plus Five*, which means we are encouraging a 70 percent national response rate--the 65 percent from 1990 plus 5. Obviously, we have not reached that goal nationally, but some jurisdictions have or will reach their goals. A second component of "How America Knows What America Needs" is called *Because You Count.* This component is aimed at increasing cooperation with census enumerators when they come knocking on doors. Our goal with the "How America Knows What America Needs" initiative is to convert the census into a civic event of the highest order.

Operational Update

In your letter of invitation, you asked for **The status and a brief overview of the Census 2000 operational time line, and readiness for key activities and dates that lay ahead.**

The next big operation is the nonresponse followup, which I will talk about at some length later. Let me just take a few minutes now, to provide additional details about operations we recently completed or started.

We began the update/leave operation on March 3, as planned. Census enumerators left questionnaires at approximately 24 million housing units in areas (including Puerto Rico) that have several different address types. These areas are mostly in small towns and rural areas where address systems have less geographic structure. Local census offices conducting update/leave operations had sufficient staff and some 70,000 enumerators were hired for this operation. We sent regional and headquarters staff, as needed, to troubleshoot in those few local census offices that experienced problems. This operation is complete and on schedule.

Telephone questionnaire assistance (TQA) also began on March 3 and will run through June 8 and outbound calling from the TQA sites as part of our coverage edit program will continue into mid-June. There are 7 toll-free telephone numbers (in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and TDD) where people can call to get assistance in filling out their questionnaire, get replacement questionnaires, get language assistance guides, or provide their census questionnaire information. As I mentioned earlier, we have answered nearly 5 million calls. Just over 4 percent of calls were unable to get through; almost all of those were on the first two days after questionnaires were delivered in mailout/mailback areas. There was a higher volume of calls earlier than expected but we moved quickly to increase staff so that we could successfully handle the calls. There were also some early problems in validating the questionnaire data that was taken over the telephone; these problems have now been resolved.

As you will recall, in our advance letter, we also provided an opportunity for those who want a form in Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, or Tagalog to request one. We have received about 2.5 million such requests, the vast majority for the Spanish form, and this is an indication that the advance letter worked.

From March 13 through March 15, the U.S. Postal Service successfully delivered questionnaires to some 98 million addresses in what we call mailout/mailback areas of the country. These addresses are generally in urban areas but can occur in small and mid-sized towns and even some rural areas. There were some instances where households received duplicate questionnaires. This occurred because during all the overlapping processes used to build the Master Address File, we wanted to minimize the chance that we would eliminate an address that should be retained. We have procedures in place to eventually remove these duplicate addresses from our files before the final census data are tabulated.

Also beginning March 13, and continuing throughout March and April, census enumerators are visiting about half a million housing units in list/enumerate areas, in an operation similar to that initiated in Alaska on January 19. These are remote, sparsely populated areas where it is not efficient to compile a precensus address list. At the time enumerators visit each housing unit, they are listing the unit and completing a questionnaire. Also at this time, we began the update/enumerate operation, which is conducted in communities with special enumeration needs and where most housing units may not have house number and street name addresses. These areas include selected American Indian Reservations, unincorporated Spanish-speaking communities along the border of Texas and Mexico (*colonias*), and resort areas with high concentrations of seasonably vacant housing units. Both of these operations progressed more slowly than we anticipated at the start, but we are confident that we will be able to complete these operations on time.

Beginning on March 20, we mailed out a reminder card to those housing units we are asking to return a form by mail. Many had already mailed back their forms, but this reminder hopefully spurred others to do so as soon as possible. That mailing was also completed successfully.

Last week, we completed the service based enumeration, with the goal of including in the census those people without conventional housing who might be missed in the regular enumeration procedures. On the evening of March 27, census enumerators interviewed people in shelters, on March 28 at soup kitchens and mobile food van stops, and on the early morning of March 29 at targeted outdoor locations. We enumerated about 22,000 such places over the course of the three days.

On the evening of March 31, we conducted the transient night operation, which is designed to enumerate people at locations where residents are highly transient in nature, such as campgrounds and parks, commercial or public fairs, carnivals, marinas, racetracks, and recreational vehicle parks. This operation will extend until April 14 for a few very large and relatively stable Transient Night locations.

Beginning April 1 and continuing until May 6, we expect to count about 7 million people in about 125,000 special places during group quarters enumeration. These are people living in such places as college and university dormitories, hospital and prison wards, migrant farm camps, and nursing homes. From April 4 to May 4, we will also conduct the enumeration of land-based and shipboard military personnel and people aboard U.S. flag-bearing merchant vessels--about 1,000 ships and over 500 military reservations in all. This group includes all U.S. land-based military personnel, their dependents living on base, and U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard ships not deployed or assigned to foreign ports.

In your letter of invitation, you asked about **The status of data capture systems for all four sites.** Data capture operations began shortly after the first questionnaires were delivered in update/leave areas and the volume of returned questionnaires picked up significantly with the delivery of forms in mailout/mailback areas. Data capture is working very well and we are aware

of no serious problems at this point. We have checked in about 67 million questionnaires and we have scanned about 24 million of them. Scanning accuracy, which is over 99%, has exceeded our expectations and we are also maintaining a very high level of keying accuracy.

You also asked about **Preparation and issues concerning Internet response to Census 2000 questionnaires and tabulation processes.** Internet data collection and questionnaire assistance began on March 3. Internet data collection will operate until April 15 and Internet questionnaire assistance will end the first week of June. We have received nearly 50,000 responses through the Internet. Some respondents have experienced problems completing the questionnaire through the Internet. This is primarily due to a bug in their browser and not caused by the website itself. If they are unable to get through after trying a different browser, we have recommended that they fill out and mail back their paper form.

Your letter also asked about **Status and issues confronting Questionnaire Assistance Centers and Be Counted sites.** Questionnaire Assistance Centers opened on March 8 and will be open through April 14. There are no major problems related to QAC's at this time. We have provided assistance to over 100,000 individuals in the QAC operation. Approximately 15,000 volunteers and 11,000 paid clerks have been assigned to staff the QAC's. To maximize use of staff, we have eliminated redundant sites and currently have 24,000 in operation.

Be Counted forms became available on March 31 at approximately 19,000 sites in addition to the QAC's, where they are also available. The Be Counted sites are not staffed, but clerks are assigned to set them up, restock them, and close them after April 11.

Your letter also asked about **Any difficulties confronting Local Census Offices.** None of the 520 LCO's is experiencing problems that have prevented normal operations. The tornado last week in downtown Ft. Worth, Texas, did not harm the office, but staff were prevented from entering the downtown section of the city for the next few days. Some LCO's are reporting minor problems with their telephone systems and headquarters staff are working closely with the General Services Administration and telecommunications service providers to resolve the problems. At present, all systems are up and running.

At the last hearing, I reported problems with a New York City LCO. GSA sought another location but no suitable site could be found. GSA has now assumed many services to assure the office is able to perform its work. Basic housekeeping services are being provided by a GSA contractor. An extermination service has solved the rodent problem and the water leak has been fixed. We are now working on getting an elevator into working order for freight and employees who need assistance and in the meantime are using an elevator in an adjacent facility.

Nonresponse Followup

Mr. Chairman, the nonresponse followup (NRFU) operation is the largest, most complex, and most costly operation in Census 2000. NRFU is scheduled to begin April 27 (enumerator

training begins April 24) and will continue for 10 weeks until the first week of July. Extending NRFU beyond that date would not only increase census costs, it could lead to a reduction in data quality. Experience teaches us that the longer we are in the field and the farther we get from Census Day, the more the quality of respondents' answers deteriorates. Therefore, our goal is to complete NRFU in 10 weeks. This is an ambitious schedule, but as I describe below, we have productivity goals and multiple quality checks built into the process. And we will stay in the field as long as it takes to complete this process.

You asked about **The status of the hiring process for NRFU.** We believe we have a sufficiently large recruiting pool to fill all positions. While we have met our national goal of having 2.4 million qualified applicants well in advance of our April 19th target date, we are continuing to accept applications and to actively recruit in local areas where we have not yet met our recruiting goals. This targeted approach will ensure that we have sufficient enumerators in all areas of the country. We have selected supervisory staff for NRFU and about one-third of the enumerators. We will complete selection of enumerators over the next three weeks.

I would now like to describe in some detail the enumerator's job and our procedures for assuring the quality and completeness of their work.

Each NRFU enumerator is assigned a specific area in which to work, called an assignment area, and is given a binder of addresses in that area that includes all those addresses for which we have not received a completed questionnaire. Because houses without numbers and street name addresses can be difficult to find, enumerators in rural areas also receive maps that have the housing unit locations spotted on them. The NRFU enumerator must go to each address in the assignment area to complete the appropriate questionnaire (either short form or long form) for the housing unit and its occupants.

If the current household lived at the address on Census Day, the enumerator interviews a household member at least 15 years of age and completes the assigned questionnaire. If the unit was occupied by a different household on Census Day, the enumerator completes a questionnaire for the occupants who lived there on Census Day by interviewing a knowledgeable person, such as a neighbor. If the current occupants were not enumerated elsewhere, the enumerator will also complete a census questionnaire for them for their Census Day address.

If the housing unit was vacant on Census Day, the enumerator completes appropriate housing questions on the questionnaire by interviewing a knowledgeable person, such as a neighbor or apartment house manager. If the housing unit was demolished or otherwise nonexistent under census definitions, the enumerator completes a questionnaire that provides the reason why the unit should be deleted from the census address list, by interviewing a knowledgeable respondent such as a neighbor or apartment house manager.

The enumerator must make up to six attempts to complete a questionnaire. If no one is home at an occupied housing unit, the enumerator obtains as much information as possible about how to

contact the occupants from a neighbor, building manager, or another source. The enumerator also leaves a notice at the address that they have visited and provides a telephone number so the occupant can call back. The enumerator then makes up to two additional personal visits (3 in all) and three telephone attempts at contacting the household before obtaining as much information as possible to complete the questionnaire from a knowledgeable source. Enumerators are instructed to make their callbacks on different days of the week and at different times of day. The enumerator must maintain a record of callbacks that lists each type of callback made (telephone or personal visit) and the exact date and time it occurred. Enumerators are expected to obtain complete interviews but must obtain at least the status (occupied or vacant) and the number of people living in the unit. If the enumerator submits a questionnaire that contains this minimal level of data, the crew leader must check the enumerator's record of callbacks for the housing unit to determine that procedures were properly followed. The crew leader also holds these cases for possible further followup to obtain more complete data.

Supervisors, called crew leaders, meet daily with each enumerator to pick up and check completed work. These meetings enable crew leaders to monitor progress and quality. Crew leaders are expected to make sure that the enumerators produce quality work at a rate of 1 to 1.5 completed questionnaires per hour depending on the type of area the LCO covers. Crew leaders check each completed questionnaire for completeness and accuracy.

In order to prevent falsification of the data by enumerators, a percentage of each enumerator's work is verified for accuracy by a reinterview staff. This staff verifies a sample of each enumerator's work and may also verify additional questionnaires from enumerators whose work differs significantly from that of other enumerators working for the same crew leader. An enumerator who is discovered falsifying data is dismissed immediately and all the work must be redone by another enumerator.

Daily production levels begin to decrease toward the end of NRFU. Sometimes enumerators completed the easier cases first, finished the work closest to their homes first, or believed that the quicker they finished their assignment, the sooner they would be out of work. In order to bring the NRFU to closure within the scheduled 10 weeks, we implement a procedure known as "final attempt." When the area covered by a crew leader has completed 95 percent of its workload, the crew leader consolidates the remaining work and gives it to the most productive and dependable enumerators. These enumerators then make one final visit to each outstanding NRFU address and to some of the housing units for which only minimal data was earlier collected to complete as much of the questionnaire as possible. Final attempt must resolve all outstanding cases within a few days, but NRFU is not over until a questionnaire is completed and checked into the local census office for every unit.

Long Form Questionnaire

Now, I want to address concerns you are hearing from some Members and constituents about the Census 2000 long form. We take these questions and concerns seriously. We are aware of the time pressures confronting people in our overworked and over stressed society and of the

concerns we all have about privacy and confidentiality. I am confident that once the public understands that their answers are protected by law, that every question asked in the census serves an important purpose, and that every question has a specific federal legislative or judicial mandate or requirement, they will perform their civic duty to respond to the census. Failure to collect the data on the long form would prevent agencies from carrying out existing laws and could result in loss of benefits to local communities.

I mentioned earlier the importance of answering the census, whether one has the short form or the long form. I also want to stress that Title 13 of the United States Code not only requires respondents to answer the census, but also requires the U.S. Census Bureau to maintain the strictest confidentiality of the data collected. The law forbids the Census Bureau from giving an individual's information to anyone else—not the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Internal Revenue Service, or the Immigration and Naturalization Service; not local governments, or police or landlords. All census employees are subject to severe fines and imprisonment if convicted of violating this law. I understand that many people have deep distrust about providing information to the government. At a time of increasing concerns about the security of our personal data, people will understandably want to know why the data are needed, what they will be used for, and how they will be protected. Answers to census questions are confidential because the Congress has provided iron-tight protections to the data and serious penalties for those who are not vigilant in protecting the data.

Concern with overburdening respondents with too many questions led the Census Bureau to introduce a long form on a sample basis into the 1940 census, and we have used this approach in each decennial census since then. The selection of a sample, based on established scientific methods, means that not everyone is asked every question; the large majority receive only a short form. Thus, the need for information is met with much less burden on the public than if everyone had to answer the questions on the long form.

In particular, the long form for Census 2000 includes the questions asked on the short form and additional questions, for a total of 52. In contrast, the long form included 57 questions in 1990, and 81 questions in 1940. This is the shortest long form the Bureau has ever used.

The questions on the long form provide essential data so that decision makers can help move our rapidly growing and economically complex country in the 21st century. Every question on the form serves an important purpose. Let me just give a few examples.

- The answers to the question on a telephone in the home are used to help plan local 911 emergency services and, in response to the Older Americans Act, to provide emergency and healthcare services to areas with relatively more homebound seniors who do not have telephone service.

- The answers on plumbing facilities are used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to administer housing programs and by local communities to

apply to the federal government for community development funds.

- The answers to the question on income are used to allocate Title 1 education funds to school districts with high rates of student age poverty.

- The information on how long it takes to commute to work is used by federal, state, local, and private transportation planners who design new roads, bus routes, mass transit systems, and manage traffic congestion, as well as for the distribution of federal transportation funds.

- The information on disability is required to help design and deliver public and private services to the elderly and disabled.

- The data on veterans' status are used to plan the location of veterans' hospitals and cemeteries and for the delivery of veterans' healthcare and nursing services.

The law requires that, three years prior to Census Day, the Census Bureau report to Congress the subjects proposed for inclusion in the census. The Census Bureau reported this information to Congress in a letter and accompanying materials dated March 28, 1997. The law also requires that we report to Congress the specific questions we intend to ask two years prior to Census Day, and we did that on March 30, 1998. The materials we submitted to Congress describe each question we included on the long form and, more importantly, provide detailed legal citations that indicate that each item is mandated or required by congressional legislation or federal judicial decisions.

