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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, INFORMATION POLICY, INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND THE CENSUS

Congressman Adam Putnam, Chairman



OVERSIGHT HEARING STATEMENT BY ADAM PUTNAM, CHAIRMAN

Hearing topic: *“Lessons Learned from the 2004 Overseas Census Test.”*

Tuesday, September 14, 2004
2:00 p.m.
Room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building

OPENING STATEMENT

Good afternoon and welcome to the Subcommittee’s hearing on the “Lessons Learned from the 2004 Overseas Census Test.” We are here today to examine the results of the test and to review the GAO’s report titled “2010 Census: Counting Americans Overseas as Part of the Decennial Census Would Not Be Cost Effective.” Having oversight of all Census matters, this Subcommittee recognizes the importance of the lessons learned and the preliminary findings from the ongoing evaluation by the Census Bureau regarding this test. We also recognize the importance of hearing the concerns from stakeholders with relevant perspectives on the test and its challenges.

The United States Constitution requires a count of its population every 10 years. The count determines the number of apportioned seats that a state gets in the House of Representatives, is used to update and revise voting districts, and the data is used to determine eligibility for distribution of available federal grant dollars to state and local governments.

Since the first decennial census in 1790, the concept of “usual residence” has been used. Usual residence generally means that people are counted where they live most of the time, and not necessarily the same as voting residence or legal residence.

Historically, the Census Bureau has focused its efforts on counting *everyone* in every household living within the United States regardless of age or citizenship status. They have developed processes, such as the Non-Response Follow Up, and tools, including the MAF/TIGER, over time that have continued to improve the accuracy of the decennial Census. The Bureau has counted those Americans who are deployed or assigned overseas in serving this nation in recent censuses for purposes of apportionment. They have included members of the military, federal civilian employees, and their dependents by using administrative records, but they have never included all American citizens residing abroad in a decennial census for purposes of apportionment or redistricting. The magnitude of known obstacles has been a determinant factor in the feasibility of such an effort.

Many private American citizens living abroad have long recognized the importance of participating in the census as part of their civic duty. Some pay taxes, vote, may have families back home, while others may be overseas for only a short period of time. Although it is estimated that up to four million American citizens may reside abroad, the precise number is unknown. There are currently no administrative records processes or any acceptable tested methodology for providing an independent measure of the coverage of this population is available. Estimations from the U.S. State Department’s 1999 records and the U.S. Department of Defense’s 2000 records suggest there is approximately 4.1 million, but there is no calculation as to how many households the Census Bureau would have to count.

Congress and the Census Bureau have been responsive to the stakeholder groups of American citizens living abroad overall. Congress has held hearings in the past to hear from stakeholders on this issue. Through its roles in oversight and appropriations, Congress has worked with the Census Bureau to help facilitate and fund the 2004 Overseas Census Test. This Subcommittee enlisted the help of the Government Accountability Office in monitoring the work of the Census Bureau as it undertook this unprecedented effort to determine if it was feasible to include overseas Americans in a decennial census.

The Census Bureau estimates that it will have spent \$7.8 million over three years for this test. It involved enumerating the unknown universe of American citizens living in France, Mexico and Kuwait from February to July 2004. The test was carried out on schedule and consistent with its research design; however, the response rate in this test was extremely poor. Just over 5,000 questionnaires were returned, most via the Internet. Because of this low response level, the cost for obtaining these questionnaires was extremely high. GAO estimates it costs approximately \$1,500 dollars per each response.

In this hearing, we will receive testimony as to the results of the test and the challenges that exist in enumerating the overseas population. We have two distinguished panels of witnesses today. In the first panel we welcome the Director of the Census Bureau and the Director of Strategic Issues at the Government Accountability Office. I

am eager to hear their expert insight into the 2004 Overseas Census Test. Our second panel is comprised of three census stakeholders. I'd like to thank the first two for traveling so far to be with us today, from Kuwait and France, respectively. They represent American citizens living abroad who have worked to make the test happen. I look forward to hearing their viewpoint. Our final witness represents the data user community. As a redistricting data analyst, he adds a valuable perspective into the discussion of the feasibility of this issue. I eagerly look forward to the expert testimony these distinguished panels of leaders will provide today.

Today's hearing can be viewed live via WebCast by going to **<http://reform.house.gov>** and then clicking on the link under "Live Committee Broadcast".

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