

Vincent Barabba

March 17, 2008

The Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez  
Secretary of Commerce  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Mr. Secretary

On March 14, 2008, as a member of your 2010 Decennial Census Panel of Experts, I participated in a review of the Barron Task Force Report and a program update presented by the Harris Corporation. Additionally, I have reviewed the written material your staff has provided which included previous Census Bureau testimony before the Senate as well as reports from the GAO and the Commerce Inspector General.

The following are my recommendations regarding the actions that can be taken by the Department of Commerce and the Bureau of the Census:

1. Accept Alternative 2 as recommended by the Barron Task Force. Of all the choices available it provides the least risk to the conduct of the entire Decennial Census while taking advantage of new hand held computer technology in the conduct of the extremely critical Address Canvassing program. A complete address list is crucial to the mail-out mail-back census procedure. I concur with the task force and Census Bureau personnel that, although it still has risk, conducting a "paper" Non Return Follow Up (for which the Census Bureau has considerable experience) is less of a risk than attempting the much larger scale application of Handheld Computers for this activity. The basis for this recommendation is that the number of employees and hand held computers required for the Non Return Follow Up activity is significantly greater than the number of enumerators and devices necessary for Address Canvassing. In this larger scale application, the range of capabilities of the Census Enumerators is likely to be far greater. If, towards the end of the Census enumeration period, there are not sufficient enumerators capable of fully using the hand held computers, the device's value will be minimized and there will be limited time to exercise contingency activities. From what I was able to assess, there are not sufficient qualified resources to conduct a dual track approach by developing both a hand held computer and a "paper" Non Return Follow Up activity.
2. Because we live in a world characterized by an accelerating rate of change and increased complexity that results in a high degree of

uncertainty, I suggest you request the Congress to provide contingency funds that the Census Bureau could put to use immediately if and when the unexpected occurs. I realize the Congress is correctly concerned over the amount of money already budgeted for the conduct of the Decennial Census. This would not be a fund to conduct additional activities, but a contingency fund whose sole purpose would be to allow the Census Bureau to take immediate action only when an unforeseen activity occurs. If the Census Bureau is to meet its mandated schedule for the delivery of census information, it will need to have immediate access to these types of funds.

3. Ensure that the Census Bureau not only establishes a directorate for the taking of the Decennial Census, but provide that directorate with both the support of Census Bureau and Commerce Department leadership to ensure the directorate can make timely decisions that affect all aspects of the other activities and organizations within the Census Bureau. Consideration should also be given to providing the Decennial Directorate with access to knowledgeable outside technical resources that can provide advice and counsel in choosing from among the alternative courses of actions that are likely to arise.

In between and after the two occasions when I served as the Census Bureau Director, I have spent most of my career working within large corporations in the private sector. One of the most important things I have learned during that time was to appreciate the theory and the application of systems thinking as described by Dr. Russell Ackoff Professor Emeritus of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Ackoff has pointed out that "management should be directed at the interactions of the parts, and not the actions of the parts taken separately." I bring this concept forward because of my experience with and understanding of the Census Bureau. It has been said that a person's (or organization's) great strength is potentially its greatest weakness. One of the Census Bureau's great strengths is the remarkable competency found in the functional organizations that make up the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau's contribution to our country's creation, dissemination and use of statistical information is extraordinary. Each of the Census Bureau's functional groups has been trained and rewarded both by the government and their peer professional societies for doing what they do best. But in the concept of systems thinking each functional organization has to focus not only on how to perform their function, but appreciate the need to make the whole (the Decennial Census) greater than the sum of its individual parts (the functions). The criticality of this approach is found in Dr. Ackoff's description of a system:

A system is a whole that is defined by its function in a larger containing system. It contains at least two essential parts without which it cannot

perform its defining function.

The essential parts have five essential characteristics:

- a. Each can affect the behavior or properties of the whole.
- b. The way an essential part affects the whole depends on what at least one other part is doing. The effects of the parts are interdependent.
- c. Subsets of the essential parts (subsystems) can also affect the properties and behavior of the whole, but none has an independent effect.
- d. Therefore, a system is a whole that cannot be divided into independent parts. Its properties and behavior derive from the interactions of its parts, not their actions considered separately.

It would be the function of the Decennial Directorate supported by the Census Bureau Director to ensure that each function within the Bureau, as well as the public and private entities with which the Census Bureau works, contributes in a manner that creates a greater whole than trying to maximize its own performance – sometimes at the expense of creating a greater whole.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this endeavor. If there are any further ways you feel I can provide assistance feel free to call on me. I hope my suggestions are helpful to you and the Census Bureau Director as you prepare for this very important and most difficult task that is at the very heart of our democracy.

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