Accurate census data also provide the underpinnings for other federal surveys and data collections. The decennial census forms the sampling base for other national surveys and is used to compute rates of various indicators. Therefore, it is directly linked to the statistical system's ability to provide current unemployment data; to provide data for making cost of living adjustments; to calculate numerous vital statistics and rates for health service utilization; to calculate crime, imprisonment, and victimization rates; and the like.

Only one new subject is included in the long form for Census 2000: grandparents as caregivers. This addition complies with legislation passed in the 104th Congress requiring that the decennial census obtain information about grandparents who have primary responsibility for care of grandchildren.

We intend for Census 2000 to be the last decennial census to include a long form. The American Community Survey, scheduled for nationwide implementation in 2003, is one of the most important improvements in federal statistics, and it is the cornerstone of our effort to keep pace with ever increasing demands for timely and relevant data. The American Community Survey will revolutionize the way we take the decennial census by making the next one simpler and making it possible to provide detailed socioeconomic and housing data throughout the decade.

There were no viable alternatives to having a long form for Census 2000. No other data source could provide all the information the Nation needs in a cost-effective manner. But, in the long term, the American Community Survey will replace the long form by Census 2010.

Without the Census 2000 long form and the American Community Survey during the next decade, the federal government would not have the data currently required to allocate billions of dollars in federal funds for education programs, veterans' services, programs to reduce unemployment and stimulate economic growth, public healthcare, and services for the elderly. The states and local governments would not have the data they need to help them plan new school construction, occupational and vocational education programs, programs to assist the elderly and the disabled, highway safety and public transportation systems, the location of police and fire department personnel, and rural development.

If there were no long form in Census 2000, each federal agency would have to undertake its own data collection efforts to fill the gap. The burden on respondents would actually increase; moreover, this would be an inefficient use of federal dollars. Alternatively, if the agencies did not conduct their own data collections, they would be forced to use ever more outdated information from the 1990 census.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Mr. MILLER. We have two votes coming up, and so I think we should be back in about 15 minutes. We stand in recess. I ask my colleagues to come back as soon as we can, and we will proceed.

[Recess.]

Mr. MILLER. We will reconvene the subcommittee. Let me start off with some questions on the long form.

What is the difference in response rates in 1990 between the long form and short form, and also in the dress rehearsal?

Mr. PREWITT. The long form/short form differential in 1990 at the end of the census was 4.5 percent, but at the end of mail out/mail back, it was about 6 percent. The reason that converged slightly, when we went out in the field, we were able to convert a higher percentage of the long from nonrespondents than the short form nonrespondents, so we closed the gap in 1990.

Your numbers that I just saw in your testimony on the dress rehearsal ranged from 10 to 15 percent.

Mr. MILLER. It was Sacramento, and I don't think——

Mr. PREWITT. Sacramento and South Carolina. Sacramento was 14.7—12 percent, and South—that's South Carolina.

I'm sorry, the reason that it is complicated, we calculated both the mail out/mail back and update/leave area. So the update/leave area was 13 percent. The mail out/mail back area was 11 percent for South Carolina.

The differential in Sacramento for mail out/mail back was 15, and in Menomenee was 8. That was all update/leave. Those are the numbers.

Mr. MILLER. So the dress rehearsal gave us an indication of a problem which we just found out about a year ago, and at that time it was too late to respond to it as much. What steps did the Bureau take?

Mr. PREWITT. I would say that there are certain things the dress rehearsal gives you a clue on. As you know, the overall turnout response rate in dress rehearsal was low. It doesn't predict everything. It is an opportunity for us to test operations. We don't expect the response patterns in a dress rehearsal to look like the overall response rates. We would not ourselves have concluded that that differential was very predictive.

We thought the strongest predictor of large-scale patterns is the 1990 pattern. Indeed, one of the most interesting things is that the overall response rate in 1990 compared to 1980 tracks almost perfectly across the 50 States. It is just that everybody dropped 10 percent. It is not that some States dropped 20 and some States didn't drop at all; all dropped approximately 10 percent across the country. That is the strongest predictor. We based much of our operational predictions on the 1990 response rates for 2000.

There are so many things going on in a dress rehearsal. One, they are not typical places of the entire country.

Mr. MILLER. There was a large differential. You don't think that was significant in both Sacramento or——

Mr. PREWITT. No, we didn't conclude from that we were going to get this kind of differential in 2000, but neither did the subcommittee or GAO. Nobody said, oh, my goodness, at that stage.

Mr. MILLER. When you scan in the envelopes the bar code tells you whether it is a long or short form. You don't know whether the person completed just the first six questions?

Mr. PREWITT. That's correct. We will do serious work on item nonresponse, but we won't have serious data until during the winter of 2001.

Mr. MILLER. I was talking to a Member of Congress, and he had the long form. He was still completing it. I got the long form, and there are some questions my wife had to fill out because she knew more details. The short form is—obviously anybody can go through it in a couple of minutes and complete it. There could be a delay a little bit, so we will have to see what it is.

Mr. PREWITT. We very much hope that there is a delay, and we hope that people are sitting with the long form waiting and that this converges.

If you do the arithmetic, there aren't that many forms left out there that we expect to get back in the mail. At a certain point you begin to get a real tailing off. We are hoping that this weekend—we are doing a lot of heavy advertising. It is certainly possible, as you suggest, Mr. Miller, that more long forms are sitting on those kitchen counters, and we will get a disproportionate number of long forms at the tail end. And we will be happy if that turns out to be the case, but we will know that roughly a week from today.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Prewitt, I think the controversy of the long form that has surfaced has been quite harmful to your efforts. What do you think is the impact on the response rate because of these comments by elected officials?

Mr. PREWITT. I honestly believe that it is very difficult for large parts of the American public to draw the kind of fine distinctions that are sometimes suggested in public commentary.

I appreciate that all responsible leaders are saying it is important to be counted; therefore, send your form in even if you don't fill it all out. But how that translates in the public consciousness, especially since we are now dealing—we have all got to remember, we are now dealing with the tail end of the mail-back response period. That is, the most alert and responsible and committed members of society have probably sent forms back in. So we are now dealing with people who are less motivated or less attuned and paying less attention. What they may hear vibrating in the atmosphere is, "oh, well, the information is not that important after all." That is what has us worried.

Mrs. MALONEY. What are you doing to counter this unfortunate attitude? Do you have any plans to specifically respond to the unfortunate comments of Senator Lott and Governor Bush?

Mr. PREWITT. I have done everything that I can in the media to repeat that the long form questions are all there because the U.S. Congress wants them; that they all perform these important functions, as you have all testified and said in your own PSAs; and that all we can do is simply repeat that.

We are doing a lot of targeted advertising, video news feeds. I do about 10 or 15 a day where we think that we might be able to get a bit of visibility on this. We are accelerating our targeted radio advertising right now, but—it is very late in the game to try to use

an advertising campaign to counter the mind-set or the public impression that has been generated by—and I think as the chairman says quite correctly—a quite extensive attention to this issue among talk shows and other public commentators. When I say that, I certainly don't mean at all to exclude any of the larger—the newspaper editors and so forth are all part of that commentary.

All we can do at this stage is push hard in the last 3 or 4 or 5 days.

If I can say one other word, I think it is going to be extremely important when the mail-out/mail-back period is finished, which is, after all, less than a week, to regroup on this and try to get a message out, because the nonresponse followup period, we are going to have a lot of temporary employees, they are Americans trying to count America, and they are going to be out in the field knocking on doors, and it is very important to have an atmosphere at the time that this census matters, that this is serious business, and that this is not trivial or incidental or voluntary.

So I am very much hopeful that we will be able to, with your help, enlist the U.S. Congress on that behalf, and other members of the U.S. Government, to say—we may have another 40 to 45 million households. So we have another shot at trying to make a major message, but we will not be able to do that through an advertising campaign. We will have to do that with the kind of PSAs you just saw, and I hope they will stress the importance of these data and to cooperate with the enumerators.

Mrs. MALONEY. I must say that I have collected well over 30 editorials across the country really calling upon everyone to fill out their forms, the long form, and not to listen to any elected official who may be advocating otherwise or referring to the census long form as optional.

It occurs to me that the problem may surface after the mail-back, but in the nonresponse followup. It may be more of a problem there. At what point do you send an enumerator out, once you have the long form? Do all of the questions have to be answered? What is the decision if they do just selectively answer; do you send out an enumerator? What is the procedure in that case?

Mr. PREWITT. No, if we get a long form in that has any information whatsoever that allows us to consider it a legitimate response, then we cannot send an enumerator out to try to get the additional information. That is why I say item nonresponse is a very serious issue, but we don't have a good measure. It could be three questions left blank, or it could be 52 questions that were left blank.

We certainly have to have some information. For example, we cannot take a form that says there are 99 people living here and then nothing else. We can't accept that form on behalf of the U.S. Government. We would have to somehow find out if there were really people living there.

So there are certain thresholds below which we cannot accept the form, and you wouldn't want us to. It would be an alert to us that perhaps this is a fraudulent count. So we have to get enough information to know that somebody actually lives there, that this is a residence, it is an inhabited residence, and enough information about an individual to be able to say this is a person or else we can't put them in the count.

We certainly don't have the resources to go out and now convert a lot of empty responses on the long form into full data. That is not part of the census operational plan.

Mr. MILLER. Mr. Ryan.

Mr. RYAN. Dr. Prewitt, you said that the nonresponse followup for the long form is twice what it was for 1990 at this time?

Mr. PREWITT. At this time.

Mr. RYAN. Why do you think that is, aside from comments here and there?

Mr. PREWITT. Look, I am trying to actually get some information on this, and I can speculate the way that you can speculate. I think you are right, Congressman Ryan, that this country has a heightened sense of privacy concerns, and that spills over into the government.

I can tell you based upon some survey data that the proportion of the American public who was telling us that the census data are invasive jumped by 7 percent from—from week 2 of the census to week 3, and in between that period of time, that is when this campaign started. So I can only infer from that that it is having some effect. Does that translate into nonresponse? I can't tell you that yet.

Mr. RYAN. I think it was a Houston judge that filed an injunction against the imposition of a fine for those who may not fill out all of their long form. What is your reaction to that? In 1990, did the Census Bureau impose a $100 fine on people who didn't fill every bit of their long form questionnaire? What is your take on the injunction?

Mr. PREWITT. The last case that was enforced on noncompliance with the census was in 1960. Mr. Rickenbacker. The fine was imposed. It was upheld by the courts.

The Census Bureau itself is not an enforcement agency and would never enforce any of these. We are a statistical agency. But it has not been our recommendation that enforcement action take place. My own concern on that would be that that would create more noise, more fuel, and I would worry that it would have a damaging effect on the census.

By the way, the $100 which has been mentioned in the press, and indeed we have mentioned it ourselves, I want to correct the record, it turns out to be up to $5,000. The standard Criminal Act of 1984 trumps all other acts. It is title 18, I believe, and unless you explicitly exclude some Federal infraction from the law of title 18, the fine is actually up to $5,000.

Mr. RYAN. I thought it was $5,000 if a government employee misuses the census data or accesses it improperly.

Mr. PREWITT. That is a separate issue.

Mr. RYAN. So the fine is actually $5,000?

Mr. PREWITT. Up to.

Mr. RYAN. Up to $5,000.

Mr. PREWITT. This is the uniform criminal statute passed in 1984 that basically, as I understand it, says that any infraction of a Federal law can be—can elicit a fine up to $5,000. So the particular injunction against the $100 is targeted on title 13 rather than title 18.

Mr. RYAN. So the injunction really is meaningless. And an infraction subject to the $5,000 fine could be failure to fill out one or two of the questions on the long form?

Mr. PREWITT. Yes.

Mr. RYAN. I don't want to create some hysteria on talk radio on this. Hopefully C–SPAN will play that. The Census Bureau—these fines have not been imposed in the past?

Mr. PREWITT. Since 1960.

Mr. RYAN. They were not imposed in 1970, 1980 and 1990?

Mr. PREWITT. I think maybe there was one case in 1970. I am almost certain in 1970 there was a case that was overturned. It was overturned on the grounds that it was selective enforcement. "Why did you choose that person instead of that person when millions performed the infraction." The only one that was upheld was 1960.

Mr. RYAN. So the last one was thrown out?

Mr. PREWITT. I believe so. But the Census Bureau is not interested in pursuing enforcement action.

Mr. RYAN. I understand that it is not in your best interest to broadcast that, because then you encourage people not to fill these out. Boy, that is an intriguing number.

As your enumerators are going out—and I know that you addressed this with Mrs. Maloney, but as they are going out and following up for the long form, as they ask questions on the followup for the long form, is there a threshold in the questioning that is acceptable and then not acceptable? Meaning if you find that people are not going to answer a question A, B or C, but they will answer all other questions, is there a threshold in the long form that makes it acceptable census data or unacceptable census data? Has that threshold been established?

Mr. PREWITT. There is certainly a minimal threshold. We have to be able to be certain that the number of people we are counting in this household on this block actually live in that household. That is the threshold.

Mr. RYAN. So essentially the short form questions and——

Mr. PREWITT. Yes. If we got even a partial short form answer on the long form, the person would still be counted. So we would have huge item nonresponse, but we would not lose the count. And we will do everything we can to get that count correct.

Mr. RYAN. Thank you.

Mr. MILLER. Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Prewitt, I know that there has been and continues to be a tremendous amount of discussion about the long form and the response.

I do believe that people begin to feel that it was more invasive as they heard other people suggest that it was invasive. I mean, the power of suggestion is amazing still in this country. And I don't think people were concerned as much about whether or not it was invasive until they began to hear public figures suggest that maybe it was, or they saw some columnist suggest that maybe it was. They pick it up and say, "yes, I guess it really is," when they look at it.

Let me just ask you, let's say that I am one of these individuals who want to participate in the count, and I don't have any real difficulty giving the basic information, but I, too, have been convinced, if I was that person—and I received the long form, and I was not convinced—I did half, and my wife did the other half, and then there might have been a question or two and we threw up a coin to decide which one of us would answer that one, and it was done. A lot of fun.

But let's say that I am not convinced that the information is necessary, and that I can participate without providing this information. Is there something that one might be able to suggest or convey to the average citizen that it is important to do the long form if that is what they got?

Mr. PREWITT. Well, Congressman Davis, I think that the message is roughly the message that we have been trying to promote now for 6 months, which is an awful lot of government programs, provide benefits to your community, if you see those ads about schools, and you see those ads about transportation, or you see those ads about day care centers, if you make any kind of connection, you connect that to long form data, because all of the social programs use the kind of data about age, about veteran status, about poverty, about traffic congestion, about water pollution, based on long form data to provide those services.

I would hope that when you are sitting there at the table and saying, I know this is something that I don't want to do, but I have just heard that all of these benefits will come to my community, you will make that sort of logical step.

But at this stage what we will have to do—because if we do have a higher than expected nonresponse to the long form, we will now have to try to get the enumerators—and this is not easy. You are trying to train half a million temporary workers to enumerate people who are angry at you, indifferent, hostile toward you and get that full information. We will have to rely on that army of people. We will have to get them to understand the importance of this. This will not recapture the data that has already come in, but is incompletely filled out. There is no way to recapture that data at this stage.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Are you saying that this is information that can be used for planning purposes to help make specific determinations about what is needed in certain communities or what might be needed overall for the country as a whole?

Mr. PREWITT. Well, yes, sir.

