



CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD BY

**J. DAVID COX SR., NATIONAL PRESIDENT
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO (AFGE)**

BEFORE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

ON

CENSUS 2020

October 12, 2017

Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Cummings and Members of the Committee. My name is J. David Cox, Sr. and I am the National President of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE). On behalf of the more than 700,000 federal and District of Columbia workers represented by our union, including approximately 3,500 at the Bureau of the Census, I thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding the 2020 Census.

The Constitutionally required Census is a cornerstone of our democracy. The Census has been conducted every ten years since 1790. The 2020 Census is less than three years away and must be adequately funded to be successful. This is not a partisan issue. It is essential that the enumeration be as accurate as possible. Even after completing the first Census, both Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and President George Washington expressed skepticism as to the accuracy of the results, believing there has been an undercount.¹

Because the FY 2017 Appropriations bills were not passed on time and because they were underfunded, the Census Bureau had to cut back on important planning activities that may potentially diminish the success of the 2020 Census.

As the Committee is aware, a critical 2018 dress rehearsal called the End-to-End Census Test has been limited due to a lack of funding. The Census Bureau cancelled two major portions of the 2017 Census Test: on-site tests in Puerto Rico and on two Native American reservations in North and South Dakota and Washington State. These were opportunities to test new enumeration technologies in rural areas. Now there will only be one test in Rhode Island with its specific geography that does not necessarily reflect many other parts of the country.

The Census Bureau is the leading source of quality data about the nation's people, workforce and economy. Depriving the Census Bureau of sufficient funding jeopardizes the success of the Census and will have drastic repercussions for the American people.

Constitutionally, the results of the decennial Census are used to apportion the seats of the U.S. House of Representatives. However, over the decades and after more than two centuries of Census history, the results of the Census are now used for so much more. The Census is used to realign the boundaries of the legislative districts of each

¹ https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1790.html

state; allocate billions of dollars in federal financial assistance; and provide a snapshot of how people are presently living in the country.² In addition, Census data informs decisions on where money should be spent on schools, hospitals, and infrastructure. The private sector uses Census data to make major economic decisions: Where to build housing, factories and workplaces? Where will new markets emerge and other markets develop?

Census Bureau employees, including those represented by AFGE, are dedicated public servants whose tireless work strengthens American businesses, infrastructure projects, hospitals, nonprofits, and, of course, State and local governments throughout the country.

While this Committee conducts oversight and focuses on the lessons learned from planning for the 2020 Census, it should not lose sight of the criticality of the mission of the Bureau. We hope that the Committee's review and oversight results in a stronger and more comprehensive plan for conducting the 2020 Census, rather than focusing on blame for any shortcomings that are highlighted.

We understand that one area of focus for this Committee has been on budgeting for the 2020 Census. While AFGE does not express an opinion on the comprehensiveness, quality or assumptions used to develop the 2020 Census budget estimates, we are concerned that in the present climate this exercise not degenerate into a "blame game." There is simply too much at stake. While Census spending cannot be unlimited, neither can it be shortchanged. Pressure to unrealistically conduct a project as large as the 2020 Census on "the cheap" will only increase the probability of serious issues with the results.

Lastly, AFGE notes that there is no permanent Senate-confirmed Bureau Director. This has a negative impact on the ability of the Census Bureau to successfully complete its work. It is important that the Bureau have competent and experienced leadership, including a Presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed Director. Although this particular matter may be beyond the control of the Committee, AFGE wishes to stress the importance of filling this critical position and ensuring that high-level Executive Branch attention be focused on the 2020 Census.

² See GAO-17-317, February 2017

We share the concerns of this Committee that Census 2020 be well-managed, efficient and effective, and we will work with you as we maintain high quality government services provided by the Bureau's dedicated public servants.

Thank you for considering our comments.