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June 16, 2000

NEWS ALERT

Proposed Rule Would Delegate Adjustment Decision
To Census Bureau Director

Plus: Census Director Proclaims 2000 "The Good Census";
House Committee Allocates FY01 Funds for Census Bureau;
Telephone Assistance Extended Through June

The U.S. Department of Commerce has issued a proposed rule that would give the Census Bureau Director sole authority to decide whether to release statistically corrected census numbers for purposes other than congressional apportionment. Census Bureau Director Kenneth Prewitt, with two former census directors at his side, announced the action at a June 14th press conference in Washington, DC.

Under the proposed rule, the census director would make "the final determination" on adjusting the census figures. The decision "shall not be subject to review, reconsideration, or reversal by the Secretary of Commerce." The notice of the proposed action, published in the Federal Register, discusses the justification for the delegation of authority. The decision, the notice says, "turns entirely on operational and methodological implementation within the expertise of the Bureau of the Census." Review by the Commerce Secretary would "create the appearance" that "non-scientific considerations" played a role in the adjustment decision, according to the background statement. The transfer of authority would "safeguard both the substance and public credibility of the decision making process."

The proposed rule would create a committee of "distinguished senior career [Census Bureau] professionals" to review the operational and technical aspects of the procedures for measuring census accuracy and correcting under- and overcounts in the first set of population numbers. The Executive Steering Committee for A.C.E. Policy (ESCAP) will then issue a written report recommending whether the director should release statistically adjusted data. The Census Act requires the Bureau to transmit block-level population data to the states by April 1, 2001, for use in the redistricting process. The rule sets forth the twelve members of the steering committee by position; the ESCAP report would be made public at the same time it is sent to the director. "A.C.E." is the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation program, which includes a quality-check survey of 314,000 households.

At the press conference, former Census Bureau directors Barbara Bryant and Martha ("Marty") Riche said they support delegating the adjustment decision to the Bureau chief. Dr. Bryant, who led the agency during the 1990 census for the Bush Administration, noted that significant reform of the census process began in 1991. Despite the move to paid advertising and efforts to simplify the questionnaires, it is "not possible to count everybody" without

the use of sampling, she said. Dr. Riche, appointed by President Clinton to head the Bureau in 1994, said partnerships with community groups and local officials were a key improvement for Census 2000. Still, she said, a household-based census is "simply bound to fall short."

On Monday, Dr. Prewitt sent former Commerce Secretary William Daley a report prepared by the Bureau's senior staff on the feasibility of using statistical methods to account for people missed or counted twice in Census 2000. The report, entitled "Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation: Statement on the Feasibility of Using Statistical Methods to Improve the Accuracy of Census 2000," sets forth the rationale for the "preliminary determination" that the Bureau can produce statistically corrected census numbers within the legal time frame and that the corrected data "will be more accurate." In his June 13th response adopting the report's conclusions, Secretary Daley said, "We owe it to the American people to use all of the tools at our disposal to make the census as accurate as possible." The choice, he said, is whether to use statistical methods to improve census accuracy, or "whether we do nothing." The differential undercount of racial minorities cannot be eliminated without using these methods, the Secretary concluded.

The rule making document also notes that in 1980, the Commerce Secretary formally delegated a similar decision on whether to use sampling methods to correct the census undercount to the Census Bureau director. That delegation of authority was rescinded before the 1990 census, when controversy over an adjustment led to a lawsuit by the City of New York and dozens of other localities. In 1991, Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher decided not to adjust the 1990 census counts, despite a recommendation to do so by census director Barbara Bryant.

The rule (in current or modified form) will take effect after a 45-day public comment period. Comments should be sent to: John H. Thompson, Associate Director for Decennial Census, Bureau of the Census, Suitland Federal Center, Suitland and Silver Hill Roads, Building 2, Room 3586, Suitland, MD 20233. The proposed rule, the Census Bureau's feasibility statement, and other relevant documents are available on the Bureau's Web site at <<http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/presskit.html>>.

Census operations update: The Census Bureau has completed 98 percent of its door-to-door visits to unresponsive households, Dr. Prewitt announced at the June 14 press conference. The Denver census region, covering ten states, as well as Puerto Rico, have reached the 100 percent completion rate, the director said. The Los Angeles census region is on the verge of reaching that milestone, as well.

Census takers are continuing their efforts to count the remaining 908,000 households that did not respond by mail. As of June 13, the Bureau had counted or declared vacant 99 percent of the housing units included in the mail out/mail back and follow-up phases of Census 2000. Census operations continued at a faster pace than in 1990. In the last census, only 60 percent of the overall workload was finished by June 1, compared to 82 percent by the same date this year.

Other highlights of Dr. Prewitt's Census 2000 status report were:

- * 117 million census forms had been scanned, and the accuracy rate for scanning was the same both for forms returned by mail and those completed by an enumerator.

- * Census workers completed telephone interviews with 90,000 households in the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation (A.C.E.) sample.

At a June 8th press briefing, Dr. Prewitt told reporters there was "no bad news to report" about Census 2000 operations. He characterized the nation's 22nd decennial count as "the good census" and cited the "enthusiasm, commitment, and dedication" of census workers as a primary reason for the operational success. The director also said an "echo effect" from the marketing program helped keep Census 2000 operations on schedule and well

ahead of the 1990 pace for similar activities. "We underestimated," he said, "the lingering effect of the advertising campaign and partnership program."

The director expanded on his characterization of Census 2000 at the June 14 press conference. A "good census," he said, meets three criteria. It is "operationally robust and successful; open, transparent, and earns the public trust; and dedicated to being fully inclusive."