To put this as strongly as I can, I think the commentators thus far are overlooking the fact that the Consumer Price Index, the unemployment rates are tracked with data that in turn are dependent upon quality information that you get from the decennial, and we are putting at risk the way that we conduct our basic economic statistics in this country. This is very serious stuff.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Would you also say that there is no better way or no other time at which we could expect to get this information in such a massive way?

Mr. PREWITT. There certainly is no way in the year 2000. There is no agency other than the Census Bureau that can collect this

kind of information. We cannot suddenly decide let's find somebody else to collect long form data for the country.

The best we could offer the country, and it is not trivial, is that if we were to—the chairman in his opening remarks said he does not expect to be doing the long form data ever again, holding out the possibility that we will be able to launch the American community survey. We are currently scheduled to launch that in 2003. We could actually accelerate that by a year. We could start the American community survey a year earlier if the Congress instructed us. If they told us to start planning to be in the field by 2002 with the American community survey, I believe we could do that.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. I know that Illinois' initial response rate is 56 percent, but I am told that my city is significantly lower than that. Would you have any suggestions at this late date for those places that are coming in below the national norm?

Mr. PREWITT. The most important figure to watch right now is how far below your own performance in 1990 you are. In Chicago you are about 13 percent below your 1990 performance. That is not that far off from the national number. The national number is about 10 percent. Even though you are well below the national average, the most important thing is to measure yourself against 1990.

So the most important message to get to the people of Chicago is let's accomplish what we accomplished in 1990. Worry about what we were in 1990 and how we can get there. It is not too late to send the form in. We are now doing video news feeds to Chicago saying it is not too late, it is not too late. Mail it back now if you still have it. I think the more we can get that message out over the next 2 or 3 days, the better off the census will be.

Mr. DAVIS OF ILLINOIS. Thank you. I am so pleased I have a bunch of volunteers who are also going out this weekend simply knocking on doors and asking people to send their forms in.

Mr. PREWITT. Good, good, good.

Mr. MILLER. Director Prewitt, I have been urging people to complete all of the questions because we recognize how critical it is for our area. Sarasota is undercounted, and it hurts; Chicago or New York City. So it really is a personal thing that we need to do.

When Mr. Ryan was asking the question about why people are not responding, you referred to some poll that said it is really because of some comments of Andy Rooney or politicians or all of the talk show people. There are legitimate concerns about privacy that are probably different today than 10 years ago, whether it is medical privacy—financial privacy is always a subject that we are concerned with, and we have legitimate concerns.

I mentioned in my opening statement a problem with the abuse of driver's license lists in Florida. They were selling photographs even in Florida, so people are more suspect of government. So it is not just these comments. There are differences in society.

Mr. PREWITT. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. I don't want to back away from that.

What I have said publicly and repeat strongly today, I think this country is on a collision course between its insatiable desire for information and its heightened concern for privacy, and the Census Bureau is caught between those two needs. As I said yesterday

publicly to the press, we are creating a knowledge economy, and the infrastructure for a knowledge economy is information. And the decennial base helps create a higher quality information infrastructure for this society, and the society on the one hand wants that, and on the other hand we have these deep concerns about privacy.

All I was suggesting by the poll data, and I don't want to put too much emphasis on poll data, but in a week—it wasn't that it wasn't already there, it was, but it jumped in 1 week that the census data are invasive, and it happened to be the week that this became a public discussion. That is a fact. I don't want to overinterpret it.

Mr. MILLER. I think if we polled it today compared to 10 years ago, it would be higher. We are in an information technology era, and it raises these concerns. After we get through these critical phases, we are going to discuss how to handle the 2010 census.

If someone refuses to answer the income question, and you get asked this question, what do you tell someone? You tell them basically—what do you tell someone who says, I am not going to put down how much my electric bill is?

Mr. PREWITT. One on one with a respondent, I would say, look, give us an estimate, create a range, give us the best information that you are prepared to give us. Here are the kind of ways that this information is used. As I just said, over two dozen pieces of important Federal legislation use some—the income data one way or the other. So the array of programs that use these data is enormous. But it is also used to drive the sample frame and the statistical controls for the CPI and unemployment data. All of our pension systems are indexed to the CPI. The Social Security is indexed to the CPI. The stakes are very high. That is what I would try to explain.

If they persisted in refusing, I would prefer to get their information, whatever I could get from them. The most important thing—and I don't underestimate this—the most important thing is a good count. Our constitutional obligation is to count the population for purposes of apportionment and redistricting. We take that as our foremost priority task; and the other benefits that come from the long form are simply not as high a priority. So we will do everything we can to count everyone and make sure that we don't count anyone twice and that we have no fraudulent responses. That is our first task.

Mr. MILLER. You are not an enforcement agency, as you said to Mr. Ryan? You are not an enforcement agency?

Mr. PREWITT. We are not going to tell our enumerators to wave fines in front of these people. We did put on the envelope that it is required by law. We wanted to make sure that this does not look like junk mail. We were worried that people might try to duplicate the census mailing, as indeed we had one instance of, and indeed that mailing must have worked because we got some checks made out to that organization.

Mr. MILLER. What did you do?

Mr. PREWITT. We sent them back to the respondents. We didn't want to be in the banking business of handling money for Mr. Glavin, as you might appreciate. We actually did get some responses to that mailing.

But by putting the mandatory nature on the envelope, we were certain that nobody could duplicate the envelope and try to piggyback on the census environment. The other reason is that we have some research that suggests that slightly increases the response. We wanted to use everything that we could to get the response rate up.

Mr. MILLER. Did you get anyone that sent you a check and said, I refuse?

Mr. PREWITT. Oh, yes. We have certified letters that come in with $100 saying, I am going to pay my fine.

Mr. MILLER. But the check has an address?

Mr. PREWITT. Listen, the number of things we get, you would be surprised. The other day we opened up a form, there were seven $100 bills in it, and obviously somebody made a mistake. They had stuff on their desk that got put in. We found that person in less than 24 hours and returned the money to them. I was very proud of our organization.

Mr. MILLER. Mrs. Maloney.

Mrs. MALONEY. That is a good story to tell from your agency.

At our last hearing we had quite an extensive discussion on access by various agencies to the Census Bureau. I understand that many of these issues have been worked out, but that there are ongoing conversations with the Monitoring Board.

I have also heard that there has been some confrontation between oversight personnel and Census Bureau personnel, and I understand there were some threatening comments.

Could you explain what happened and comment further on access, and in particular this particular incident?

Mr. PREWITT. No, I am pleased to report that we have been making some headway, and with the chairman's permission and your permission, the Deputy Director has taken a major leadership responsibility in working out the access questions, so if I can ask him to respond to where we are on access issues.

Mrs. MALONEY. Go ahead.

Mr. MILLER. Mr. Barron.

Mr. BARRON. Good afternoon.

Mrs. MALONEY. Good afternoon.

Mr. BARRON. Yes, we have spent a lot of time on access issues. I think the major objective was to make sure that we were providing the access that all of the various oversight entities felt that they needed in order to do their job. Right now I think we are at 140 visits, either conducted or scheduled now through the end of April. I fully expect that number is going to grow some more. To my knowledge, we are working well with all those who wish to look at our activities. If there are any complaints, I hope that people will get in touch with me right away.

With respect to the issue of threatening comments, I think we did have reports of one incident in one LCO. I have discussed that with the Monitoring Board staff. I think they agreed with me that this was a situation that needed to be addressed, and, in fact have now issued some guidelines on conduct which emphasize that in the course of doing these visits, Federal employees and particularly LCO staff need to be treated with courtesy and respect. I think that is mentioned several times in those guidelines, and I would

like to thank the congressional side of the Monitoring Board for preparing that document and putting this issue to rest.

Just in conclusion, I think given the tone of some of the comments made at the last hearing, I think this was the reason the Census Bureau had our guidelines in the first place. We have a temporary staff working for us for just a short period of time. They are a wonderful group of people, and we give them a lot of work to do, and we were just trying to manage the process by which people contact them. And over the last month I think we have made a lot of progress, and I am hoping others agree and we can go about doing the work that we need to do.

Mrs. MALONEY. Dr. Prewitt, what is your response to the chairman's comment that he would like to do away with the long form in 2010?

Mr. PREWITT. Well, I did obviously note that response or that comment. I agree with the chairman. I think, as the chairman knows, the Census Bureau has for several years been working toward establishing the American community survey. Congress has funded this early preparatory work. We are in the field right now to see if the questions bridge between the American community survey format and the long form format in the decennial.

We are coming before the Appropriations Committee tomorrow. We will be recommending in our fiscal year 2001 budget the continuation of that work. I do not see any alternative to the long form other than the American community survey. I think some of the ideas that have been mentioned in public that we ought to simply assign this task to each of the agencies to do their own individual surveys would not be a very efficient way to conduct the government's business.

So I do think that the American community survey remains the most innovative and important way to get the kind of data that the country needs, not just the Federal Government, but the country needs in a timely fashion and to do it in a somewhat different environment.

The questions, I should say to the committee, are no less intrusive. They are still the same questions unless the U.S. Congress decides we should not be asking these questions, which is fair enough, we won't ask them. But we believe in a sample format in which you are only talking to a quarter million people per month, that you are rolling that through the full year and the next year and the next year, that you have the opportunity to do more education about the importance of these questions with the local leaders.

I think when—the important thing about the American community survey is that it is conceptualized to be deeply rooted in the local communities, and when the local leaders understand these are important data for us, then we hope that they will be out front in making the case, and that will create a public education environment, and we will get high levels of cooperation.

Mrs. MALONEY. Although I was not a Member of Congress in 1990, I was a member of the city council in New York and was very involved in the census and involving partnerships with the community and working with other Congress Members to get the response rate up. I don't recall any type of objection or conflict at all over

the long form in 1990, and the form that we have before us now is essentially the same, only four questions less.

You mentioned there was a disparity between the short form and the long form after the second week; is that correct?

Mr. PREWITT. No. What I was talking about was some survey data.

Mrs. MALONEY. About the response rate coming back?

Mr. PREWITT. Right.

Mrs. MALONEY. After the controversy, the response rate fell for the long form?

Mr. PREWITT. No. Actually we have not tracked this day by day. I don't know as we would put much confidence even if that were the case, because as the chairman said, we expect people to hold the long form longer and to be delayed in returning it. So what we are focused upon is the end point. If we don't close what is now roughly a 12 percent gap in the long form and the short form response rate, then, as I say, operationally we have more work to do, and we also have the problem with data quality if we don't get those data.

So the most important indicator, I think, of whether the campaign has had an effect will be on item nonresponse. That is, if we have millions of long forms that have come in, but there is not much on them, and if there is a significant drop-off from 1990, then we would be able to infer that obviously the conversation, as Mr. Davis just said, the kind of suggestive nature of invasiveness will have had an effect, and the country will pay a price for a decade unless we get the American community survey in quite quickly and fill in the gaps.

It is serious stuff, and I am concerned that people don't understand what is at stake when you are talking about the CPI and Social Security payments, to say nothing of title I and Head Start and Clean Air and all of the other programs, the dozens and dozens and dozens of programs. But as I have said publicly, I think that the capacity of Mr. Greenspan to report to this Congress on the state of the economy becomes an issue if we have very flawed long form data.

Mrs. MALONEY. My time is up.

Mr. MILLER. Is there an organized campaign against the long form? A lot of talk show people are going after it. There is not an organized effort to do it, is there?

Mr. PREWITT. I would say that I have certainly heard the leaders of the Libertarian Party, that is an organization, and I can only tell you from my e-mail traffic that when you start getting the same e-mail time and time again, it suggests that it is not just random, and when you hear the same sort of things in the talk shows. It is certainly an environment in which it is easier to create a buzz in the public discourse about something because of the Internet chat rooms. We have people who track the chat rooms, and there is a lot of it there. We have Internet sites, all of those things.

Mr. MILLER. Even Andy Rooney, who is not a conservative, came out saying—this is more local with me. In Sarasota, I think it was 58 percent as of yesterday, and I was rather pleased that my main county is—but the Complete Count Committee has received hundreds of calls from people who have not received a questionnaire.

These are not communities with new housing units. There have been reports in the Washington Post that local areas have not received their forms. What can these people do to make sure that they get counted?

Mr. PREWITT. Obviously every time we get a report that some area of the country has not received forms, we go to work on that. If we get a report that these people got their advance letter and their reminder card and did not get a form, for some reason the postal service did not mail the form. So we hope that those forms are sitting someplace in a post office and they are still in the mail stream and they will get there.

But when you have a situation where no one got any piece of mail, then that suggests that there was a mail address problem. And if that is in new construction, we have finished our new construction work. We are adding about 375,000 addresses through the new construction process, and they will be enumerated in the nonresponse followup period.

We have to figure out first what is the nature of the problem. You can still order a form up to April 11 by using that number. We widely publicized that number. We sometimes deliver them ourselves if we have reason to believe that it was a breakdown in our system. We are not finding many instances where it is a breakdown. Sometimes it is a slippage between the Post Office box problem. We cannot deliver to a Post Office box because that is not a geocoded address, and so some of the instances that we are picking up in the press and other ways are examples of those. But we do not ignore those. Every one of those we immediately, through our Local Census Offices, go to work in that neighborhood and sort out the nature of the problem and correct it.

Mr. MILLER. There is an area of Laurel in Sarasota County that said they were not counted. We are sending letters to make sure that people are aware that they will be followed up on, so there is a concern.

In Florida we have a lot of seasonal residents. Longboat Key has a separate set of numbers, for example, but they have large mobile home parks for 6 months of the year. First of all, residents feel they should be counted half in each State. If one lives 6 months in Michigan and 6 months in Florida, they have emergency service needs and such. So they are arguing that they should get counted half and half.

One of the problems—and in a way I wish you could have it on a form. If I have a place here in Washington, I fill out my form in my home here, and I fill out my form in Florida. If Members just throw the forms away it means that you are going to have to send an enumerator to knock on that door. I got my form in Washington, but it doesn't tell me what to do with it.

Mr. PREWITT. Right.

Mr. MILLER. This is your second home. Longboat Key is a tourist area. It is a large mobile home park in my district.

Mr. PREWITT. Obviously Longboat Key, the town, which is very low, it gets 50 percent, but half are seasonal homes. When we actually report the final number, which is different from the initial response rate, which is the return rate, it will come in at 100 percent. So they will get that credit, and we will make sure that they

get that credit. And indeed across the country we know there to be roughly 9 percent or so of seasonal homes and vacant homes.

Mr. MILLER. How many?

Mr. PREWITT. Nine percent of households or addresses in the United States, are one way or the other vacant.

Now, I think your question, sir, on why we didn't have a better procedure in place for identifying the seasonal homes is a completely fair question. I wish we had. It would have been better to try to identify those households so we don't have to send out a nonresponse followup enumerator. Somebody will get to that neighborhood and say, "yes, these five people have all driven up to Detroit," and they will be ticked off as seasonal and vacant housing units. In my judgment, if there was a better way, we should have done it.

Mr. MILLER. In Florida in the Tampa area, there were front page stories and concerns about problems within the Tampa operations. I am curious if you are aware of them and get your assurance that we are going to resolve them. I think the GAO has expressed that they would be willing to help out. I need to get your assurances that the problems in Hillsborough are going to be addressed?

