

**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, INFORMATION POLICY,
INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND THE CENSUS
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Chairman's Statement

"The American Community Survey: The Challenges of Eliminating the Long Form from the 2010 Census."

Good morning.

The Census is one of the oldest civic ceremonies of our Nation. The enumeration of our resident population is set-forth in Article I Section 2 of our Constitution. The first census was conducted in 1790 under the direction of Thomas Jefferson. That Census was conducted by U.S. Marshals on horses and counted 3.9 million inhabitants.

The modern day Census is the largest peacetime mobilization of manpower that America undertakes. In 2010 rather than riding horseback, enumerators will carry with them mobile computing devices. Although the basic fundamental notion of enumerating our population hasn't changed, the way in which the Census Bureau conducts this enumeration certainly has. The Census has adapted over time to the continually changing needs of our Nation for timely, quality data. In 1940 we saw the introduction of the long form. The long form has provided volumes of data for users from federal, state, and local governments, to businesses and universities.

The Congress and specifically this Subcommittee is being asked to consider whether or not it's time for another significant evolution in the way we conduct the census: The elimination of the long form and the introduction of the American Community Survey. The Census Bureau has been developing the ACS since the 1990's and in recent years has worked closely with Congress and with many outside interest groups and data users in its development.

By most accounts the data using community is supportive of the American Community Survey and its full implementation by the Congress. The Census Bureau

began developing the American Community Survey in the mid 1990s and has been collecting ACS data in a development program since 1996.

The goals of the ACS as stated by the Census Bureau are:

- Provide federal, state, and local governments an information base for the administration and evaluation of government programs.
- Eliminate the long form from the 2010 Census thereby facilitating improvements of the accuracy by allowing the decennial census to focus on counting the population by simply using the short form
- Provide data users with timely demographic, housing, social and economic statistics updated every year that can be compared across state, communities, and population groups

I would also add a goal that is critical if ACS is going to receive the necessary funding from Congress for full implementation. The Census Bureau must demonstrate to both the authorizers and appropriators that fully funding the ACS will eliminate duplicative surveys at the Census Bureau and in this arena alone, the taxpayer will recognize savings. I simply would find it unbelievable that no surveys could be eliminated with the advent of the American Community Survey. Eliminating redundant surveys would send a clear message to Congress that the Census Bureau is truly dedicated to making the American Community Survey the top of the class and not just simply -- another survey.

To be sure there are still some serious issues to mitigate beyond the mere cost. One of those issues is privacy. As an elected official I understand that in order for governments to make informed decisions when spending hard-earned tax dollars, governments need timely and reliable data on which to base those decisions. At the same time, I also understand how important people's privacy is to them. In many aspects of my work chairing this Subcommittee integrating technology, information and security needs with the right to privacy of Americans has been at the forefront.

Generally speaking, government has a tremendous challenge ahead of it: How to obtain the information that is needed to make informed decisions while at the same respecting the privacy rights of the public. The Census Bureau needs to be at the forefront of overcoming these privacy challenges.

The Census Bureau, to its credit, has the most protective privacy law on the books. All personal census information, and this would include the American Community Survey, is not shared with anyone for 72 years. That being said, I don't know if that will continue to be sufficient in convincing people to participate in a survey. I'm not suggesting that the law needs to be strengthened necessarily, but rather the Census Bureau needs to seriously begin to explore new and innovative ways to solicit voluntary cooperation from the residents of the Nation.

I know that the Census Bureau, the Congress, public and private data users and partnership groups have done a lot of work on the ACS. I am also very aware that we are rapidly approaching the point where the Census Bureau needs to know one way or the other if there will be a long form in the 2010 census or will the ACS be the new survey tool. It's fundamental to a successful 2010 Census that we let the Census Bureau know as soon as possible how the Congress expects the Census to be conducted. I'm hopeful that we can continue to work together to resolve these final remaining issues, and that Congress can make a final determination on full funding for the ACS in the near future.