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Date: Mon, 23 Jul 2001 10:39:53 -0400
MIME-Version: 1.0
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July 23, 2001

NEWS ALERT

House of Reps Approves Census Bureau Funding,
Designates Money to Explore Count of Overseas Americans

Plus: Senate Committee Clears Census Bureau Funding;
Hearing Scheduled on Counting Overseas Americans;
Census Bureau To Release ACS Test Data

On July 18, the House of Representatives approved funding for Census Bureau activities in fiscal year 2002 (FY02) as part of the Commerce, Justice, and State, The Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill (H.R. 2500), one of 13 regular annual spending bills that fund all federal government programs. The House agreed to an amendment offered by Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) that designates money to plan for a count of private American citizens living abroad in the next census. Lawmakers narrowly rejected two other census-related amendments sponsored by Rep. Maloney, a member of the census oversight subcommittee.

The \$38.5 billion Commerce spending measure, approved by a vote of 405 - 19, allocates \$519.8 million for Census Bureau programs in the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2001. The amount is \$23.6 million below President Bush's budget request, but a \$25 million carryover from previous years will give the Bureau \$544.8 million to spend in FY02. The House appropriated \$350.4 million for Periodic Censuses and Programs, which includes dissemination of Census 2000 data, planning for the 2010 census, and continued development of the proposed American Community Survey (ACS). The \$25 million carryover, earmarked for Census 2000-related activities, brings the total spending level in this account to \$375.4 million. The Bureau received \$169.4 million for its Salaries and Expenses account, which covers ongoing statistical programs and surveys.

The spending bill provides the full \$29 million requested for the so-called "Long Form Transitional Database," which includes the first national-scale test (the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey) for the ACS. Another \$27.1 million, under the Continuous Measurement program, covers continued data collection in the 31 ACS test sites.

House adopts amendment on counting overseas Americans: Lawmakers adopted, by voice vote, Rep. Maloney's amendment on counting Americans abroad in the

census. The proposal shifts \$2.5 million from the Census 2000 account to the 2010 census account, to plan for a count of overseas Americans in the 2010 census. Last year, appropriators directed the Census Bureau to submit a report to Congress on the feasibility of counting private American citizens abroad. That report is due September 30.

Speaking in support of her amendment, Rep. Maloney estimated that three to six million Americans who are not federal or military personnel are living outside of the United States. These Americans, she said, vote, pay taxes, and "make huge contributions to our economy each year." In Census 2000, the Census Bureau used information from administrative records to include members of the armed forces and federal civilian employees in the state population totals used for congressional apportionment. The State of Utah challenged that policy in court, claiming it was unfairly denied a fourth congressional district because private American citizens living abroad, such as Mormon missionaries, were not counted. A three-judge federal panel unanimously rejected Utah's challenge earlier this year; the state has appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Census Subcommittee Chairman Dan Miller (R-FL), who also serves on the Appropriations Committee, agreed to the Maloney amendment. Rep. Miller said the Bureau and Congress must determine who should be included in a count of Americans living abroad, but that "[o]ur goal is to have them counted in the 2010 census." The congressman also cautioned that \$2.5 million was "an arbitrary number" for the planning effort and that he would consult with the Census Bureau to include the necessary amount of money in the final bill. Rep. Benjamin Gilman (R-NY), a former chairman of the Committee on International Relations who also spoke in support of the amendment, has introduced legislation calling on the Census Bureau to include private American citizens living outside of the United States in the decennial census.

House rejects Maloney-Kucinich amendment on street and shelter data: A second amendment offered by Rep. Maloney and Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) would have set aside \$500,000 for the Census Bureau to publish data on the number of people counted at shelters, food kitchens, and on the streets during the Census 2000 Service-Based Enumeration (SBE). The House defeated the proposal, 217-209.