Mr. PREWITT. Well, two things if I could address there. First, the response rate right now from Hillsborough is within 10 percent lower than its 1990 rate. There is not any kind of big variation from the response rate.

Certainly in Tampa there is an early and continuing recruitment problem. That, sir, had to do with the quality of our management staff. We had to change the management staff, and we think that we have seriously upgraded it. I can't explain to you exactly what went wrong there today because the person who had to be let go has not signed his privacy release form, so we cannot discuss that. But the Census Bureau made the decision that we knew that we did not have strong management in the Tampa office, and we acted quickly and made sure that you do have strong management.

We are expecting right now in the Tampa office not to hit our 100 percent recruitment goal. We expect by the time we close down the recruitment on April 19, we will be at about 70 percent. However, we have already determined that in the surrounding areas we have an oversupply in our recruitment pool and that we will be able to borrow roughly the same kind of people that we would be hiring in Tampa. Once we put a good management team in place, the recruitment shot up. It was not that the labor pool was not there, our procedures were not effective.

The Tampa article that you referred to, and I have in front of me, from the Tampa Tribune does use as its primary source of information the very individual that Carolyn Maloney just talked about. When a member of the Monitoring Board staff says, "Most cities say they are being road-blocked by the Census Bureau from completing their task," I would be hesitant to take that person's testimony as the testimony about what is going on. Who could actually believe that the Census Bureau is trying not to count cities across the country? He is attributing this to most cities in the country.

So I would urge you not to over attribute a particular newspaper article, especially if the source of information is someone who is willing to make those kinds of charges.

Mr. MILLER. There are problems at Tampa, and so the problem is not just because one person made some statements that they obviously should not have made. They are legitimate problems, and you are addressing them, and the resources are there, and I think we can give assurances that everyone is going to do what they can.

Mr. PREWITT. Not just because the subcommittee chairman happens to be from that area, but Tampa was one of the problems, and we did act aggressively and successfully, and I can be reassuring that we are now on schedule, on target. We will not hit our recruitment level, but we—don't forget, it is a 5 to 1 ratio, and so we don't need all of those people. Nevertheless we would have liked to have hit our target, but we are convinced that we have the number of people to do the nonresponse followup.

Mr. MILLER. Mrs. Maloney.

Mrs. MALONEY. Dr. Prewitt, for the sake of our television audience and people who may be watching this, what should someone do if they have not received their questionnaire and they would like to get their census form? What should they do?

Mr. PREWITT. As I think the chairman correctly said, at this stage the most important thing to do is to call the telephone assistance number, the 1–800–471–9424 number, and we will still try to get the form to you. The reason that we stress that process is because by asking our system for a questionnaire, we then will have your address because we know where we have mailed it, which means that we can geocode it more easily when it comes back in.

In addition, we have the Be Counted system, which is a safety net system. We hope that a lot of people don't have to rely on the Be Counted system because it is a much harder geocoding problem. We want people to use it if there is no other way.

Finally, I do remind people there are certain people who do live in new construction, we will find them in new construction, and we also have the nonresponse followup. If there is an address, we will be knocking on the door if a form didn't come in.

Mrs. MALONEY. Again, for our listening public, if they received two forms, if they have two apartments in the same city or two houses so they have access to their other form, what should they do with the second form?

Mr. PREWITT. If they have two separate residences, they have to follow the residency rules, which are problematic. We urge them to use the form at the residence that they most frequently occupy.

Mrs. MALONEY. And mail back the other one?

Mr. PREWITT. That goes to the chairman's question. I got one at a place that I am not living, and I mailed it back in. I put in zero in terms of the number of people living there joping that we will get that out of our nonresponse followup. It will most likely be difficult to do that, of course, but maybe they will come in, and it will be a clue.

Mrs. MALONEY. Say someone has three apartments in one city, and they get three different forms. If they would mail back all three, would your system catch the name?

Mr. PREWITT. We have a deduplication process, but in this case we do end up with an overcount, and one of the things that the accuracy and coverage evaluation does is identify the number of people, the proportion of people who end up sending more than one form in. In 1990, when we talk about the undercount number, we talk about a net. That is a difference between the number that we doublecounted and the undercounted. We try to find them and use the accuracy and coverage verification to detect that.

Mrs. MALONEY. I want to emphasize how unfortunate it is that talk show hosts have called the census long form optional. I want to compliment major newspapers and writers across this country that have come out with strong editorials in support of an accurate census and in support of the long form and urging everyone to not listen to any elected official who is saying otherwise. And I have with me the Seattle Times. We have Roll Call, Tulsa, the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Milwaukee Journal, the Atlanta Times, the Sacramento Bee, the Memphis paper in Tennessee, the Commercial Appeal, and they keep coming into my office, and so I think the press and the country has responded in a responsible way encouraging people to be part of this.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MILLER. I have several other questions, but for the sake of time, we want to go on to GAO. I have some questions about proxy data and close-out verification. I would like to discuss that some more.

Did you see the Dave Barry column the other day?

Mr. PREWITT. Very funny.

Mr. MILLER. We have to have a sense of humor about this.

Mr. PREWITT. No, I liked that one a lot.

Mr. MILLER. I know that you are very loyal about this, but you are missing your pin. Just sitting here—I know that you have dozens of them in every coat. You have been giving them away, but——

Mr. PREWITT. I appreciate the chairman. Before we get off camera, let me get my pin on.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you again for being here. It is a tough job. I encourage everybody to complete the form. In conclusion, thank you very much, and I will see you next time.

We ask Mr. Mihm, accompanied by Mr. Robert N. Goldenkoff and Mark Bird, to come forward, and I will swear you in.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. MILLER. Let the record note that they answered in the affirmative.

Let me briefly say since we have people watching this that the General Accounting Office is a nonpartisan organization. They have a Web site that says the GAO's mission is to help Congress oversee Federal programs and operations to ensure accountability to the American people. GAO evaluators, lawyers, economists, public policy analysts, information technology specialists and other multidisciplinary professionals seek to enhance the effectiveness and credibility of the Federal Government.

We rely on GAO for all of our congressional oversight. We appreciate them.

Mr. Mihm, you were involved in the 1990 census, and so we appreciate the knowledge that you have contributed to this. At this stage let me ask you to make your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF J. CHRISTOPHER MIHM, ACTING ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, FEDERAL MANAGEMENT AND WORKFORCE ISSUES, U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE, ACCOMPANIED BY ROBERT N. GOLDENKOFF AND MARK BIRD, U.S. GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

Mr. MIHM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mrs. Maloney. It is again an honor to appear before you today. I am joined by Robert Goldenkoff and my colleague Mark Bird, who has data processing responsibilities.

This afternoon I will briefly hit the highlights of my written statement in six areas: first on the mail response rate; second on recruitment; third on update/leave operations; fourth, service-based enumeration or the counting of the homeless population; fifth on Questionnaire Assistance Centers; and sixth, data capture.

First, in regards to the mail response rate, as Director Prewitt noted as of April 1, the national rate was about 55 percent. Figures 1 and 2 in my prepared statement show the progress of the mail response at the regional and local levels. As you can see from those charts, overall the news is good thus far. Overall about 90 percent of Local Census Offices are three-quarters or more of the way toward achieving the final response rate they had in 1990, which, of course, is a higher benchmark than the Bureau has budgeted for. Meeting that would go a long way toward ensuring an accurate and complete census.

Second, the Bureau is making progress in meeting its recruiting goals, but certainly continued efforts are still needed. As Director Prewitt has noted, the national goal of 2.2 million qualified applicants has been met, but about 41 percent of the Local Census Offices have not met the March 30 recruitment goal compared to about 53 percent that had not met the goal as of March 2. So we are seeing real progress at the national and local level, but we still have our 40 percent of the census offices that are not where they need to be in terms of recruitment.

Third, over 24 million update/leave questionnaires were delivered by 70,000 census field staff. While national data are not yet available, our observations of update/leave suggest that update/leave made important improvements in the quality of the address list, including correcting for potential lapses in earlier address list development efforts. If these corrections are accurately reflected in the maps and address binders and keyed in accurately, they will reduce problems with nonresponse followup.

Fourth, the Bureau's service-based enumeration operation attempts to count individuals who lack conventional housing when they go for services such as to shelters or soup kitchens, as well as attempting to capture them at targeted outdoor locations. Despite great effort on the part of the Bureau, the inherent challenge of counting this population combined with operational problems make the completeness and accuracy of this data uncertain. Overall, through several dozen field observations in 12 different locations, we noted that the operation was well staffed and received the

cooperation of service providers. In addition, enumerators largely approached their jobs with professionalism and respect for the population.

Mrs. Maloney, you mentioned that you and Chairman Miller were out in the streets and saw that firsthand. I had the opportunity to see it as well. For example, a team of enumerators I accompanied during the early morning hours of March 29, in Rosslyn, VA, searched heavy underbrush along the Potomac River. This was truly impressive. They searched under the walking bridge over to Roosevelt Island, there were three different ways they went in, and they were determined to find our encampment. They did find evidence that homeless people resided there, including the mattresses and clothes and other personal belongings.

On the other hand, however, we also observed the challenges that the Bureau faces in trying to count individuals without usual residences. In some locations a police presence, the weather, the tornado down in Texas, and the terrain hampered enumerators' ability to find people living on the streets. In addition, however, a lack of sufficient supplies, inadequate enumerator training in some cases, inconsistent procedures for handling rejections and inadequate advanced planning undermined the quality of the count.

Overall, while these problems may have affected the quality and completeness of the count and therefore should not be minimized, it is not surprising that they occurred in such a large and complex undertaking.

My fifth point is that the Bureau continues to work to ensure that its 23,700 Questionaire Assistance Centers are available to the intended populations. My prepared statement provides examples from Laredo and Del Rio, TX, of some of the successful efforts that we observed. On the other hand, we saw less input from local partners and less promotion in other census offices that we visited in Oklahoma and Virginia, although assistance centers were open in those areas as well.

Finally, data capture operations. As Director Prewitt pointed out, the data capture operations are working successfully. Available operational data tends to confirm that view. But some risks still remain that warrant continued attention.

In our February report we expressed concern that the short time between the conclusion of the development and test activities of the data capture system and the date when data capture operations would begin created the risk that new problems would come to light after the system was in use. This, in fact, is occurring. In fixing these new problems, the Bureau has had to delay some important changes. As we discussed at the March 2 hearing, under the two-pass approach to data processing, the Bureau is making two sets of software modifications. The first set of changes were completed in February, and the second was to be completed by April 27. The Bureau has now delayed completion until May 31 because it needs to divert personnel to address the newly arising data capture problems. If new problems continue to surface, the completion of the second release will be increasingly at risk.

On behalf of the subcommittee, Mr. Chairman and Mrs. Maloney, we will continue to track data processing and other key operations. This concludes my statement, and I would be happy to take any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Mihm follows:]

United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on the Census
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives

For Release on Delivery
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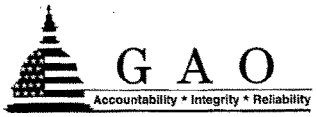
2000 CENSUS

Progress Report on the Mail Response Rate and Key Operations

Statement of J. Christopher Mihm
Associate Director
Federal Management and Workforce Issues
General Government Division



GAO/T-GGD/AIMD-00-136

Statement

2000 Census: Progress Report on the Mail Response Rate and Key Operations

Mr. Chairman, Mrs. Maloney, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to provide the latest in our series of regular progress reports on the status of key census-taking operations. My statement focuses on the mail response rate and the implications it has for the timely and accurate completion of the Bureau's nonresponse follow-up workload. In addition, I will discuss the status of specific enumeration activities that have taken place over the last month. These include (1) update/leave, a procedure used to count people in certain small towns and rural areas; (2) Service Based Enumeration, used to count persons with no usual residence; and (3) Questionnaire Assistance Centers, which are designed to help people, especially those with limited English skills, complete their census forms. I will also discuss how well the Bureau's data capture centers are handling production-level workloads.

My remarks today are based on our analysis of Bureau data, including those data from the Bureau's Census 2000 Management Information System that tracks the cost and progress of the census. In addition, we made field visits to 12 geographic areas across the country, primarily selected for their relatively high numbers of hard-to-enumerate population groups.[1] We interviewed managers and other local census office employees to obtain information on specific census operations and observed those operations that were occurring at the time of our visit. We have conducted more than 90 observations of the census thus far.

In making these field visits, we were able to see, first hand, the extraordinary challenges of counting different segments of the nation's population, and the dedication, ingenuity, and professionalism that so many enumerators and other local census employees are bringing to bear to address these challenges.

The Mail Response Rate and Its Implications for Field Follow-up Operations

Key to a successful census is a high mail response rate, which helps the Bureau obtain more accurate data and reduce what, in past census efforts, has been an error-prone and costly nonresponse follow-up workload. The Bureau has based its schedule, staffing and funding resources needed for follow-up on an expected national mail response rate of 61 percent by April 11, 2000. At that time, the Bureau will begin to generate a list of nonresponding households that will be visited by census enumerators. Consequently, obtaining at least this 61-percent mail response rate is

[1] Field visits were made in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, as well as in San Francisco and the Los Angeles metropolitan area in CA; Albany, Columbus, and Waycross, GA; Enid, Tahlequah, and Tulsa, OK; and Laredo, McAllen, and the Dallas metropolitan area in TX.

critical to the success of the census. According to senior Bureau officials, a mail response rate of as little as 2 or 3 percentage points less than 61 percent could affect the Bureau's ability to complete nonresponse follow-up operations on schedule, which could affect data quality.

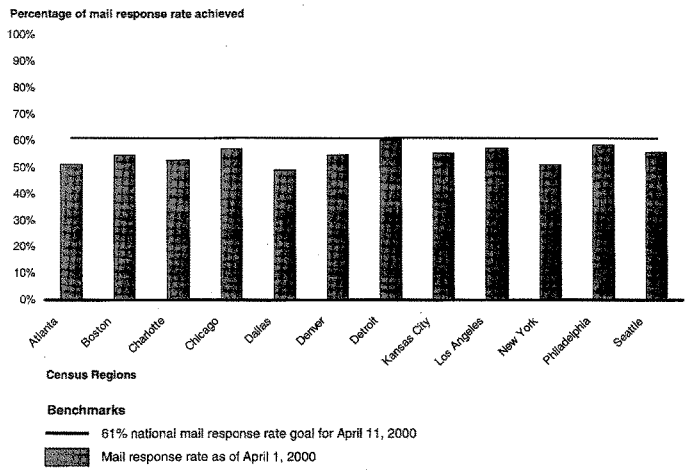
Mail Response Rates Vary Greatly at the Local Level

As of Census Day, April 1st, of the approximately 120 million households that were mailed or hand delivered questionnaires to complete and mail back, about 66 million have been returned to the Bureau, for a mail response rate of about 55 percent.[2] This rate is consistent with the Bureau's expectations for this date. Thus, with 10 days remaining until the April 11th deadline for mailback responses for purposes of generating the list for nonresponse follow-up, the Bureau needs to receive over 7 million additional questionnaires—more than 700,000 returns each day, on average—to reach its 61-percent response rate objective.

