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Status of 1990 Census Promotion
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Statement of
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Subcommittee on Census and Population
Committee on Post Office and Civil Service
House of Representatives



STATUS OF 1990 CENSUS PROMOTION AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

SUMMARY OF STATEMENT BY L. NYE STEVENS DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT BUSINESS OPERATIONS ISSUES

Through its promotion and outreach activities, the Bureau hopes to influence the public's level of participation in the census. The level of public participation affects the accuracy and completeness of census counts as well as census costs. Promotion and outreach activities will be particularly important for the 1990 census because the Bureau anticipates lower levels of public participation than in the 1980 census.

Late decisionmaking and delays contributed to the late start of 1990 census promotion activities. The Census Promotion Office administers an informational and educational program to solicit support for the census. A Chief for this office was hired about 3 years later than was recommended in an evaluation done by one of the 1980 census promotion consultants. As a result, the time available to focus on program implementation was reduced.

In addition to the late start, the 1990 promotion program has not had the oversight of an appointed Bureau Director since January 1989, when the former director resigned. The Bureau Director's strong leadership was considered to be a major strength in the 1980 promotion campaign. Some early problems have occurred in the 1990 promotion program, such as duplication of effort and strained working relationships among some Bureau organizations. Measuring the impact of these conditions and the late start on the effectiveness of the Bureau's promotion and outreach program is impossible at this point in the census cycle.

To provide stronger leadership, the Department of Commerce assumed a greater oversight role in June 1989 and designated a single Bureau executive to oversee the staff of three of the four Bureau organizations involved in promotion and outreach activities. In the absence of a Bureau Director, this executive is reporting directly to the Department's Associate Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. It is too early to determine the impact of this restructuring. While we believe Departmental oversight is important, it cannot fully substitute for the day-to-day leadership of an appointed Bureau Director.

Despite these difficulties, the Bureau has attempted to strengthen aspects of its promotion and outreach activities for the 1990 census. It has expanded its outreach activities with community action groups by starting earlier and hiring more outreach staff than in 1980. Also, the Bureau began its work with the Advertising Council, the organization responsible for public service advertising campaigns, earlier than in the 1980 census. The Advertising Council also has expanded its efforts to reach minority groups by using four minority advertising firms.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear today to discuss our preliminary observations on the Bureau's promotion and outreach activities for the 1990 census. The Bureau has planned a multifaceted promotion and outreach campaign that includes not only public service advertising but also initiatives with local governments, the private sector, and national and religious organizations to obtain support for the census.

Through these activities the Bureau seeks to encourage the public's participation in the census. Not only does increased public participation contribute to improved accuracy and completeness of census counts, but it also lowers the cost of expensive field follow-up operations. The Bureau estimates that for each percentage increase in the mail response rate, it reduces nonresponse follow-up costs by about \$10 million. Promotion and outreach activities will be particularly important for the 1990 census because the Bureau estimates, on the basis of the results of its test censuses, a lower level of public participation in 1990 than in 1980.

Today I will discuss the late start-up of the Census Promotion Office. This office not only works on the public service advertising campaign but also produces promotional and educational materials for other Bureau components that work with outside organizations. In addition, I will discuss the need for

strong centralized leadership over these activities, since four separate and different organizational units are responsible for promotion and outreach activities.

Measuring the impact of this late start and the lack of executive leadership by an appointed Bureau Director on the quality and effectiveness of the Bureau's promotion and outreach activities is not possible, particularly at this point in the census cycle. The Bureau has only recently moved into the implementation phase of its promotion program, and it is designed to peak shortly before Census Day. Any effect of lost opportunities for early promotion and outreach activities will be difficult to separate from other factors that will also influence the success and cost-effectiveness of the 1990 census.

On the basis of the Subcommittee's request, we reviewed the Bureau's 1990 promotion and outreach planning activities, as compared to its 1980 efforts. In our review we examined planning and budget documents and spoke to Bureau officials who were involved in both the 1980 and 1990 promotion and outreach efforts. In addition, we spoke to the chairpersons of two of the Bureau's minority advisory committees and to Advertising Council officials. The Advertising Council is a nonprofit organization responsible for administering public service advertising campaigns for television, radio, and print media.