The Census Bureau conducted a separate nighttime count of people without a usual residence over a three-day period in late March 2000. The Bureau worked with local governments and community service providers to identify, in advance, outdoor locations, food kitchens and vans, shelters for the homeless, and other sites where people who had no permanent address at that time might gather. However, the Bureau decided not to report separately the number of people counted on the streets or in shelters and food kitchens, below the national level. Bureau spokespeople have said the data could be misinterpreted as a count of the homeless population and have pointed to criticism of the 1990 Street and Shelter Night count, which advocates for the homeless contended was highly inaccurate. Instead, the Census 2000 counts of people on the streets and in shelters were included in the numbers for non-institutional group quarters such as college dormitories. Nationally, the Census Bureau said it counted about 280,000 people during the Service-Based Enumeration.

Rep. Maloney said many local governments and community groups helped facilitate the Census 2000 street and shelter count, with some providing incentives (such as blankets) to cooperate with census takers and others training local residents to help enumerators interview wary people. While "no one should delude themselves that this is an accurate count of the homeless," the congresswoman said, "[t]his is not a good reason to suppress these data." Rep. Maloney said the Census Bureau recently agreed to release a report on the SBE this fall, elaborating on the information collected from people at shelters and food service locations. She suggested that the report could "clearly describe just what these data do and do not represent." Her amendment would have earmarked funds for that report.

After homeless advocates objected to the 1990 census Street and Shelter Night counts, the Bureau agreed to include a caveat in data publications, clarifying that the numbers did not represent a count of the homeless.

Rep. Kucinich said the SBE data released so far "is not in a format useful to local governments." The former Cleveland mayor argued that only local data would "enable communities to determine what services are needed" for their residents. He emphasized that the count of people in shelters and living on the streets was not meant to be an official count of the homeless, but that "to withhold the information or to say it might be misinterpreted really is to lose an opportunity to get a broader assessment of the picture of homelessness in this country."

Rep. William L. Clay, Jr. (D-MO), the ranking Democrat on the census oversight subcommittee, said a special report on the data collected during the SBE would "give local governments and community groups a way of evaluating their efforts." He said the only way to improve the accuracy of such a count "is to make it public and to enlist the efforts of all involved in improving those data in the next census."

Rep. Miller opposed the Maloney-Kucinich amendment, saying that "professionals at the Bureau" believe the street and shelter counts are "not accurate information to release." The congressman released a letter signed by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the National Coalition for the Homeless (a member of the Commerce Department's Decennial Census Advisory Committee), and the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, in support of "the Census Bureau's decision not to release a separate homeless count in the 2000 Census." The advocacy groups said that "people without housing should be counted by the Census," but that publishing separate counts of people "enumerated in homeless situations... would be inaccurate and misleading." "[H]omelessness is not a permanent condition, but a state of extreme poverty marked by a temporary lack of housing. ...A one-day, or 'snapshot' estimation of homelessness therefore distorts the reality of homelessness for most people who experience it," the advocates wrote. They also noted that census takers were not able to visit all shelters, service facilities, or outdoor sites where people might spend the night.

In response, Reps. Maloney and Kucinich said many local service providers wanted the Census Bureau to release the street and shelter counts for their communities. They cited statements from the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless, Baltimore's Office of Homeless Services, Seattle's Strategic Planning Office, and other organizations that said they had expected to see detailed results from the Service-Based Enumeration after helping the Bureau carry out the operation.

Lawmakers split on proposal to improve Hispanic subgroup data: A third Maloney amendment to the Commerce spending bill failed on a rare tie vote of 215-215. Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY) joined the congresswoman in an effort to earmark \$2 million to fill in gaps in the reporting of Hispanic subgroups in Census 2000.