Although national numbers are important for providing an overall perspective of the census, as we have often noted, the census is a local effort, and thus we must look beyond the national figures when gauging the progress of the census. Examining response rates by local census office is particularly important because nonresponse workload, recruitment, and staffing are all managed through these local census offices. As shown in figure 1, as of April 1st, the mail response rates by census regions ranged from 49 percent in Dallas to 60 percent in Detroit.

[2] The Bureau calculates the total mail response rate by dividing the number of responses (including those received by mail, Internet, and other response options) by the number of questionnaires mailed or hand delivered.

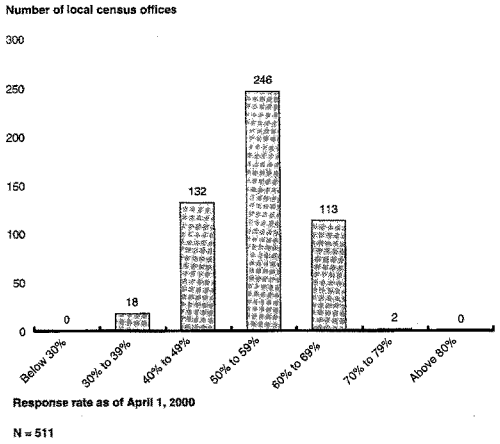
Figure 1: Response Rates By Census Region



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

Not surprisingly, greater variation in response rates exists at the local census office level. Based on our analysis of Bureau data as of April 1st, response rates by local census office ranged from 30 percent to 72 percent. And, as shown in figure 2, 115 local census offices have a mail response rate of 60 percent or greater, while 150 local census offices have a mail response rate of less than 50 percent.

Figure 2: Distribution of Mail Response Rates by Local Census Office



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

The wide variation in response rates also was evident in the final rates for the 1990 census. Although the national response rate was 65 percent—4 percentage points higher than the target rate for 2000—the response rates at the local census offices ranged from 40 percent to 84 percent.

Overall, it appears that the majority of local census offices are progressing towards the final mail response rate they achieved in 1990. Indeed, of the 509 local census offices for which we were able to obtain both 1990 and 2000 data, as of April 1st, 456 (almost 90 percent) were three-quarters or more towards equaling the final response rate they had in 1990.[3]

[3] These are approximate comparisons since the local census office composition used to obtain the 1990 local census office response rate data do not precisely reflect the Census 2000 local census office geographic areas.

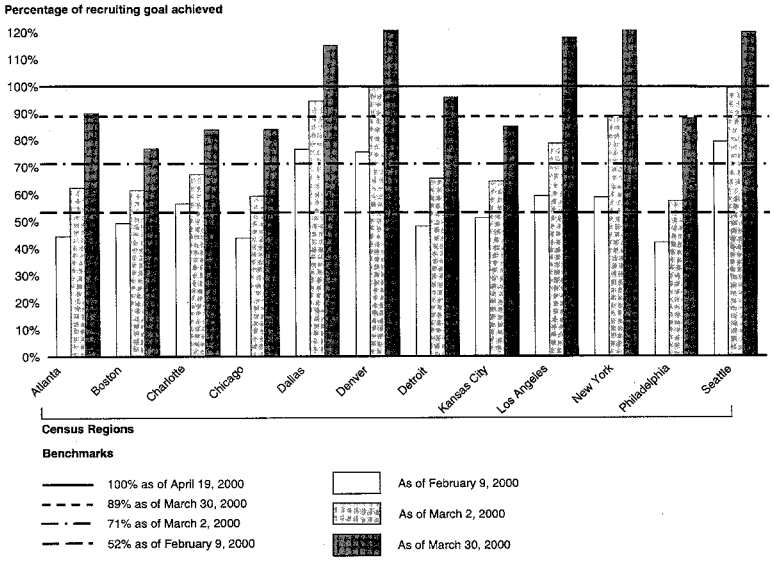
Local Census Offices Continue Making Progress Toward Their Recruitment Goals

The mail response rate drives the Bureau's field follow-up workload, which in turn affects staffing requirements and the Bureau's ability to complete its field workload on time without compromising the quality of follow-up data.

Nationally, to conduct nonresponse follow-up and to cover for the possibility of high turnover rates during this operation, the Bureau estimates it will need to recruit about 2.4 million qualified applicants by April 19, 2000. Although the Bureau is close to meeting this goal, several local census offices are still experiencing substantial shortfalls.

The Bureau's goal for March 30th, the latest date for which data were available, was to recruit about 89 percent of the 2.4 million qualified applicants needed. Nationally, the Bureau was well ahead of this objective, having achieved about 99 percent of its recruiting goal. However, 5 of the Bureau's 12 regional offices fell short of the 89-percent benchmark. Based on Bureau data, the current shortfalls ranged from 1 to 12 percentage points. As shown in figure 3, these 5 regions—Boston, Charlotte, Chicago, Kansas City, and Philadelphia—were among those below the Bureau's 71-percent benchmark as of March 2nd, and 52-percent benchmark as of February 9th, when we last analyzed Bureau recruiting data.

Figure 3: Recruiting Levels Over Time By Census Region



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data.

At the local level, the Bureau appears to be making progress toward meeting its recruitment goal. Indeed, 210 (41 percent) of 511 local census offices fell below the Bureau's March 30th benchmark of 89 percent, compared with 270 (53 percent) as of March 2nd.[4] Moreover, of the 210 local census offices falling short of the Bureau's March 30th benchmark, 9 had recruited fewer than half of the qualified applicants that the Bureau

[4] Our analysis did not include nine local census offices in Puerto Rico.

estimated it needed as of that date. This compares with 22 offices as of March 2nd.

Update/Leave Questionnaires Were Delivered and Address List Data Appears to Have Improved Despite Challenges

To deliver questionnaires to an estimated 24 million housing units in areas with mostly rural route and P.O. box addresses, the Bureau conducted its update/leave field operation between March 3rd and March 30th, 2000. During update/leave, enumerators were to systematically travel every street, road, and path in their assigned areas to verify census address lists and maps and to leave questionnaires for residents to mail back. They also were to identify incorrect or missed units, make corrections and additions to the address list and maps, and leave questionnaires for those residents to mail back as well. In addition, enumerators were to identify, for later enumeration, "special places," such as correctional institutions, juvenile homes, and homeless shelters.

Over 70,000 enumerator and other staff were in the field conducting update/leave, and the Bureau did not experience any significant problems staffing this operation. This is notable given the generally low unemployment rates prevailing around the country and the other recruiting challenges we have reported on before.

While national data are not yet available, our observations of update/leave thus far at 9 of the more than 350 local census offices conducting this operation suggest that the update/leave operation appears to have improved the quality of the address list, including correcting for potential lapses in the quality of earlier address list development efforts. During update/leave, census enumerators made corrections to many types of problems with maps and address registers, including nonexistent streets, incorrectly located "map spots," overlapping block and assignment area boundaries, and a variety of typographical errors. In some cases, local staff redrew or relisted entire blocks. To the extent that corrections identified during this operation have been accurately reflected in the maps and address binders and are keyed in accurately, they will reduce problems with later census operations, such as nonresponse follow-up.

However, the update/leave operation faced challenges that made it difficult to conduct and to ensure the quality of the address list data that were updated. For example, given its door-to-door nature and the need to identify every possible housing unit, update/leave faced challenges similar to those encountered by enumerators during block canvassing, such as finding "hidden" housing units and accessing gated properties to update

the address list and deliver questionnaires.[5] In addition, most of the offices we contacted experienced delays in receiving key materials. For example, one office did not receive its enumerator training kits on time, which required staff to photocopy needed materials.

Methods to Count Persons With No Usual Residence Appear to Have Improved Since 1990

The 2000 Census includes several initiatives designed to count people without conventional housing who may have been missed in the traditional enumeration. One of these, known as Service-Based Enumeration, attempts to count these individuals where they go for services, such as shelters and soup kitchens, as well as targeted non-sheltered outdoor locations. However, the inherent challenge of counting this population, combined with several operational difficulties that we observed, makes the completeness and accuracy of this data uncertain.

Although Service-Based Enumeration may count selected components of the homeless population, the program is not designed—and was never intended by the Bureau—to provide a specific count of homeless persons or service users. Rather, Service-Based Enumeration is part of the Bureau's Special Place enumeration program that attempts to count people living in less conventional residences. Other Special Place initiatives include efforts to count people living on military bases and aboard ships, as well as people in group quarters, such as nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, and college dormitories.

During the 1990 Census, the Bureau attempted to count persons with no usual residence by enumerating individuals living in shelters and on streets on a particular night.[6] However, the Bureau's approach did not include the "hidden homeless"—those individuals not living in shelters or visible on the streets at night. The Bureau noted that independent researchers in two cities had found that the hidden homeless could represent up to two-thirds of the nighttime street population. Also, in 1990, the Bureau relied primarily on local governments to identify street locations where persons with no usual residence could be found—but only 36 percent of all local governments responded. As a result, the Bureau fully understood that it did not produce a complete and accurate count of this population in 1990.

In response to the limitations of the 1990 initiative, the Bureau expanded its efforts for the 2000 Census. Service-Based Enumeration, which

[5] For additional information on the challenges of identifying housing units, see Decennial Census: Information on the Accuracy of Address Coverage (GAO/GGD-00-29R, Nov. 19, 1999).

[6] 1990 Census: Limitations in Methods and Procedures to Include the Homeless (GAO/GGD-92-1, Dec. 30, 1991).

occurred nationwide from March 27th through March 29th, 2000, had several components, including one-time enumeration at emergency and transitional shelters; soup kitchens; stops made by regularly scheduled mobile food vans; and targeted non-sheltered outdoor locations where people live and eat, such as encampments under freeway overpasses.

During the outdoor enumeration, teams of enumerators, using contact persons familiar to the individuals living at a given location, interviewed people using a short-form questionnaire. Enumerators were directed not to wake anyone who was sleeping, but instead to record approximate age, gender, and race if it could be clearly determined.

Starting in April 1999, the Bureau has worked with local governments and community-based organizations, such as homeless advocacy groups, to identify and update the list of service locations for Service-Based Enumeration at census time. For example, the Tulsa, Oklahoma, Local Census Office staff had several meetings with organizations serving the homeless community. Some other local census offices went even further. In the City of Los Angeles, Bureau officials told us that they toured known outdoor encampments by helicopter to get an indication of how large the outdoor enumeration might be.

To augment its list of service-providing facilities, the Bureau also reviewed government responses from the Special Places Local Update of Census Addresses (which included Service-Based Enumeration locations), and from additional facility listings added from other census operations, such as update/leave, to determine if any potential Service-Based Enumeration locations were missing. In addition, local census office employees reviewed Yellow Pages listings to see if any service facilities were missed. In preparation for Service-Based Enumeration, Bureau enumerators were also to make advance visits to facilities to work with staff to plan the enumeration and determine which procedures would work best.

Overall, in our field observations, we noted several things that generally went well with the way Service-Based Enumeration was conducted, including the following:

- Operations were appropriately staffed. Bureau enumerators came prepared in proper numbers to conduct enumeration at locations that in some instances, such as soup kitchens at meal times, had over 2,000 people to count.

• Enumerators generally obtained cooperation from service providers. For example, at two locations that we visited, service providers took the Bureau's sworn oath to protect confidentiality and helped conduct the count. This helped the enumeration because it was conducted by people known to shelter residents.

• Enumerators showed professionalism and commitment to their jobs. We observed enumerators making an effort to explain the census process, and answer respondents' questions. We also saw the extraordinary level of effort many enumerators put forth to ensure a complete and accurate count. In Albany, Georgia, for example, starting at 4:00 a.m., a team of enumerators searched empty railroad cars and abandoned and condemned buildings to locate people. Ten people were counted as a result of their efforts. In Rosslyn, Virginia, a team of enumerators unrelentingly searched heavy underbrush along the Potomac River, and, while no one was encountered, enumerators found evidence that people lived there.

Service-Based Enumeration, as it was designed, was a very short-term operation conducted under a tight time schedule--one that required much coordination to complete. Enumerators, hired specifically for the 3-day operation, were expected to learn procedures quickly and be prepared to conduct each enumeration when the time came in a variety of locations and under various, often difficult, circumstances.

As with any undertaking of this scope and nature, operational problems can and did occur. First, accurately counting this mobile and often hard to identify population is fraught with challenges, many of which were evident in our observations. For example, enumerators had difficulty spotting people sleeping in alleys and under blankets on benches. As a result, some individuals were no doubt missed.

Police presence, the weather, and the terrain also hampered enumerators' ability to find people living on the street at some of the locations we observed. In Los Angeles, crew leaders told us that a police "sweep" before the count may have forced some people away from the sites targeted for enumeration by the local census office. According to a Bureau official in the Plano, Texas, Local Census Office, a previous night's tornado, rain, and hail in the area resulted in no one being found the following morning at the office's 5 targeted non-sheltered locations. In Tulsa, muddy and brush-filled terrain along a river bank and in other locations made it difficult to spot encampments where people could be living.

In addition to these inherent challenges, we also observed a variety of logistical, administrative, and procedural problems common to most of the sites that we visited. Specific problems included the following:

• **Insufficient quantities of supplies:** Supplies of questionnaires, training materials, and other documents were not always adequate at the locations we visited, which, at a minimum, appears to have led to inefficient use of staff time. For example, because a San Francisco Local Census Office did not have enough questionnaires, staff had to photocopy the questionnaires and use the same bar code identifier on all copies. In order for these forms to be data captured, the office will have to redo all the completed questionnaires on the individually bar coded forms when they are received from the Bureau's supply distribution center. At the Tulsa local census office, an official told us that training kits were incomplete, forcing employees to take apart other training kits in order to put together full sets of instructional material.

• **Inadequate training:** Enumerators in San Francisco and the Los Angeles area told us that their training did not sufficiently prepare them for the wide range of scenarios that they encountered. Also, training materials, such as videos of a mock visit to a soup kitchen, arrived too late in one San Francisco local census office to be used by the enumerators. In Tulsa, a crew leader told us that because the training materials arrived late, training was delayed by a week and, as a result, the crew leader had to rush through the training in order to complete it in time for the enumeration. Similarly, in Albany, Georgia, a crew leader told us that training materials did not arrive until the Saturday before training was to begin—leaving little time to prepare for the class held on Monday.

• **Inconsistent procedures for handling rejections:** Although Bureau procedures require enumerators to ask individuals to complete a form even if they said that they had already done so at another location (for later unduplication), many enumerators we observed did not do this. Instead, we observed that enumerators often accepted an individual's response (typically after attempting to confirm it by asking where and when the earlier enumeration occurred) without attempting to interview the individual further.

• **Inconsistent advance planning:** In the Los Angeles area, enumerators made an advance visit at a shelter the previous Saturday when no knowledgeable staff were present. As a result, the Bureau picked a less than optimum time to enumerate on shelter night. In another instance, the Minister of an Alexandria, VA, church that provides lunches to the poor

told us that she stressed to the Bureau during the visit before the enumeration that it was important that the Bureau bring only a few enumerators to count her clients. She knew from experience with efforts to take local censuses that too many enumerators would prove intimidating. However, she said that the Bureau did not take her advice and showed up with far too many enumerators, thus scaring-off some of those coming in for lunch.

