

George T. Ligler, D.Phil.

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

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

Thank you for your letter of March 12, 2008 inviting me to participate on your 2010 Decennial Census Expert Panel. On March 14 I participated in a review by the Panel of the Barron Task Force Report. The Panel also received a presentation by the Harris Corporation on Harris perspectives on the status of and outlook for the Field Data Collection Automation (FDCA) Program. Additionally, I have reviewed Congressional testimony and reports either forwarded to me by your staff or available on the Internet. I have also revisited the National Research Council's (NRC) 2004 report "Reengineering the 2010 Census", which I helped to draft as a member of the NRC's Panel on Research on Future Census Methods. My pertinent personal background is in executive and major program management, computer systems integration, and a number of the technologies underlying FDCA automation.

I concur with the Barron Task Force's recommendation that Alternative Two be pursued for the FDCA Program. I am quite disappointed to make this recommendation, as it is not only expensive but is also necessitated by unrecoverable, given the hard deadlines of the 2010 Census, problems in the FDCA Program caused by both the Census Bureau and the Harris Corporation. As pointed out in the Barron Task Force Report, Alternative Two itself is high risk. A significant portion of this risk may be attributed to the need for the Census Bureau and Harris Corporation to develop a productive and collaborative working relationship, with effective program management by the Census Bureau, in parallel with meeting highly challenging deadlines.

It didn't need to be this way. The technology to deliver the desired automation for the FDCA program is easily within the state of the art, and the Harris Corporation is generally known in the industry as a competent prime contractor, particularly in the telecommunications field. Moreover, the Census Bureau has historically at times been in the forefront of the successful application of new technology.

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The approach your staff has recently taken to understanding the problems with the FDCA program and to formulating and enforcing a disciplined approach to FDCA requirements finalization (for example, daily meetings with all parties in the room) is excellent. A similar mindset will need to be applied, hopefully without daily involvement of senior Department of Commerce staff, to the effective implementation of Alternative Two.

The formation and support of an effective FDCA Program Management Office (PMO) within the Census Bureau is essential to the successful execution of Alternative Two. The PMO must contain not only people with a deep understanding of the Census and the Census Bureau's responsibilities in Alternative Two, but also experienced managers, likely brought in from outside the Census Bureau, of large information technology integration projects. The PMO must be empowered, in conjunction with appropriate stakeholders within the Census Bureau, to make prompt decisions about FDCA requirements, priorities, and deployment.

I would further recommend that the Census Bureau's substantial investment in FDCA hand-held computers for Address Canvassing for the 2010 Decennial Census (assuming that Alternative Two is implemented) be further levered at the earliest opportunity. Increased use of this type of automation in field data collection will have the additional benefit of setting the stage for a smooth transition to Non-Response Follow-Up (NRFU) automation in the 2020 Decennial Census.

Secretary Gutierrez, thank you for the opportunity to participate in the 2010 Decennial Census Expert Panel. I hope that my recommendations are helpful to you and our new Census Bureau Director. I would be pleased to provide further assistance should you desire me to do so.

George Ligler