Rep. Maloney contended that a change in the wording of the so-called 'Hispanic origin' question led to a significant jump in the number of respondents who identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino but failed to write-in a specific subgroup, such as Dominican or Nicaraguan. Both the 1990 and 2000 census forms specified three subgroups - Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Cuban - that people of Hispanic origin could check. The 1990 question instructed respondents checking "Other Hispanic" to print one group and gave examples, such as Argentinean and Salvadorian. In 2000, the "Other Hispanic" option was followed only by the instruction, "Print group," leading some people to write in "Hispanic" or "Latino" instead of a specific subgroup. As a result, Rep. Maloney said, 17 percent of Hispanics were identified simply as "Other Hispanic" in 2000, compared to 1.9 million in 1990, making comparisons in growth of specific population groups over the decade difficult.

Nationally, the Hispanic population grew by 58 percent between 1990 and 2000. But Census 2000 data showed a 15 percent decline in the number of Nicaraguans and a drop in the number of Panamanians, for example, even as the number of "Other Hispanics" grew from 2 million to 6 million, Rep. Maloney noted. She suggested that the Census Bureau could use data reported on the long form, which asked for a person's ancestry or national origin as well as their place of birth, to produce more accurate estimates for Hispanic subgroups, an editing procedure she said was used in 1990.

Rep. Rangel, whose Harlem-based district is home to many Dominican Americans, said that the Bureau should "give us a clearer understanding of who we call Hispanic." Rep. Jose Serrano (D-NY), the ranking Democrat on the Commerce appropriations subcommittee, described the "Other Hispanic" category as "this incredible new number that, one, we do not know how to service; two, we do not know where they come from; and three, we do not know how best to deal with all of their needs."

Rep. Miller, who opposed the amendment, said that the proposal "may be well intended, but it sets a dangerous precedent." He argued that the Census Bureau could not determine the national origin of a respondent who wrote in "Hispanic" instead of a specific subgroup and suggested that the long form would yield more detailed information. "[W]e cannot go back and change what people put down on the short form now," the congressman argued. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), chairman of the Commerce appropriations subcommittee, also spoke against the amendment, saying "the professionals [at the Census Bureau] would be opposed to this."

Senate committee approves Bureau funding: The FY02 Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary spending bill began moving through the U.S. Senate, as the Committee on Appropriations approved its version of the measure on July 19. The Commerce appropriations subcommittee, chaired by Sen. Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC), did not vote on the bill separately.

According to preliminary information from the committee, the \$41.49 billion bill includes \$517.1 million for Census Bureau programs in FY02. The Periodic Censuses account is funded at \$348.5 million, about \$2 million below the House-passed level. (The prior-year carryover brings the total spending level for this account to \$375.5 million.) The Senate bill designates \$26.2 million for Continuous Measurement (covering the ACS test sites), about \$1 million below the House-approved funding level. The Bureau received \$168.6 million for its Salaries and Expenses account.

Congressional hearing scheduled: The House Subcommittee on the Census will hold a hearing on Thursday, July 26, on "Americans Abroad: How Can We Count Them?" The subcommittee had not released a witness list, but groups representing private American citizens living outside of the United States are expected to be among those testifying. The hearing will start at 1:30 p.m. in Room 2247 Rayburn House Office Building, and is open to the public.

Census Bureau to release ACS test data: The Census Bureau will release data from the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey (C2SS) at a Washington, D.C. press conference on July 31. (Please note this has changed from the original date.) The C2SS, the first national-scale test of the proposed American Community Survey, collected data from 700,000 housing units during the decennial census year. The survey questions were substantially similar to those found on the Census 2000 long form. The initial C2SS data release includes information for the nation, the 50 states, and the District of Columbia. In the fall, the Census Bureau will publish additional C2SS data for most counties and cities with 250,000 population or greater. At the July 31st press event, the Bureau also will release data from 21 of the 31 ACS test sites, for geographic areas and population groups with 65,000 population or greater.

New ACS resource materials available: Two new Fact Sheets on the Census Bureau's proposed American Community Survey are now posted on the Census

2000 Initiative web site. Go to www.census2000.org
<<http://www.census2000.org>> for "The American Community Survey in Brief: Key
Policy and Operational Issues" and "Meeting 21st Century Data Needs: From
the Census Long Form to the American Community Survey."

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