As I noted, while these problems may have affected the quality and completeness of the count, and therefore should not be minimized, it is not surprising that they occurred in an operation as large and complex as the Bureau's attempt to count persons without a usual residence.

Questionnaire Assistance Centers Are Available to Serve Targeted Groups, But Implementation Has Been Varied

For the 2000 Census, the Bureau planned a number of coverage improvement initiatives to increase the accuracy and completeness of the count. One such initiative is the Questionnaire Assistance Centers program. Questionnaire Assistance Centers are intended to help people—especially those with little or no English-speaking ability—complete their census questionnaires, by providing assistance in various languages on a walk-in basis. The centers are also to distribute Be Counted forms to count those people who believe that they did not receive a census questionnaire, or who were otherwise not included in the census. The centers are to be open between March 8 and April 14, 2000. Nationwide, as of March 30, 2000, the Bureau had about 23,700 centers open.[7]

As we discussed in our February report to the Subcommittee, several factors will be critical to the effectiveness of the Questionnaire Assistance Center initiative. The factors include (1) partnering with community, social service, religious, and other local organizations to identify sites with locations and schedules that best meet the needs of targeted groups, and to ensure they are adequately publicized; (2) ensuring that sites have "street-level" visibility so that targeted groups are able to find them; (3) monitoring usage so that people will be able to find forms and obtain assistance when and where they are supposed to be available; and (4) making sure staff are available with appropriate foreign language skills.[8]

Based on our fieldwork, during which we visited 15 Questionnaire Assistance Centers, our observations suggest that the Bureau has made

[7] According to a Bureau official, the number of Questionnaire Assistance Centers has fluctuated over time as centers have been established or consolidated.

[8] 2000 Census: Actions Taken to Improve the Be Counted and Questionnaire Assistance Center Programs (GAO/GGD-00-47, Feb. 25, 2000).

appropriate efforts to make Questionnaire Assistance Centers available to targeted groups. For example, at the Laredo, Texas, Local Census Office, Bureau officials told us that the office had so many partners volunteering to operate Questionnaire Assistance Centers that it could pick the more effective locations—for a total of 51 centers. The partners included the Texas Migrant Workers Association, the Laredo Department of Human Services, the American Association of Retired Persons, and the National Association of Federal Employees. In addition, the City of Del Rio, Texas, donated $50,000 to staff the Questionnaire Assistance Centers. The locations and operating times of the centers were advertised in English and Spanish on local television, radio, and in a Hispanic community newspaper. The Questionnaire Assistance Center that we visited at the Sunrise Convenience Store in a hard-to-enumerate Hispanic area was prominently advertised at a nearby intersection with a large street banner paid for by a local Coca-Cola franchise.

Similarly, in Albany, Georgia, we also visited a Questionnaire Assistance Center in a hard-to-enumerate Hispanic area where Bureau officials told us that approximately 50 percent of the Hispanic population could not speak English. The center was located in a health care center for the aging and was also publicly accessible. The staff at the center provided help in reading and completing the forms to respondents and arranged for language assistance. Advertisements for the center were placed in a local Wal-Mart and newspaper.

In contrast, less input from local partners and less promotion was evident in other local census offices we visited. For example, management staff at a local census office in Northern Virginia identified Questionnaire Assistance sites that generally lacked any input from local partners. The centers are primarily located in less urban areas, in such government buildings as libraries, a city hall, and a police station. Moreover, at a local census office in Oklahoma, according to the local census manager responsible for the Questionnaire Assistance Center program, the office had to call organizations to reconfirm their interest in the Questionnaire Assistance Center initiative because contacts were not kept up-to-date in the Bureau's partnership database. According to the local manager, this office also did not have the time to promote the Questionnaire Assistance Centers and is instead relying on word of mouth to publicize them.

Bureau Reports Successful Data Capture Operations, but Risks Remain

In mid-March, we testified that the readiness of the Bureau's four data capture centers (DCC) to operate at production-level workloads was uncertain. Specifically, although the DCCs had been operating for about 1 week, they had not yet received sufficient questionnaires to reach production-level processing. Additionally, we had not yet seen the results of important tests, and we did not yet know the extent to which ongoing development of DCS 2000—the Bureau's automated data capture system—would be affected by diverting personnel to support data capture operations.

Bureau officials told us that, as of March 29th, the DCCs were experiencing no data capture problems and that questionnaires were being processed at a rate that will meet the Bureau's May 26th deadline for completing mail-back questionnaire processing. Available data on some processing activities, such as form check-in, corroborated these statements. However, because we do not yet know the Bureau's goals for other activities, such as data transmission and form check-out, we cannot independently assess progress in several key areas. Additionally, the ongoing changes to DCS 2000's software and hardware configurations face increased risk to their timely completion.

Successful Data Capture Operations Reported, but Not Independently Assessed

The Bureau's data for the first 3 weeks of data capture operations show that, through March 29th, the DCCs had received a sufficient number of census forms to perform data capture operations at the full production level of 1.1 million questionnaires per day. Bureau officials told us that the DCCs have been able to keep up with this production-level workload. Moreover, data show that some data capture operations are meeting or exceeding the Bureau's goals. For example, each DCC either met or exceeded its goal for check-in of questionnaires received. This step entails reading the barcode on each mailed-in questionnaire and sorting the questionnaires for subsequent data capture activities. Because the check-in enables the Bureau to determine who has not yet responded to the census and thus will require follow-up, the DCCs are expected to check-in as many questionnaires as possible before April 11, 2000.

As of March 29th, the Bureau reported DCS 2000's optical character recognition (OCR) accuracy rate was over 99.29 percent at each DCC, exceeding the Bureau's 98-percent accuracy goal. Additionally, the key from image (KFI) accuracy rate was 97.28 percent or more at each DCC, exceeding the Bureau's 96.5-percent KFI accuracy goal. The KFI keying rate exceeded the Bureau's 5,000 characters per hour goal at each DCC except Jeffersonville, which had a KFI keying rate of 4,127 characters per hour.

There are several other key data capture activities that we cannot independently assess because the Bureau has not yet provided its goals for these activities. These include imaging, the number of forms that have gone through KFI, data transmission, and check-out. However, according to the Bureau, it has compared its data on these activities against its goals and determined that the DCCs are processing questionnaires at a rate sufficient to meet its May 26, 2000, deadline for processing all questionnaires it receives through the mail.

To help prepare for the actual data capture operations during Census 2000, the Bureau and its contractors conducted a final operational test from February 22 to 25, 2000. In our previous testimony to the Subcommittee, we stated that the Bureau characterized the four-site test as successful.[9] Subsequently, our review of the four-site test report determined that the test identified several problems with DCS 2000. However, Bureau officials told us that these problems have been fixed and that DCS 2000 has been modified accordingly. Our analysis of these problems and the actions taken to address them indicates the problems should be resolved and will not affect an ongoing system operation.

DCS 2000 Problems Increase Risk of Delay in Completing Ongoing System Changes

In our February 2000 report on the progress of DCS 2000 development,[10] we raised the concern that the short time between the conclusion of the development and test activities and the date when DCS 2000 would start supporting data capture operations created the risk that new problems would be identified after the system was in use. This, in fact, is occurring. During the initial 3 weeks of data capture operations, the Bureau and its contractors identified a total of 66 new problems with DCS 2000. Six of these were classified as "critical," meaning that they could significantly degrade system operation and needed to be fixed within 72 hours.

The DCS 2000 system development contractor has fixed these problems, but doing so has required the Bureau to delay the development of some important changes to DCS 2000. As we testified in March, the Bureau was making two sets of software modifications that would enable the Bureau to set priorities for data capture operations and meet its deadline for producing apportionment counts. The first set of changes was completed in February, and the second was to be completed by April 27th. The Bureau has delayed its completion date for the second set to May 31st, because it needs to divert personnel to address DCS 2000 problems. According to the

[9] 2000 Census: Update on Essential Operations (GAO/T-GGD/AIMD-00-119, Mar. 14, 2000).

[10] 2000 Census: New Data Capture System Progress and Risks (GAO/AIMD-00-61, Feb. 4, 2000).

DCS 2000 development contractor, the revised schedule still allows time to complete development and testing activities, and further delays are not expected because the contractor is adding personnel to the second release development effort. Nevertheless, if new DCS 2000 problems continue to surface, the completion of the second release will be increasingly at risk.

Moreover, there are still a number of significant activities that need to be completed before the second release software is ready for operation. In particular, the Bureau and its development contractor have not yet completed a software development plan for the second release. Additionally, the contractor has proposed eliminating system acceptance testing—which is normally a government witnessed activity to ensure that the system meets required specifications—to save time in the development schedule. Because the development plan is not completed, we cannot yet offer an assessment of second pass development risks, including the proposal to forgo system acceptance testing.

Mr. Chairman, with about a week before the cutoff date for mailback responses for purposes of generating the list for nonresponse follow-up, the Bureau continues to need public cooperation to return millions of outstanding questionnaires.

While it is positive to note that the national response rate was at 55 percent as of April 1st, a large number of local census offices could be facing relatively large nonresponse follow-up workloads. The more the response rates for these offices increase, the better positioned they will be to complete their nonresponse follow-up workload. Thus, all of us need to continue to encourage our colleagues, friends, acquaintances, and those we meet in the public to return their census forms.

On behalf of the Subcommittee, we will continue to track the mail response rate and other operational data, and monitor the progress of the census.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have.

Contact and Acknowledgments

For further information regarding this testimony, please contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-8676 or Randolph C. Hite on (202) 512-6240.

Individuals making key contributions to this testimony included Thomas Beall, Mark Bird, Christine Broderick, Cristina Chaplain, Arthur Davis, Garry Durfey, Deborah Eichhorn, Martin Ferber, Julian Fogle, Robert Goldenkoff, Samuel Hinojosa, Richard Hung, Lily Kim, Edward Laughlin, Victoria Lin, Jon Ling, Susan Malone, David Marks, Victoria Miller, Vicky L. Miller, Ty Mitchell, Enemencio Sanchez, Thomas Schulz, Larry Thomas, Gary Ulrich, Lynn Wasielewski, Gary Wiggins, Linda Willard, Karen Wright, Donald Yamada, and Cleofas Zapata Jr.

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Mr. MILLER. The long form—one of the questions that I asked Director Prewitt was about the differential on the dress rehearsal, that was the 10 and 15 percent differential in the dress rehearsal. Director Prewitt didn't think that was a warning sign. Looking back at it, it should have told us there is a concern about privacy. It was too late at that stage to change the long form. We had to get the data, but maybe there was some other way we could have promoted it. Do you have a comment on that?

Mr. MIHM. I think there were plenty of warning signs in hindsight, and that is why the Bureau sought to streamline the short and long form, make the entire approach more user-friendly and have an advertising program that focuses on what the census means to you and your community. "It is your future, don't leave it blank."

In addition to all of the issues that Mr. Ryan and you were mentioning, Mr. Chairman, there was a broad acknowledgment that generally public attitudes and concern about confidentiality and privacy and invasiveness were out there. In an electronic age those feelings are certainly strong.

There was indeed a difference in the—or a growth in the difference in the long form/short form mail response rates between 1990 and the dress rehearsal. But on the other hand, as the Director has pointed out, mail response rates in the dress rehearsal are not predictive.

One of the things that I need to take a look at is the differential long form/short form response rates from the 1988 dress rehearsal before the 1990 census, and that will give us a feel whether or not there was more of an issue out there that we should have been attentive to.

Mr. MILLER. I would be glad if you would let us know.

[The information referred to follows:]

United States General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

General Government Division

B-285274

June 7, 2000

The Honorable Dan Miller
Chairman, Subcommittee on the Census
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives

Subject: 2000 Census: Information on Short- and Long-Form Response Rates

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This letter responds to your request for information on response rates for short- and long-form questionnaires in the (1) 2000 Census, (2) 1998 Census Dress Rehearsal, (3) 1990 Census, and (4) 1988 Census Dress Rehearsal. Our information is based on historical data and 2000 Census preliminary response rates from the Bureau of the Census and is contained in the enclosure.

On May 17, 2000, we requested comments on a draft of this letter from the Secretary of Commerce. However, comments were not provided in time to be included in this letter. We performed our work in April and May, 2000, in Washington, D.C., in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

We are sending copies of this letter to Representative Carolyn B. Maloney, Ranking Minority Member of this Subcommittee; the Honorable William M. Daley, Secretary of Commerce; and the Honorable Kenneth Prewitt, Director of the Bureau of the Census. Copies will be made available to others on request. If you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact me at (202) 512-8676.

Sincerely yours,

J. Christopher Mihm
Associate Director, Federal Management
and Workforce Issues

Enclosure

Enclosure

Short- and Long-Form Response and Return Rates

Short- and Long-Form Response Rate Differentials Have Been Increasing

The questionnaire response rate provides an indication of the scope of the Bureau's field follow-up operation with nonresponding households. The response rate is defined as the percentage of all forms mailed or left by enumerators that are completed and mailed back by respondents.[1] Although response rate data include housing units that are later identified as vacant, uninhabitable, or nonexistent during nonresponse follow-up, such data provide a general indication of the level of public cooperation close to Census Day.

During the 1990 and 2000 Census cycles, questionnaire response rates were higher for the short-form questionnaire than for the long-form questionnaire. However, as shown in table 1, the gap between the two rates has generally widened over time. For example, the differential between the short- and long-form response rates ranged from 5.1 percentage points to 8.7 percentage points during the 1988 Dress Rehearsal for the 1990 Census. A decade later, during the Dress Rehearsal for the 2000 Census, the differential ranged from 8.2 percentage points to 14.7 percentage points. For the 2000 Census, preliminary Bureau data show that, continuing this trend, the response rate differential for the 2000 Census is 12.5 percentage points—over twice that of the 1990 Census.

Table 1: Short- and Long-Form Questionnaire Response Rates, by Census or Test

Census or test	Short form	Long form	Percentage point differential
2000 Census (preliminary) [a]	66.6%	54.1%	12.5
1998 Dress Rehearsal [b]			
South Carolina	55.4	43.7	11.7
Sacramento	55.4	40.7	14.7
Menominee	40.6	32.4	8.2
1990 Census	66.0	60.0	6.0
1988 Dress Rehearsal			
St. Louis City	50.3	44.4	5.9
East Central Missouri	57.7	52.6	5.1
Eastern Washington	56.5	47.8	8.7

[a]Final data are not yet available.
[b]The 1998 Dress Rehearsal was conducted in Sacramento, CA; 11 counties in the Columbia, SC, area; and Menominee County, WI, including the Menominee Indian Reservation.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

[1] For the 2000 Census, the Bureau used what it refers to as an "initial response rate" to provide a measure of the scope of the field follow-up operation with nonresponding households. This initial rate is defined as the percentage of all questionnaires that were completed and returned by April 18, 2000. The rate included the number of questionnaires that were mailed back, transmitted via the Internet, or completed over the telephone through the Bureau's Telephone Questionnaire Assistance program. It also included "Be Counted Forms" that could be matched to a specific census identification number.

As shown in table 2, for the 2000 Census, the Bureau had anticipated a 6.2 percentage point response rate differential between the short and long forms. However, the actual difference grew to 12.5 percentage points because the response rate to the short form was higher than anticipated, while the response rate to the long form was somewhat lower than anticipated.

