



THE FEDERATION OF AMERICAN WOMEN'S CLUBS OVERSEAS, INC.
Founded 1931

***Statement to the Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations
and the Census, House Government Reform Committee***

I am extremely honored to have been invited to address this hearing, and equally daunted by the challenge of speaking, with Leigh Gribble, for a global population equal in size, according to some estimates, to the 25th state in the Union.

In addition to FAWCO (Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas, Inc.), this statement has been reviewed and approved by Paris-based AARO (Association of Americans Resident Overseas) and Geneva-based ACA (American Citizens Abroad) with whom FAWCO has worked since they were respectively founded in 1973 and 1978, as it has with ABCGC since the early 1990s.

The inclusion of private overseas citizens in the U.S. Decennial Census has been a priority for us all for close to a decade. Many people wonder why. Leigh Gribble can speak far more eloquently than I for the overseas business community. I would like therefore to speak for the students - I was one when I arrived in France in 1970; the families, like my own, often bicultural, bilingual and dual-national; the self-employed like myself, and those working for non-U.S. businesses; those living, for whatever reason, permanently abroad; the retired, a population I will soon join. FAWCO, with over 17,000 members in 33 countries around the world, has many members from each of these communities.

We want first to congratulate the Census Bureau for taking on a huge challenge. Under two Directors, it has moved this cause forward in good faith and to the best of its ability with the resources available to it, and it has worked with our organizations as few American agencies have ever done.

We are here to discuss the "lessons learned from the 2004 test census", conducted in three countries including France, where I live. I do not want to digress from those "lessons" but must explain why they, and the recommendations of this committee to Congress, are so important to the communities I represent here.

The Constitution mandates a count of every person physically present in the United States. Today this includes people of all nationalities, the homeless and even illegal immigrants and convicted criminals. It provides a picture of the entire population living in America. We know that what we are asking is not similarly Constitutionally mandated and that it is unprecedented, but it is, in today's global world, as logical as the count of people physically present on American soil on April 1, called for in the 18th century. It will provide a picture of what is truly America's entire population in the 21st century, present and active throughout the world.

Our organizations do not all agree on the purposes for which our statistics should be used. There is one on which we do all agree, however, and that is apportionment. We are not so naïve as to believe that this will be easy but we are American enough to believe that it is important. As long as the statistics that determine numbers in the U.S. Congress do not include the corresponding overseas population, state representation will be skewed and the House of Representatives will not be representative of the real - global - American population.

We in Paris were delighted when the Census Bureau announced that France, with 4 of FAWCO's member organizations, would be one of the test countries. We are less delighted to see that the total number of respondents in France is far below what we might have hoped.

We must remember, however, that the Census Bureau did not set out, in this '04 experiment, to test for response rate or coverage. The aim of this enumeration was to test the Census questionnaire itself, and the means by which Americans in the three countries were reached and encouraged to respond. I would like to comment in turn on both of those aspects. Many of these points are at least touched on in the written statement submitted by AARO, as well.

Questionnaire

Realizing that the attempt was to make the overseas questionnaire as similar to the domestic short form as possible, we would still recommend changes to make it more appropriate for the overseas population:

- The overseas census should be mandatory for U.S. citizens, like the domestic census.
- Clarify "last US address at which the respondent resided" as being "voting state". The UOCAVA assigns us to our last state of residence (which may be the last state where we resided or the state in which we have now established residence because we own property there, for example). This would also assign those who have never lived in the US to the state in which their parents are eligible to vote and where they - the children - should therefore vote (where this is allowed by the state).
- Eliminate data not relevant to the overseas population (leaving room for other data which could be). It might be decided that distinguishing between Filipino, Samoan and Korean, for example, is less relevant for overseas Americans than other data.
- Ask for only the last 4 digits of the Social Security number, as on the Federal Post Card Application for voter registration. Many people are afraid of identity theft.
- Make it abundantly clear that responses are protected under Title 13 of the U.S. Code. Confidentiality and non-sharing of information with other government agencies are a prime concern not only domestically but also abroad. This concern was only fueled by recent accounts of sharing of information on Arab Americans.
- While the Census Bureau was not in a position this year to give reasons for participating because Congress has not ruled on use of the statistics, the form should still stress the civic aspect of the response. The Bureau chose the good slogan: "Easy. Important. Confidential." for the test. Just as the "confidential" nature of the data must be stressed, so the "importance" of participating should be made clear.