EVALUATION OF 1980 CENSUS PROMOTION
ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 1990

One of the Bureau's 1980 promotion expert consultants, who was also a former private sector marketing executive, evaluated the 1980 promotion campaign to help guide future promotion efforts. His evaluation identified the campaign's major weaknesses and strengths and recommended changes for the future.

The most prominent weakness identified was that the Census Promotion Office was established too late in the census cycle. The full-scale program did not begin until August or September 1978. According to the evaluation, the late start prevented the full execution of several planned programs.

For the 1990 promotion campaign, the evaluation recommended that the Bureau begin careful planning in 1985 by hiring a Census Promotion Office chief. This would have provided a 2-year period for studying past records, assessing budgetary and staffing needs, and developing promotion plans before initiating program implementation. The evaluation also recommended that a full-time fiscal officer charged with technical and administrative functions be hired before the office was fully staffed.

The evaluation also identified several major strengths of the 1980 program. The Bureau Director's commitment and attention to the promotion effort was identified as a major strength. The

evaluation said that this commitment was of crucial importance "since many other units besides the Census Promotion Office impacted the total promotion effort." According to the 1980 Census Promotion Coordinator, the Bureau Director was actively involved in the promotion campaign. The Coordinator believed that his direct access to the Bureau Director contributed to the campaign's success. The evaluation recommended that the Bureau Director's strong leadership should be continued.

Other strengths cited in the evaluation were the pro bono public service advertising campaign; the Broadcasters Census Committee of Eighty, which secured time slots for census advertisements; public opinion studies used for planning the 1980 campaign; and a congressional media program. The evaluation recommended continuing these efforts for the 1990 census.

1980 PROMOTION EVALUATION
RECOMMENDATIONS NOT FULLY IMPLEMENTED

For the 1990 census, the Bureau implemented some of the recommendations contained in the evaluation of its 1980 promotion program. For example, the Bureau will use a pro bono advertising campaign and a Broadcasters Committee. However, although the Bureau hired a Chief for the Census Promotion Office several months earlier than in the 1980 Census, it did so about 3 years later than was recommended in the evaluation. In addition, since January 1989 the Bureau's promotion program has

lacked the leadership of an appointed Bureau Director. The Bureau Director's leadership was cited as a major strength of the 1980 program and recommended for 1990. I will discuss the late start of the Census Promotion Office and the need for strong executive leadership in greater detail.

Late start of Census Promotion Office

The Bureau did not hire a census promotion chief until early 1988, about 3 years later than was recommended. As a result of this late start, the time available to focus on program implementation issues was reduced and, according to Bureau officials, some promotional and educational materials needed for field outreach specialists were not timely.

Several factors contributed to this late start. First, in late 1983, according to a Bureau official, the Bureau sought approval from the Department of Commerce to contract with the 1980 Census Promotion Coordinator to recruit candidates for the promotion chief. However, according to this official, the Department did not approve this activity.

Second, as late as April 1985, the Bureau was still considering options on how the 1990 census promotion campaign should be managed. It had not yet decided whether a separate promotion office would be established and was considering having the

Bureau's existing Public Information Office assume this responsibility.

Finally, in December 1985 the Bureau submitted a reorganization proposal to the Department of Commerce that included a new position of Associate Director for the Decennial Census. The creation of a Census Promotion Office, reporting to the new Associate Director, was included as part of this proposal. The office was to be responsible for developing and administering a comprehensive national informational and educational program to solicit the support of the public, private interests, and governmental entities.

However, the Department of Commerce did not approve the reorganization proposal until January 1987, more than a year after the Bureau's request. Two months later the Bureau advertised for a Census Promotion Chief but did not hire one until March 1988.

According to the Census Promotion Chief, upon his arrival, he was faced with administrative start-up problems that diverted his attention from focusing on the substantive aspects of the promotion campaign. Without the benefit of the fiscal officer recommended in the 1980 evaluation, the Census Promotion Chief devoted his early efforts to resolving budget issues and establishing operating procedures.

For example, budget estimates prepared before the establishment of the Census Promotion Office did not accurately reflect printing costs for promotion materials. The Bureau's initial budget allocation for promotion printing was about \$465,000. According to Census Promotion Office budget estimates, about \$5 million would be needed to meet promotion printing requirements for fiscal year 1990 alone. The Bureau recently reassessed its fiscal year 1990 promotion budget and now plans to allocate about \$4 million for printing.