Table 2: Anticipated and Actual Response Rates to the 2000 Census Short- and Long-Form Questionnaires

Response rate	Short form	Long form	Percentage point differential
Anticipated	62.1%	55.9%	6.2
Actual*	66.6	54.1	12.5
Difference between anticipated and actual	4.5	(1.8)	6.3

*Final data are not yet available.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

After the 1990 Census, the Bureau expected a more difficult time obtaining public cooperation in 2000 because of many factors, including concerns about privacy, lack of confidence in civic institutions, non-English speaking immigrants, and illiteracy rates. In response, the Bureau took several actions designed to boost response rates—including developing streamlined and simplified questionnaires, a paid advertising campaign, and partnerships with local governments and other organizations. The overall (short and long form) initial response rate for 2000 was 65 percent—about what it was in 1990 and 4 percentage points above what the Bureau had anticipated. Nevertheless, the 1990 experience, the 1998 Dress Rehearsal results, and other demographic and societal trends that we, and the Bureau, have often noted throughout the decade suggested that there likely would continue to be a significant, and perhaps growing, short- and long-form questionnaire differential mail response rate for the 2000 Census.

As shown in table 3, short- and long-form differential mail return rates have followed a similar pattern to differential response rates—that is, increasing over time. The mail return rate is defined as the percentage of forms completed and returned for occupied housing units. Therefore, the rate is considered the more precise measure of public cooperation with the census and is calculated after the census is completed. Return rates for the 2000 Census are not yet available.

Table 3: Short- and Long-Form Questionnaire Return Rates, by Census or Test

Census or test	Short form	Long form	Percentage point differential
2000 Census	N/A	N/A	N/A
1998 Dress Rehearsal:			
South Carolina	64.7%	51.9%	12.8
Sacramento	63.1	47.7	15.4
Menominee	59.1	48.3	10.8
1990 Census	74.9	70.4	4.5
1988 Dress Rehearsal:			
St. Louis City	62.4	56.6	5.8
East Central Missouri	73.4	69.2	4.2
Eastern Washington	64.0	54.2	9.8

Legend: N/A = Not available

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Response Rates Before and After Dress Rehearsal Replacement Mailing

During the 1998 Dress Rehearsal, the Bureau mailed a second, "replacement" questionnaire to all housing units located in mailout/mailback areas in South Carolina and Sacramento. The Bureau hoped that the second questionnaire would help improve the response rate.[2] The initial forms were mailed between March 28 and 31, 1998. Replacement forms were mailed between April 15 and 17, 1998. The cutoff date for determining mail response rates was May 7, 1998. Table 4 shows that although the response rates in both Dress Rehearsal sites increased after the replacement mailing, the differential response rates between the short- and long-form questionnaires did not change significantly—decreasing by 2.5 percentage points in South Carolina and increasing by 0.1 percentage point in Sacramento.

Table 4: 1998 Census Dress Rehearsal Short- and Long-Form Response Rates Before and After the Replacement Mailing

	Short form			Long form			Short- and long-form differential	
Dress Rehearsal site	Initial response rate	Response after replacement mailing	Difference	Initial response rate	Response after replacement mailing	Difference	Before replacement mailing	After replacement mailing
South Carolina	41.4%	56.8%	15.4	27.7%	45.6%	17.9	13.7	11.2
Sacramento	41.0	55.4	14.4	26.4	40.7	14.3	14.6	14.7

Note: The Bureau did not use a replacement mailing at its Menominee test site and rural sections of the South Carolina test site. The replacement mailing was used in Sacramento and the house number/street name area of the South Carolina site.

Source: GAO analysis based on Bureau of the Census data.

[2] The Bureau decided against using a replacement questionnaire for the 2000 Census because, among other reasons, it appeared to have confused the public.

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Mr. MILLER. Let me ask you about the data capture center, and I think the report is that things are going well. You mentioned that the Bureau assured you that the problems found in the four-site test have been resolved. Please discuss the problems experienced, and do you have documentation that the problems have been resolved?

Mr. MIHM. The four-site test was the fundamental test that the Bureau did at the end of February, the 22nd to the 25th, that was to test all operations in an integrated way. In our testimony last time, we expressed some concern about the completeness of that test and the lack of information that was available to us at that point. We have since seen the report that has come out. Mark, you are most familiar with that.

Mr. BIRD. Yes. We received their report on the four-site test about a week ago, and we have reviewed it. The report itself does a good job of documenting many of the problems and the resolution of the problems. In addition, the system development contractor has a process for identifying, tracking and resolving problems, and that is an effective process.

By way of example, one of the problems that was identified was that there was a discrepancy between the number of data files that had been transmitted to headquarters and the number of data files that had been reported as transmitted to headquarters.

That discrepancy has been resolved.

Mr. MILLER. You mention that the contractor proposed eliminating system acceptance testing to ensure quality to save time. Please discuss that in further detail, and what are the implications in that?

Mr. BIRD. In a large system development and acquisition effort such as DCS 2000, it is important for the acquiring organization, which, of course, in this case is the Federal Government, to have some insight into the contractor's progress in the development of the system. Heretofore in the DCS 2000 program, that has been accomplished in part by system acceptance testing, which has been witnessed by the government.

So if, as has been proposed, system acceptance testing on the ongoing development work of DCS 2000 is eliminated, we would be concerned if there is no other opportunity for the government to witness testing. We don't yet know whether that is the case because the plans for the ongoing DCS 2000 development have not been finalized.

Mr. MILLER. Let me ask about the recruiting, and I will bring up the Tampa issue. Recruiting can be successful in New York, but if you can't solve the problems in Tampa, there are surrounding areas that can fill in, I am assuming, in the St. Petersburg or Lakeland or some close-by areas.

How serious of a problem is it? You said half of the local census service offices are understaffed at this stage as far as the number of potential nonresponse followup workers, and have they reacted adequately to address that issue?

Mr. MIHM. About 41 percent have not met their most recent recruiting goal. This is a bit of an issue of concern. In a large national undertaking, a normal distribution applies. You have some that are doing very well and some that trail off at the end. And

the national numbers showing success are taking advantage of the fact that the Denver and Dallas region are approaching 120 percent of the goal. And so it is a bit of a concern, or at least it is still a reason to continue to watch recruiting efforts—as Director Prewitt said, they certainly will continue to do aggressive recruiting down at the local level.

In regards to your comment about how feasible is it to move people across areas and have them work in different offices, in some cases that can work. It adds additional travel cost, of course, to the Bureau because they do pay mileage for transportation. The issue, though, is that generally they find census takers want to enumerate neighborhoods that they are familiar with, and people want to be enumerated by people that they are familiar with. To the extent that you try and move people or ask people to work successfully in different neighborhoods, you usually find a lot of refusal, and you usually find that people are unwilling.

Mr. MILLER. How serious is that 41 percent that you are using; 41 percent of the LCOs are not adequately hired up?

Mr. MIHM. It is hard to say at this point. They have 70,000 people on the ground doing update/leave and didn't report significant staffing problems. As Director Prewitt noted, the big question is when they are going to have 500,000 enumerators on the ground doing nonresponse followup, and that becomes an enormous challenge for them. Thus far it appears that the recruitment program, the geographic pay rates that are higher and more aggressively managed than in 1990, and certainly the recruitment process generally is more aggressively managed than in 1990, seems to be paying off in many areas.

But there are these 41 percent of the offices that, in our view, are the ones that bear some scrutiny. What we are going to be doing over the coming days as we get a better feel for where the mail response is shaking out for census offices is to compare these two and try to come up with a set of offices that are having both recruitment problems and mail response problems, and that will allow all of us—and I know the Bureau does the exact same thing—allow all of us to have a defined subset of what are the likely offices with the most challenge.

Mr. MILLER. Tampa had a management problem, and they don't necessarily correlate?

Mr. MIHM. Not necessarily. In some cases they do. One of the things that I think is good to see this time is that the pattern from 1990. In 1990, they had a great number of problems with recruitment. In this—for 2000, you are still seeing some poor mail response. We discussed when Mr. Davis was here the problems that they have having in Chicago. They are having some problems in New Orleans, as well. There are 8 to 10 offices where they are having the biggest challenges in terms of mail response. Those are not necessarily the offices where they are having the biggest recruitment problems. In some cases there are correlations, but it is not as uniform as it was last time.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you.

Mrs. Maloney.

Mrs. MALONEY. For the record, since it was such a large discussion at our last hearing, Mr. Mihm, have you had any access problems?

Mr. MIHM. No, ma'am. On the contrary, I was able to talk to senior Bureau people over the last week, spoke with Director Prewitt and Deputy Director Barron today and told them that we continued to have good cooperation from them. Our access issues were resolved. We had a number of people that were on the field during the soup kitchen and shelter and the targeted nonshelter outdoor location, they were very, very cooperative and very accommodating. We are expecting that it will continue to be that way because of the efforts of the Bureau, and certainly the efforts of this subcommittee, to make sure that we had appropriate access.

Mrs. MALONEY. On the substance of your report, your testimony reflects the usual thorough job of GAO, and it points out a number of what I would call minor challenges, but it certainly doesn't seem to be anything that would threaten the success of the 2000 census. In fact, I read your testimony or hear your testimony as essentially good news. Is that a proper characterization?

Mr. MIHM. I would agree, yes, ma'am. As we have been saying now for many months, the linchpin of a successful census is a high mail response rate. And at this point we are looking at a pretty good mail response rate. Depending on the bump that the Bureau gets over the next couple of days, the Census Bureau Director mentioned that they are at 57 percent, or that is the number that they will come out with today. Within the next day or so, we will see any bump that they got from April 1, and then if he gets another hit coming next week, we could be well over 61 percent and approaching the 1990 numbers.

As we have said before, each percentage point is 1.2 million fewer cases that need nonresponse followup and $34 million that could be better spent.

Mrs. MALONEY. This is an important point that you raise. The two principal risks that you raised in December were the Bureau's mail response time and also the tight labor market which you have been discussing. Overall how would you rate the response rate? Very good? Extremely good?

Mr. MIHM. At this point it does seem quite good. As I mentioned, 90 percent of the local census offices are at three-quarters or more of the 1990 rate, which means that they are in striking range of the mail response rate that they got in 1990. I agree with what Director Prewitt was saying, that the relevant indicator for most district offices is not the national rate, it is doing better than you did in 1990.

There are some areas of concern. The big issue now is—irrespective of a good mail response rate—is to make sure that we get out of the field as quickly as possible. Even with the Bureau's assumptions, which would be a 61 percent mail response rate, they were still looking at following up on about 49 million cases in 10 weeks, which is shorter than the amount of time than it took in 1990. So one of the concerns is as we get toward the end of this operation, are we closing out those crew leader districts, as the director mentioned, prematurely, or what kind of controls does the Bureau have

in place that we do not go to last resort or proxy data before they should. That is the next big issue.

Mrs. MALONEY. Are you willing to make any predictions about where we might end up with these numbers?

Mr. MIHM. I would prefer not. I wish I could. The Bureau is taking exactly the right position on this, and that is a tone of cautious optimism. They know, and their response model shows that as we get closer to that 61 percent and even closer to 65 percent or 90 plus 5, it gets harder and harder to get, because there is a significant trail-off in mail response. In order to get to 61 percent, we are looking at basically another 750,000 cases per day in each of the next 10 days. Can they make it? They certainly can, but on the other hand, I would not be necessarily shocked if we came in just right below that. But I think the news overall looks good for them on the mail response rate.

Mrs. MALONEY. How is the Bureau's Internet questionnaire progressing?

Mr. MIHM. It had not been tested before, and it was not something that they put an enormous effort in. The Bureau had established the possibility of getting up to a million responses to that. The reality is quite a bit lower, and they are not necessarily disappointed with that. It is in the neighborhood of tens of thousands. It is about 60,000 or 70,000.

Mr. GOLDENKOFF. It is about 58,000.

Mr. MIHM. We, at the request of the subcommittee, had done some preliminary looks at the security provisions that they had in place and came away convinced that, at least from the standpoint of the stated provisions, that they did have a secure system. They have done some testing to see if it could be hacked into. It has been successful in that regard.

The big issue with the Internet is for the 2010 census. This came very late in the cycle and didn't get a dress rehearsal test. For 2010 we all need to look in a hard way at using the Internet, and technology generally needs to be seriously investigated, and I am sure the Bureau will do that.

Mrs. MALONEY. You commented that you felt the homeless organization could have been better organized. It certainly was not the experience that Mr. Miller and I had. They even swore us in. We said—they insisted on swearing us in, and we went out in a very organized way with the count.

I read in the paper that Los Angeles, in that region they used individuals from the homeless community to accompany the enumerators as they went out on the street. Was that done in New York City? Was that a process that was followed across the country? It seems like a very good idea.

Mr. MIHM. In regards to was it done in New York City, I am not sure. I do know it was a provision that the Bureau had nationally. Those people were technically called gatekeepers, and they were to be as you characterized, the representatives or very close or to even the homeless persons themselves that would basically be able to go into areas and say, the census is here, it is OK, it is important for us to be enumerated.

In the observations that I did and my colleagues did, we didn't find that was necessarily the case that they used the gatekeepers.

I didn't find, certainly in any of the observations that I did, it was a problem that those gatekeepers were not there. The census enumerators, as I mentioned in my statement, dealt with the people that they were enumerating with professionalism and respect for the dignity of those individuals. In fact, one of the mantras that the Bureau had is that we do not wake up people who were sleeping, and there were a number of people that I noticed, census enumerators, were waiting for people to wake up. Once they woke up, they would enumerate them. They made the correct judgment that it is better to have enumerators standing around rather than disturb someone that is asleep.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you very much.

Mr. MILLER. I have a couple more questions. There was an article in yesterday's CQ Daily Monitor about privacy on an appropriation subcommittee. There was somebody there from Eagle Forum, Public Citizen, from Public Interest Research Group, National Center for Victims of Crime and the ACLU.

Privacy has become more and more of a concern. I think it is worth including this.

You mentioned several problems in conducting the update/leave operations. There are reports of children taking questionnaires off of doors or gates. What impact will all of these problems have on the quality of data from these regions? Should we be concerned?

Mr. MIHM. Let me deal first with anyone removing a census form from a door. That would be then is presumably a nonresponse. It requires the Census Bureau to hire and train an enumerator to make up to the six visits to get that family in. That is a very unfortunate occurrence if it happens even one time, and extremely unfortunate if it happens quite often.

The types of problems that we found were twofold. One is that the need to do extensive updating of the address registers, and the maps suggest in a positive way that doing update/leave was an important step in order to clean up those maps, and may have made some important additions and changes and improvements to previous address listing efforts.

The key now will be to make sure that the changes get consistently included in the nonresponse packet. If an update/leave enumerator went out there and found a problem with the map and corrected it, and that doesn't get corrected, then the census enumerator who goes out for nonresponse may have exactly the same problem. There should be a house here; I don't see that house. So there are some real efficiency concerns in both of those instances.

Mr. MILLER. I am hearing more and more counts of late or unavailable supplies and also the questionnaires in different languages, both from you and other field operations people. What is the reason for those problems, and how serious a problem is it?