Outreach

We feel that outreach efforts were hampered, not by the quality of the firm chosen but by over-reliance on its resources. Many parallel resources are needed, not the least of which is well-targeted paid advertising.

- Overseas Americans will more readily fill out census questionnaires in response to requests from other Americans, not local staff unevenly expert in the English language and very unfamiliar with the overseas American population.

We suggest the equivalent of the US system, with regional and local offices around the world, staffed by one person from the Census Bureau and one local American familiar with the country and its American population. Paid partnership positions would be advisable, as volunteers cannot necessarily give the time needed.

- Our organizations could have helped efforts better but were unable to coordinate with the public relations firm hired. We were informed that the PR firm was itself being evaluated, and that we could not work with them, with the result that we were all working somewhat "blind".
- The domestic census-in-schools program is just one example of another kind of outreach that would have been effective abroad. American and international schools and universities could have used this test in many creative ways to teach practical lessons about American government, the Constitution, etc.
- Paid advertising in a wide range of media would be even more cost-effective abroad than in the United States, but should not have been concentrated in one American newspaper and its online version.
- Congressional funding is needed for U.S. embassies and consulates abroad, by far the best equipped today to help coordinate an effort like this and contribute/cross-check citizenship data but unable in 2004 to do more than make forms available, due to a lack of funding. Resources are also needed for briefing and perhaps training of foreign service officers, and for real State Department involvement in the count. Unless the State Department can feel implicated in the success of the exercise, it will have little chance of succeeding.
- Some funding could have been far better spent with more upline planning involving those familiar with the populations in question. There were far too many of the expensive though very attractive posters for a community of people that do not all shop in the same stores, attend the same schools and churches, go to the same town hall. In addition, the high cost of two sets of focus groups (100 euros per participant) was extremely offensive to many.

It is clear that the cost-per-respondent was high. We must remember, however, that this was an unprecedented test whose cost will drop as knowledge is acquired. Moreover, overseas Americans are at least as Internet-prone as their domestic counterparts, and the high proportion of online responses this year will only grow. If, in addition, good (and funded) use is made of increasingly widespread embassy and consulate communication with the overseas population, costs can be further reduced.

There is absolutely no doubt that counting overseas Americans poses an awesome challenge but we might remember that in 1781, no one knew yet how to count persons physically present in the new United States, either. Procedures developed over time continue to be refined and even so, the entire domestic population is not yet counted. We do not at all want to detract from the domestic efforts; on the contrary, we want to see them complemented by statistics that show the global reality of the modern America. Procedures can and, I believe, will be developed over time for this, too. First, we must clearly state that participation in the Census is mandatory for American citizens, as it is in the United States. Second, we must find ways to develop the baseline population without which the count would not be possible domestically either. This will

take time but, as always, there are many organizations like ours just waiting to contribute our knowledge of the overseas community to help make it possible.

The one aspect of the domestic census which seems impossible overseas is follow-up, indeed, but with increased Internet use and more widespread online registration of overseas citizens, here, too, solutions will be found if we don't give up.

We all realize that if we knew how to count overseas Americans, it would not be necessary to conduct an overseas census test. Instead, it is unknown territory. But this unknown territory must not deter us any more than it deters the child who falls the first few times he or she tries to walk. One day the child walks right into university. Other countries, like France, count their overseas citizens. We can do it, too. The time has come, as we enter the 21st century, for a real sea change in mentalities about America's place in the world, and that involves recognizing that the overseas American population is an integral and vital part of the modern American community.

Respectfully submitted on September 14, 2004

Lucy Stensland Laederich

FAWCO U.S. Liaison