NRFU visits are scheduled to end on July 7. Census workers have started follow-up telephone calls (called Coverage Edit operations) to approximately 2.2 million households that listed six or more residents (questionnaires were designed to collect information for up to six people, with space provided to list additional residents) or that reported information for only some of the people listed as residents. Clean-up operations (called Coverage Improvement Programs), which include rechecking housing units designated as vacant or nonexistent in earlier visits, will be conducted on a flow basis from early July into August. During this operation, census enumerators also will visit addresses submitted by local governments since last fall as part of the "New Construction" phase of the Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program. The Bureau will start in-person interviews with households in the quality-check A.C.E. survey on June 19, in neighborhoods where NRFU operations are complete.

Despite his upbeat assessment, Dr. Prewitt noted several problems that he said the Bureau had moved quickly to alleviate. The Census Bureau added enumerators, authorized overtime payments, and created narrowly targeted Public Service Announcements in English and Spanish to help boost response rates in the "small number" of Local Census Office areas where completion rates are lagging. The director has visited several cities in recent weeks, including Chicago, Baltimore, Columbus (OH), and Milwaukee, to convey the message that, "It's not too late to be counted."

During last week's Census 2000 briefing, the director also warned that census workers trying to finish their workload still encounter "real resistance," some of which he described as "organized." He displayed a sign taped to the doors of some unresponsive households, bearing the message, "Census Workers Are Not Welcome Here. Do Not Knock." The printed sign provides space to list the gender and age of up to six residents, and concludes by saying, "This is all you need to know and are entitled to ask. Have a nice day." A logo and Web address for "The Heartland Institute" (www.heartland.org <<http://www.heartland.org>>) is printed at the bottom.

In a written statement issued on June 8, the Institute's president and CEO, Joseph Bast, said his organization "does not advise anyone to violate the law," but that the questions asked in the census "[go] far beyond any reasonable interpretation of the 'Enumeration' authorized by the Constitution." The statement described the Institute as an "independent, nonprofit research organization" in Chicago that addresses issues such as school reform, environmental regulation, and tax policy. Mr. Bast said "many political leaders, including Texas Gov. George W. Bush, Sen. Chuck Hagel, and Rep. Tom Coburn have stated publicly that people should not answer Census questions they believe invade their privacy." The poster, which Mr. Bast said appeared on the back of the Institute's monthly newspaper sent to 45,000 people, also bears a small-print "warning" about penalties for not answering census questions.

Telephone help lines to remain open longer: The Census Bureau has decided to keep its toll-free telephone assistance lines (TQA) open until June 30, about three weeks past the original shut-down date of June 8. TQA operators will continue to accept census responses over the phone in the six languages in which questionnaires are printed (English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Tagalog, and Vietnamese) from people who did not mail back a form and have not been visited by a census taker, or people who believe they were left off the questionnaire completed for their residence.

People who provide their answers over the telephone might still receive a visit from a census enumerator, if the address is included on the list for nonresponse follow-up. The Census Bureau will rely on local governments and complete count committees in areas where response is lagging to promote the continued availability of the telephone response option.

Census Bureau funding for fiscal year 2001: On June 14, the House Committee on Appropriations approved the Fiscal Year 2001 Commerce, Justice, and State, The Judiciary and Related Agencies funding bill. The panel allocated a total of \$670,867,000 for Census Bureau programs, about \$48.3 million less than the Administration had requested. The Census Bureau is an agency of the Commerce Department.

Aside from Census 2000, Census Bureau programs did not receive requested funding increases over current year levels. The committee allocated \$392.9 million for the decennial census, just shy of the Administration's request. In fiscal year 2001 (FY01), which begins October 1, 2000, the Census Bureau must finish 2000 census operations, including the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation program to measure and adjust for undercounts and overcounts in the initial set of population numbers. It also must shut down local census offices and data processing centers, and begin tabulating and publishing data collected in the census.

The bill specifies how decennial census funds should be spent, listing nine broad categories such as field data collection, marketing, data processing, and testing and evaluation. The Census 2000 appropriation includes \$3.5 million for the eight-member Census Monitoring Board.

The panel allocated \$20 million to continue development of the American Community Survey (ACS), the same amount appropriated for the current year and \$5 million below the President's request. The ACS would collect demographic and socio-economic data from a rolling sample of households throughout the decade, with 3 million housing units surveyed each year. The survey is designed to replace the traditional census 'long form' in 2010 and beyond. The Census Bureau is testing the ACS in 31 sites around the country.

Funding for the decennial census and the ACS is part of the Periodic Censuses and Programs ("Periodics") account, one of two main funding categories for the Census Bureau. The Periodics account covers activities that support census operations, such as mapping, as well as other mandated censuses of business establishments and local governments. The House committee allocated a total of \$530,867,000 for the Periodics account, about \$14.5 million below the request. The Census Bureau's second main funding category is Salaries and Expenses ("S&E"), which covers ongoing surveys (such as the Current Population Survey) to collect important demographic, economic, and social statistics. The committee allocated \$140 million for the S&E account, the same amount appropriated in fiscal year 2000 and \$33.8 million below the Administration's request.

The full House may take up the Commerce spending bill before the July 4th recess starts on June 30. The bill is one of thirteen regular appropriations bills that fund activities of the federal government.

Questions about the information contained in this News Alert may be directed to TerriAnn Lowenthal at 202/484-2270 or, by e-mail at terriann2k@aol.com. For copies of previous News Alerts and other information, use our web site www.census2000.org <<http://www.census2000.org>>. Please direct all requests to receive News Alerts, and all changes in address/phone/fax/e-mail, to the Census 2000 Initiative at Census2000@ccmc.org or 202/326-8700. Please feel free to circulate this information to colleagues and other interested individuals.