Mr. MIHM. We are still trying to find out the reason. The problem is across virtually all operations and across geography in the Nation. It does seem to be a nagging concern of a lack of supplies, and we are not just talking about the papers and pens, we have been focusing on training supplies not getting there in time. In the case of San Francisco, the short forms that they used to enumerate during the service-based enumeration did not get there in time, as I mentioned in my written statement, so they had to photocopy the

forms, which requires that when the real forms come in, that they be recopied back at the local census office, because each has to have a unique identifier on them.

There are a number of nagging stories of supplies not getting out, and whether it be training kits or foreign language recruitment material, the census in the schools not getting out in time, we are trying to still look at the causes of all of this. And it could be everything from it is in the local office and they don't know it yet—we have all been to some of these local census offices where we see boxes and boxes of material—to the distribution out of the Jeffersonville center. We are certainly going to be continuing to track the supply issue during nonresponse to see whether this is a pervasive problem.

Mr. MILLER. One important lesson learned from the dress rehearsals was the importance of clear expectations between the Census Bureau and community partners. It seems that the partnership program is having mixed results in 2000. Do you have a sense why this is occurring? Has the Census Bureau performed outreach uniformly across America?

Mr. MIHM. They certainly offered. The 39,000 governments were offered the opportunity to participate. As we have reported in previous statements and in a couple of reports to the subcommittee, what we have found fairly consistently is a mismatch in expectations between local governments and the Census Bureau. Without going too far, it appears that a lot of this mismatch and expectations was particularly prevalent among some of the smaller or rural governments. Large cities have the expertise and experience to run a complete count type of program. They know what they are doing, and they understand clearly the stakes in an accurate count for them.

The rural areas, especially when they have one or maybe even two employees at the local government, to ask them to take on the additional responsibilities of being the chief promoter and organizer of complete count in that community is onerous. They don't know how much they can rely on the Bureau. And so we have found some unevenness in the promotion and outreach campaign, particularly the complete count element of that.

In order to get a more systematic view, and certainly to build for lessons learned, we are going to be doing some more detailed work down at the local level to try to get a feel both in successful areas and less successful areas asking what are the key ingredients of a profitable business partnership so we can build on that for 2010.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you.

Mrs. MALONEY. My last comment is that I hope everyone who has not filled out their form will be part of the census. Don't leave your future blank. This is a bipartisan effort. It is a responsibility of every resident in America, and as you pointed out, it is going to cost us more if you don't fill it out because we have to have enumerators. So it is important that you fill out your form.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you for being here. We appreciate GAO keeping on top of the issues.

Next week I think we have the Congressional Monitoring Board before this subcommittee.

I ask unanimous consent that all Members' and witnesses opening statements be included in the record. Without objection, so ordered.

In case there are additional questions Members may have for our witnesses, I ask unanimous consent for the record to remain open for 2 weeks, and that the witnesses submit written answers as soon as practical.

I would like to submit the Census Monitoring Board's congressional Members' request for oversight materials mentioned earlier for the record. Without objection, so ordered.

The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:41 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

[Additional information submitted for the hearing record follows:]

U. S. CENSUS MONITORING BOARD
Summary of Answered Requests
Monday, March 13, 2000

Answered: 77
Average wait: 53 days

Briefing

Description	Requested	Filled	Days Elapsed
Meeting with the Census Bureau's Regional Directors.	8/13/99	11/18/99	97
Meeting with Bureau staff regarding Block Audit details.	7/20/99	9/13/99	55
Meeting to discuss coordinated review of Dress Rehearsal blocks (Block Audit).	3/ 4/99	6/16/99	104
Talk with Howard Hogan, DSSD.	11/10/98	3/18/99	128
Demonstrations and explanations of Search/Match operations.	9/ 8/98	10/23/98	45
Demonstrations and explanations of data capture process and technology.	9/ 8/98	10/23/98	45
Briefing by John Thompson on the decennial budget.	9/ 8/98	10/27/98	49
Demonstration, explanation of geocoding.	9/ 8/98	10/23/98	45

Site Visit

Description	Requested	Filled	Days Elapsed
Observation: Enumeration of Alaska Native Village	2/ 8/00	2/29/00	21
Two spots at the January 17 training session for clerical matching in Jeffersonville, Indiana.	11/22/99	1/11/00	50
Case Studies: access to New York and Dallas Regional offices, meeting to coordinate with RDs, visits to four LCOs.	11/12/99	2/22/00	102

Data

Description	Requested	Filled	Days Elapsed
1998 TIGER line file.	1/14/00	1/19/00	5
Updated version of the Planning Database (PDB): complete file, including records for each of 61,257 census tracts and revised documentation.	12/30/99	1/ 4/00	5
Person records for 1990 PES (data file contains approximately 750,000 records).	12/ 6/99	2/ 2/00	58
Block Audit materials: data files from the Dress Rehearsal, matching guidelines, E- and P-sample counts.	10/15/99	2/ 4/00	112
Block weights for 1990 PES.	9/24/99	12/ 6/99	73
Ethnicity, language ability of regional staff.	9/22/99	1/14/00	114
Information to select six sample block clusters from two Dress Rehearsal sights to be reviewed in the Block Audit.	6/24/99	8/ 2/99	39
Census Plus estimator.	3/24/99	4/ 6/99	13

Data (continued)

Description	Requested	Filled	Days Elapsed
XYZ file: census count, sample count, and adjusted count for each block in the 1990 PES.	12/11/98	4/ 6/99	116
PES Block file: population counts (including race) for each block surveyed in the 1990 Post Enumeration Survey (PES).	12/11/98	11/10/99	334
Adjusted population totals for the 1990 Post Enumeration Survey by zip code.	10/28/98	12/14/98	47
Number of people added to the 1990 Census in five large cities through the Shelter and Street Night (S-Night) program.	8/24/98	10/ 5/98	42
Racial composition of large households (five-person or more) in 1990 Census.	8/24/98	10/ 5/98	42
Final data file from the 1990 Census (PL-94 data).	6/ 5/98	6/15/98	10

Document (internal)

Description	Requested	Filled	Days Elapsed
Allocation, distribution and processing of Be Counted forms.	1/25/00	2/14/00	20
Allocation and staffing of Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC).	1/25/00	2/14/00	20
Guidelines for in-kind contributions to the Bureau's census partners.	1/14/00	2/ 4/00	21
Timeline, templates and status of Hard-to-Enumerate (HTE) action plans (strategies to count hard-to-count neighborhoods).	11/22/99	1/ 4/00	43
Full text of all Dress Rehearsal evaluation reports.	10/25/99	11/10/99	16
Census Bureau research, auxiliary material, multi-language forms, etc. regarding the confidentiality of census data.	8/10/99	8/30/99	20
Enumeration policy and plans for Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago.	7/20/99	10/14/99	86
Language guides (32) from 1990 Census.	3/ 4/99	3/ 9/99	5
"Tool Kit" describing enumeration procedures in hard-to-count (HTC) neighborhoods, and Planning Database (PDB) identifying HTC neighborhoods.	2/ 4/99	4/21/99	76
1990 Post Enumeration Survey (PES) Evaluation Project (P-project) Report series.	12/23/98	2/ 4/99	43
Description of "unduplication" process.	9/30/98	12/11/98	72
Budget for South Carolina and Sacramento dress rehearsals.	9/30/98	12/11/98	72
Most recent working drafts of the Long and Short Questionnaires, and the questionnaires distributed in the Dress Rehearsals.	9/23/98	10/16/98	23
The papers invited and delivered at Census Bureau's 1997 Record Linkage Workshop.	9/ 8/98	10/20/98	42

Document (internal, continued)

Description	Requested	Filled	Days Elapsed
Research on erroneous enumeration Rates in the 1990 parolee/probationer coverage improvement programs (PPCIP and PPCIPFU).	9/ 8/98	10/ 6/98	28
Transcripts from Census Bureau's 1997 Record Linkage Workshop.	9/ 8/98	10/20/98	42
Results of the "full-load test" of Jeffersonville data processing equipment.	9/ 8/98	4/ 8/99	212
Materials distributed at Census Bureau's 1997 Record Linkage Workshop.	9/ 8/98	10/20/98	42
Academic paper, "Towards a US Population Database from Administrative Records," Kent Marquis.	8/27/98	9/17/98	21
1995 Census Test and 1996 ICM Test Evaluations, presented to the Census Advisory Committee.	8/27/98	10/16/98	50
Census Bureau census test and coverage study evaluations cited in Recommendation 5 of the Census Advisory Committee on the American Indian and Alaska Native Populations, December 11-13, 1995 meeting.	8/27/98	10/16/98	50
Westat Research Report on use of administrative records, presented to the Census Advisory Committee.	8/27/98	10/16/98	50
Young & Rubicam advertising contract.	8/14/98	4/15/99	244
Census Bureau test results regarding using administrative records to supplement the census, including: 1995 Census Test results, 2000 Operational Plan, and Decision Memorandum #21.	8/14/98	9/11/98	28

Document (public)

Description	Requested	Filled	Days Elapsed
Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation (ACE) design document.	1/25/00	2/ 2/00	8
Census Bureau papers presented to the August 99 Baltimore meeting of the American Statistical Association.	8/ 4/99	11/26/99	114
Enumerator training materials, booklets.	3/ 1/99	3/24/99	23
Copies of "Complete Count Committee" booklet.	12/23/98	2/ 4/99	43
Census Bureau paper, deliverables from Administrative Records Program.	11/13/98	11/23/98	10
Census Bureau paper, "Census 2000: Statistical Issues."	11/10/98	11/16/98	6
Census Bureau paper, 1990 Coverage Improvement Program, CPH E3.	11/10/98	11/16/98	6
"Be-Counted" forms, information and materials.	9/30/98	12/11/98	72
Non-Response Follow-Up (NRFU) plans, information and materials.	9/30/98	12/11/98	72
1990 Decennial Post Census Local Review Program (PCLR booklet) and PCLR field hearing transcripts.	8/27/98	10/27/98	61
Transcript to the 11-13 December 1995 Meeting of the Census Advisory Committee.	8/27/98	10/16/98	50

Document (public)

Description	Requested	Filled	Days Elapsed
1990 Census procedural histories for data collection, data processing and Post Enumeration Survey (PES).	8/27/98	9/17/98	21
Census Bureau report, "Evaluating Censuses of Population and Housing," 1985.	8/27/98	9/17/98	21
National Academy of Sciences reports on the 2000 Census.	8/14/98	9/11/98	28
Reports (13) from the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).	8/10/98	8/20/98	10
Evaluation and background on Census Bureau's use of parole and probation records to count people in the 1990 Census.	8/ 5/98	8/14/98	9
Paper by Dr. Jerusa Wilson on undercount of parolee and probationers.	8/ 5/98	8/14/98	9
Census Bureau organizational chart.	6/ 5/98	8/ 5/98	61

General Information

Description	Requested	Filled	Days Elapsed
Information for October 1 Report to Congress.	8/18/99	9/21/99	34
Complete Count Committees information.	3/ 1/99	3/24/99	23
Partnership Specialists information.	3/ 1/99	3/24/99	23
Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QAC) information.	3/ 1/99	3/24/99	23
Charter, guidelines, and membership of the 20 groups detailed to produce the traditional census plan.	9/16/98	11/ 9/98	54
Detail on "undeliverable as addressed" forms in South Carolina Dress Rehearsal.	8/27/98	10/14/98	48
Close-out and proxy data from the South Carolina Dress Rehearsal.	8/27/98	10/14/98	48
Detail on complete count committee efforts in the South Carolina Dress Rehearsal.	8/27/98	10/14/98	48
Efforts or programs to develop and improve the Master Address File	8/14/98	9/11/98	28
Budget and personnel allocated for the Detroit Region Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program.	8/12/98	10/16/98	65

U. S. CENSUS MONITORING BOARD
Requests delayed over 60
Tuesday, March 07, 2000

Briefing

Description	Requested	Days Elapsed
Talk with Howard Hogan, DSSD.	11/10/98	128
Meeting to discuss coordinated review of Dress Rehearsal blocks (Block Audit).	3/ 4/99	104

Data

Description	Requested	Days Elapsed
PES Block file: population counts (including race) for each block surveyed in the 1990 Post Enumeration Survey (PES).	12/11/98	334
XYZ file: census count, sample count, and adjusted count for each block in the 1990 PES.	12/11/98	116
Ethnicity, language ability of regional staff.	9/22/99	114
Block Audit materials: data files from the Dress Rehearsal, matching guidelines, E- and P-sample counts.	10/15/99	112
Block weights for 1990 PES.	9/24/99	73

Document (internal)

Description	Requested	Days Elapsed
Young & Rubicam advertising contract.	8/14/98	244
Results of the "full-load test" of Jeffersonville data processing equipment.	9/ 8/98	212
Enumeration policy and plans for Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago.	7/20/99	86
"Tool Kit" describing enumeration procedures in hard-to-count (HTC) neighborhoods, and Planning Database (PDB) identifying HTC neighborhoods.	2/ 4/99	76
Description of "unduplication" process.	9/30/98	72
Budget for South Carolina and Sacramento dress rehearsals.	9/30/98	72

Document (public)

Description	Requested	Days Elapsed
Census Bureau papers presented to the August 99 Baltimore meeting of the American Statistical Association.	8/ 4/99	114
Non-Response Follow-Up (NRFU) plans, information and materials.	9/30/98	72
"Be-Counted" forms, information and materials.	9/30/98	72
1990 Decennial Post Census Local Review Program (PCLR booklet) and PCLR field hearing transcripts.	8/27/98	61
Census Bureau organizational chart.	6/ 5/98	61

General Information

Description	Requested	Days Elapsed
Budget and personnel allocated for the Detroit Region Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program.	8/12/98	65

Meeting (w/Members)

Description	Requested	Days Elapsed
Meeting with the Census Bureau's Regional Directors.	8/13/99	97

Site Visit

Description	Requested	Days Elapsed
Case Studies: access to New York and Dallas Regional offices, meeting to coordinate with RDs, schedule to visit LCOs.	11/12/99	102

U. S. CENSUS MONITORING BOARD
Outstanding or Refused Requests
Tuesday, March 07, 2000

Outstanding Requests

Data

Description	Requeste	Days Elapsed
Complete LUCA records from one municipality (as an example).	3/ 2/00	5

Document (internal)

Description	Requeste	Days Elapsed
Timeline of LUCA '98 and LUCA '99 activities.	3/ 2/00	5
Additional information about specific initiatives to enumerate Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago.	11/17/99	111

Site Visit

Description	Requeste	Days Elapsed
Two spots at the September 2000 person matching training session.	1/25/00	42

Refused Requests

Data

Description	Requeste	Days Elapsed
Racial breakdown of subsampled 1990 PES block clusters.	10/25/99	56
Data set detailing gross undercounts and gross overcounts from 1990 Census.	7/20/99	86
Number of people added, per state and race, to the 1990 Census through Post Census Local Review (PCLR).	9/24/98	12
Number of people added, per state and municipality, to the 1990 Census using parole and probation records (PPCIP).	8/24/98	52

Document (internal)

Description	Requeste	Days Elapsed
Primary Selection Algorithm (PSA), Within Block Search (WBS), Intentional Fraud Dress Rehearsal evaluation report.	10/25/99	16
Decision memoranda, materials to discontinue Post Census Local Review (PCLR).	10/ 7/98	86
Young & Rubicam proposal for contract.	9/16/98	360