



The Census Project

Statement in Support of The Census Oversight, Efficiency and Management Reform Act March 25, 2010

As former Directors of the U.S. Census Bureau, we were appointed under both Republican and Democratic presidents. We strongly believe that the time has come for the Census Bureau to be much more independent and transparent.

This is based on our own experiences as former directors:

First, following three decades during which the press and Congress frequently discussed the Decennial Census in explicitly partisan terms, it is vitally important that the American public have confidence that the census results have been produced by a non-partisan, apolitical and scientific Census Bureau.

Second, the Commerce Department is responsible for many activities and several very large agencies. For the Commerce Department, the importance of the Census Bureau waxes and wanes, peaking as the Decennial approaches but then drifting down the Department's priority list. The Census Bureau, however, conducts extensive preparatory activities for the Decennial Census during the entire decade preceding it. It also has other major statistical responsibilities in the years that intervene between Decennial Censuses – including producing the nation's ongoing economic monitoring measures. The Bureau needs to more efficiently focus on these continuous responsibilities.

Third, as directors each of us experienced times when we could have made much more timely and thorough responses to congressional requests and oversight if we had dealt directly with the Congress.

The Census Bureau is the nation's largest, general-purpose statistical agency. Establishing it as a more independent agency, in the government's highly decentralized system of statistical programs, will be broadly beneficial to other statistical agencies and programs in emphasizing that the nation's statistical products are scientific and independent of partisan considerations. This is a valuable signal for the American public in a time of economic uncertainty and the corresponding high level of dependence on the numbers generated by the federal statistical system.

We believe that the Census Oversight, Efficiency and Management Reform Act , which will be sponsored by Senators Carper and Coburn in the Senate and

Representatives Maloney and Dent in the House, achieves the goals of independence and transparency we seek for the Census Bureau.

It is vitally important that the public have confidence that census results are produced by a Bureau that is non-partisan, apolitical and whose results are based on sound science. The proposed legislation would have several positive features that we believe would ensure the Census Bureau can act more independently and with more transparency:

The Census Oversight, Efficiency and Management Reform Act would ensure that the Census Bureau enjoys the independence of governance and budget that will best enable it to perform its essential function in the following ways:

- Gives the Director the independence to report directly to the Secretary of Commerce without being required to report through any other official at the Commerce Department.
- Increases the independence of the Director by allowing the Director to submit recommendations or testimony to Congress that represents his or her own views and not necessarily the views of the administration, and prohibits the Director from being required to testify on census issues that he or she does not agree with.
- Makes the Director of the Census Bureau a presidential term appointment of five years, with the 10-year decennial cycle split into two, five-year phases - planning and operational, creating continuity across administrations.
- Gives the Director authority over all personnel and activities in the exercise of all powers and duties of the Bureau and mandates that all Census personnel report only to the Director.
- Gives the Director the authority to establish, alter or discontinue such organizational units within the Bureau as he/she may consider necessary or appropriate.
- Gives the Director the authority to establish advisory committees to provide advice with respect to any function of the Director.
- Gives the Director, in consultation with the Secretary, the authority to prescribe rules and regulations to carry out the function of the Director.
- Gives the Director the authority to delegate authority to act and render decisions as the Director deems necessary.
- Requires that the Census Director provide copies of budget requests to

Congress, at the time the Director submits a budget request to the Commerce Secretary to be included in the President's budget request, prior to the Commerce Department's budget submission to OMB, increasing transparency and oversight.

- Gives the Director the authority to utilize personnel from other federal agencies in carrying out the functions of the Bureau.
- Gives the Director the authority to appoint a Deputy Director who serves at the Director's pleasure and is a member of the Senior Executive Service.
- Requires the Director to submit to Congress a comprehensive annual report on the next decennial census, with a description of the Bureau's performance standards and a risk-assessment of each significant decennial operation.

We believe that each of these features in the proposed legislation would address the independence and transparency issues we are concerned about.

The Census Bureau is the nation's largest general-purpose statistical agency. The American public must have complete confidence in the Bureau and its results in times of economic uncertainty and the corresponding high level of dependence on the critical numbers generated by the Census Bureau.

For these reasons, we wholeheartedly support the Census Oversight, Efficiency and Management Reform Act.

We congratulate you and your colleagues for initiating the Bill, and offer our services in any way that you might find useful.

Sincerely,

Vincent P. Barabba (1973-1976; 1979-1981)

John G. Keane (1984-1989)

Barbara Everitt Bryant (1989-1993)

Martha Farnsworth Riche (1994-1998)

Kenneth Prewitt (1998-2001)

Charles Louis Kincannon (2002-2008)

Steven H. Murdock (2008-2009)