

# CENSUS NEWS BRIEF

## **SENATE FUNDING LEVEL WOULD DOOM AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY & AUTOMATED DATA COLLECTION IN 2010, CENSUS BUREAU SAYS**

The Census Bureau would be forced to suspend the American Community Survey (ACS) for the rest of the decade if the funding level for the bureau approved by a Senate committee for fiscal year 2006 is not increased, the agency said this week. It would also cancel the 2006 Census Test planned for Travis County, Texas, and the Cheyenne Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

Without the monthly survey, designed to produce annual socio-economic data and to replace the census "long form" starting in 2010, the Census Bureau would abandon plans to fundamentally redesign the decennial census and would begin planning for a traditional census that includes a short form sent to all households and additional long form questions sent to a sample of homes. The bureau also would drop plans to equip census takers with hand-held computers to collect data in the field from unresponsive households in 2010. Changing course at this point in the decade could increase the cost of Census 2010 by \$1.3 billion, the agency estimates, due in large part to using paper-based methods to gather information from the roughly 30 percent of American households that don't mail back a census form.

Last week, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved a funding bill for the departments of Commerce and Justice and various science agencies (including NASA and the National Science Foundation). The bill (H.R. 2862, as amended by the committee) allocates \$727.4 million for the Census Bureau, about \$85 million below the amount approved by the House of Representatives earlier this month, \$150 million below the Bush Administration's request, and less than the bureau received for 2005.

Earlier in June, the House Appropriations Committee approved a funding level of \$832.2 million for the Census Bureau, about \$45 million below the President's request. However, that amount included a cut of \$25.8 million requested for furniture and other expenses associated with a planned move into a new headquarters facility next year. The full House of Representatives reduced the bureau's appropriation by an additional \$20 million (\$10 million from redesign of the 2010 census and \$10 million from Salaries and Expenses account), shifting the funds to two law enforcement programs.

The Bush Administration requested about \$170 million for the ACS in fiscal year 2006, which starts October 1, 2005. The Census Bureau hopes to add group quarters, such as nursing homes, military barracks, prisons, and college dorms, to the survey for the first time. While the Appropriations Committee did not specify an amount for the ACS, agency budget analysts determined there would not be enough money in the Periodic Censuses and Programs account ("Periodics") to implement the full survey next year. Appropriators

allocated \$544.4 million for the Periodicals account, which covers cyclical census programs such as the decennial census, the ACS, and the Economic Census and Census of Governments, as well as supporting functions such as maintaining geographic information.

Without group quarters, ACS data cannot be compared to data from the Census 2000 long form, and complete five-year averages for smaller geographic areas would not be available in 2011, as originally planned. Last year, Congress appropriated enough money (\$146 million) to launch the ACS nationwide, without group quarters, in 2005. At that time, House appropriators noted in their committee report that the inclusion of group quarters "may be postponed for an additional year without increasing the risk to the overall planning process." If the Census Bureau suspends the ACS in 2006, it would only complete activities needed to publish data collected in 2005 for places of 65,000 population or greater.

Census Bureau budget analysts also determined that the Senate appropriations bill provides about \$163 million for redesign of a short form-only census in 2010, roughly the same amount allocated in 2005 and not enough to conduct a final field test in two sites next year. Canceling the field test would eliminate opportunities to study improved methods for enumerating American Indian reservations, as well as a dual language (English-Spanish) questionnaire and a targeted second mailing to unresponsive households. The Census Bureau will not implement new methods in the 2010 census that are not fully tested in advance.

Senate appropriators allocated \$79.8 million for continued updates to the Master Address File (MAF) and digital mapping system (TIGER), the amount requested by the Administration and approved by the House.

Ironically, in the committee report accompanying the FY2006 Senate funding bill (S. Rpt. 109-88), appropriators encouraged the Census Bureau "to continue its efforts to minimize the number of personal visits for non-response follow-up for Census programs. This activity is very costly and if response rates through other means can be increased, it will provide substantial cost savings in both the ongoing American Community Survey and the 2010 Census." In Census 2000, the mail response rate for households receiving a long form was 11 percent lower than for households receiving only a short form. The General Accounting Office (now called the Government Accountability Office) noted before Census 2000 that it cost \$25 million to count each one percent of households that do not respond by mail.

**Other consequences significant:** If Congress does not provide funding significantly above the Senate passed levels, the Census Bureau said it would eliminate several economic statistics programs, including corporate profits data for small manufacturing firms, the annual state and local government employee survey, the annual County Business Patterns program, and the Current Industrial Reports. Senate appropriators allocated \$183 million for the bureau's Salaries and Expenses account, which covers ongoing demographic and economic programs. The Senate "mark" for this account is about \$37 million below the President's budget request.

The Census Bureau also would abandon plans for several new statistical initiatives. These include expanding measurements of service activities that are part of the GDP; improving

the Automated Export System; and instituting a national Longitudinal Employer/Household Dynamics (LEHD) Program.

On the demographic side, the Senate funding level would reduce the sample size for the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) by 15 percent and eliminate incentives that the Census Bureau says have boosted the response rate for low-income households. The Census Bureau also would cut by 30 percent the sample size for the Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS), thereby limiting the survey's ability to detect year-to-year change in the official poverty rate and other measures of well-being.

Further program implications for Periodics programs include scrapping plans to measure international migration to states and to produce state-level population estimates by migrant group. The Census Bureau said it would also scale back testing of content for the 2007 Economic Census.

**Next steps:** The full Senate is scheduled to consider the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill the week of July 11. At some point after Senate passage, the House and Senate will appoint members to a conference committee, which will meet to iron out differences between the two versions of the funding bill. Traditionally, all members of each chamber's appropriations subcommittee responsible for the bill are appointed as conferees. Subcommittee members are listed below for easy reference.

### **House Committee on Appropriations**

#### **Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies**

#### **Republicans**

Frank Wolf (VA) (*Chairman*)  
 Charles Taylor (NC)  
 Mark Kirk (IL)  
 Dave Weldon (FL)  
 Virgil Goode (VA)  
 Ray LaHood (IL)  
 John Abney Culberson (TX)  
 Rodney Alexander (LA)  
 Jerry Lewis (CA) (*ex officio*)

#### **Democrats**

Alan Mollohan (WV) (*Ranking Minority Member*)  
 Jose Serrano (NY)  
 Robert Cramer, Jr. (AL)  
 Patrick Kennedy (RI)  
 Chaka Fattah (PA)  
 David Obey (WI) (*ex officio*)

**Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science**

**Republicans**

Richard Shelby (AL) (*Chairman*)  
 Judd Gregg (NH)  
 Ted Stevens (AK)  
 Pete Domenici (NM)  
 Mitch McConnell (KY)  
 Kay Bailey Hutchison (TX)  
 Sam Brownback (KS)  
 Christopher "Kit" Bond (MO)  
 Thad Cochran (MS) (*ex officio*)

**Democrats**

Barbara Mikulski (MD) (*Ranking Minority Member*)  
 Daniel Inouye (HI)  
 Patrick Leahy (VT)  
 Herbert Kohl (WI)  
 Patty Murray (WA)  
 Tom Harkin (IA)  
 Byron Dorgan (ND)  
 Robert C. Byrd (WV) (*ex officio*)

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