According to a Census Promotion Office report, these start-up problems were occurring at a time when the Field Division's Census Awareness and Products Program, which seeks to motivate minority community action groups to support the census, was requesting informational materials to provide its field outreach staff. Census Awareness and Products Program Headquarters staff acknowledged that the Census Promotion Office was unable to provide some informational materials for some of its early outreach efforts in the time period desired. Therefore, to the extent the Census Promotion Office focused its attention on staffing and budgeting issues, time was diverted from program implementation.

Promotion effort needs strong centralized leadership of a Bureau Director

Top executive leadership is particularly important for the Bureau's promotion and outreach activities because, in addition to the Census Promotion Office, three different and separate components of the Bureau also are responsible for portions of the Bureau's 1990 promotion and outreach activities. As I mentioned earlier, the Bureau Director's strong leadership was cited as a strength of the 1980 program and recommended for 1990.

Before the establishment of the Census Promotion Office and continuing until June 1989, the Bureau's Decennial Planning Division assumed responsibility for coordinating promotion and outreach activities of the four organizations. During this time some problems have occurred, such as duplication of requests for promotional materials, multiple contacts by different divisions with outside organizations, and strained working relationships between some Bureau units.

Some of these problems could be alleviated by strong centralized leadership of an appointed Bureau Director. However, the Bureau's promotion and outreach activities have not received the oversight and support of an appointed Bureau Director since January 1989, when the former Director resigned.

In an effort to provide stronger leadership, in June 1989 the

Department of Commerce placed staff from three of the four organizations under a single Bureau executive. In the absence of a Bureau Director, this executive is reporting directly to the Department's Associate Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. It is too early to determine the impact of this restructuring. While we believe Departmental oversight is important, it cannot fully substitute for the day-to-day leadership of an appointed Bureau Director.

BUREAU ATTEMPTS TO STRENGTHEN PROMOTION
AND OUTREACH FOR MINORITY POPULATIONS

Despite these difficulties, the Bureau has attempted to strengthen its promotion and outreach programs for minority populations for the 1990 census. Traditionally, the Bureau has experienced greater difficulty in accurately counting some minority groups. The Bureau's 1990 initiatives include greater emphasis on field outreach activities and more extensive targeting of public service advertising to reach minority populations.

The Bureau's Census Awareness and Products Program, which I mentioned earlier, is administered through temporary outreach staff in census field offices. This program is the most costly part of the promotion and outreach program. The Bureau achieved peak staffing for temporary outreach staff for the 1990 census about 6 months earlier than in the 1980 census. According to a

Bureau evaluation, 1980 temporary outreach staff were unable to effectively fulfill their assignments as a result of their short tenure. Also, the Bureau increased the number of temporary outreach staff from 199 for 1980 to 260 for 1990.

In addition to expanding its outreach program, the Advertising Council's work on the 1990 census, which started over a year earlier than for the 1980 census, will focus more attention on minority populations. To supplement the general public service advertising campaign, the Advertising Council has selected four minority advertising firms to better target minority populations. According to an Advertising Council official, the 1990 program for minority populations is significantly more sophisticated than it was in 1980.

Finally, for 1990 the Bureau created a new advisory committee for the American Indian and Alaska Native populations. It has also reestablished three minority advisory committees, used in 1980, representing the Black, Hispanic, and Asian and Pacific Islander populations. These advisory committees are designed to provide for an ongoing exchange of information about the Bureau's plans for the 1990 census, particularly as they relate to these populations.

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In closing, Mr. Chairman, considering that the Bureau anticipates a decrease in public cooperation in comparison to the 1980

census, the Bureau's promotion and outreach activities could be more important than ever to obtaining a complete and accurate census. To the Bureau's credit, it has started its public service advertising campaign planning and outreach efforts earlier than it did for the 1980 census. It has also directed more attention to targeting advertising for minority populations.

However, we are concerned that the Bureau Director's position has been vacant for the past 8 months, a critical period for implementing census promotion and outreach activities. As the evaluation of the 1980 promotion activities pointed out, the Bureau Director's leadership was critical to the success of the program. The Department of Commerce has recently assumed a more active oversight role. As I mentioned earlier, while we believe Departmental oversight is important, it cannot fully substitute for the day-to-day leadership of an appointed Bureau Director.

That concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to questions.