

Texas Demographic Conference

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

May 23, 2023

- Good afternoon, everyone. It's an honor to be back in my home state for this wonderful conference.
- As many of you may know, I was born and raised in San Anto.
- I maintain a home here in Austin.
- I also own a spit of land in the rocky hill country south of Junction, Texas, where I can gaze for hours at the Milky Way, take in the natural beauty of the land, and enjoy quiet time.
- This land, this state, our richly diverse people, . . . they all energize me.
- Hey, over the years, I've mostly been involved in national studies, but I've conducted research across this state, too.
- I visited many state prisons and county jails for a re-entry study.
- I went all over the state for a large longitudinal survey of high school students to look at the impact of the top ten rule.
- I even designed a sample survey of state roads and highways where data collection involved gathering road litter to develop a state estimate.
- So, although I've lived most of my life in far away places like Ann Arbor, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Washington, DC, it's the state of Texas that has always been a beacon, urging me never to forget my roots and to someday return home to family and friends.
- It's that Tejano history—a unique mixture of native Texan and Mexican-American—that makes me who I am as a person and a leader.
- I use my unique perspective often in developing insights and illustrating the value of diverse perspectives.
- In fact, I gave an illustration in my very first blog as director of the Census Bureau.
- Well, so much for reminiscing . . . We have a conference to kick off.
- I'd like to start by giving a special thanks to our state demographer, Dr. Lloyd Potter, for his leadership and unwavering support of the Census Bureau and the State Data Center program.
- I also offer a big Texas thank you to Monica Cruz for her commitment and dedication to the data community as a steering committee member of our SDC network.
- And a final 'thank you' to Associate Director Helen You, who I met recently met at a conference of the Federal-State Cooperative for Population Estimates.
- Now, the Texas Demographic Center has been a supporter of our SDC Program for over four decennial censuses.
- You have been a consistently active stakeholder.
- You have promoted the decennial census, surveys, and our data releases.
- And you've played a critical role in the development of our Annual Population Estimates.
- Yes, the TDC represents an outstanding resource to Texans who need data, who need an evidence base for decision-making.

- The center supports nearly 40 state and county affiliate organizations that serve every corner in the state.
- You conduct workshops and trainings, and you provide technical assistance.
- And we really applaud your outreach efforts using a robust web and social media presence.
- Ok . . . before going on, let's stop for a moment for a solemn remembrance.
- I want to pay homage to and acknowledge the recent passing of Steven Murdock.
- He was Texas' inaugural official state demographer.
- He was also a predecessor, serving as the 22nd director of the Census Bureau.
- Dr. Murdock's public service was exemplary.
- He put personal gain and personal needs aside by serving as director of the Census Bureau during a critical point in its decennial preparation process.
- I know that many of you are mourning his loss, just as we are at the Census Bureau.
- Now I'll return to my original statement—that it's an honor to be here today to address you as your director of the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Yes, I did say your director.
- This position serves the public . . . it serves our nation.
- And that's how I'm approaching my role . . . as a public servant who's honored to lead the largest federal statistical agency in our country.
- As we all know, the pandemic shut down the nation just before Census Day in 2020.
- The Census Bureau nimbly adapted our massive decennial census operation.
- And when its grip on society was strongest, we still had to deploy hundreds of thousands of enumerators to knock on doors across our nation.
- We had a constitutional mandate to fulfill.
- All the while, new challenges unfolded, such as natural disasters like wildfires and hurricanes.
- Yet, despite unprecedented challenges, our career staff came together and completed the job we set out to do—that of counting the resident population of the United States.
- I'm incredibly proud of their accomplishments.
- But we recognize something important.
- We didn't complete this job alone.
- We needed the public's help, the help of our complete count committees, the help of state and local governments, and the help of national and local partners and stakeholders.
- Not to mention cooperation from the public.
- Without your support, we could not have achieved the measure of success we did attain.
- We recognize and deeply appreciate that.
- Let me tell you a little about how the Census Bureau is reaching out to our partners and the public.
- It's important because it includes you.
- Now, the ability of the Census Bureau to adapt nimbly during the pandemic really opened our eyes.
- It showed us something we thought was impossible: that of adapting to and overcoming threats and doing so quickly.
- That experience motivated the development of a robust transformation and modernization initiative to recreate how we do our work at the Census Bureau.
- We are undertaking a paradigm shift in how the Bureau collects, processes and disseminates our statistical data products.

- It involves the development of new systems to bring together data from all sources—both administrative data and data from surveys and censused.
- We will use new systems to create more efficient and effective data products that better meet the needs of data users.
- I won't go into the technical details, but I spotted an area where I thought I could help.
- I knew that such a transformation requires broad level of buy-in from our staff.
- I saw the opportunity to bolster that transformation with an accompanying culture change.
- But a specific type of change . . . on that inspires staff to innovate by realizing the value of diverse perspectives.
- Actively seeking and valuing different views from different players in the enterprise leads to better insights, creative solutions, and better methods and products.
- This is consistent with the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion, but you really don't need those terms to understand the value that flows from different ideas and perspectives on a problem.
- But if you take this cultural change to its natural conclusion, then we must also actively seek and value diverse perspectives of our external stakeholders, partners, data users, and the public.
- And that includes folks like everyone here today.
- So, I've spent this last year laying the groundwork to create continuous, ongoing community engagement in its broadest sense.
- I and Census Bureau staff met with numerous scientific and government associations.
- We've conducted listening sessions with stakeholders representing both communities and data users.
- I spoke at conferences.
- Internally, I've met with career staff at all levels and in offices around the country.
- I went out on multiple field observations for a housing survey and the American Community Survey.
- I've conducted numerous media interviews and used blogs, videos and other communications to reach out to stakeholders and the public.
- I met with tribal leaders from around the country.
- Throughout these engagements, we listened carefully, we strengthened existing ties, and we established new relationships.
- I must say: the experience was profound.
- I engaged with rural America and witnessed the struggles and joys of the lives of farmers and smalltown businesses.
- I visited inner-city neighborhoods; I spoke to local community leaders and pastors who recognized the value of local statistical data and expressed concern about data quality.
- I witnessed the dignity of America's indigenous people and their honorable, indeed sacred way of life through living with nature.
- And I met with scholars and researchers from across the nation to understand their concerns.
- After all these amazing experiences, here's my bottom line:
 - I learned that it takes a community-of-the-whole to maintain a fully functioning and successful federal statistical agency.
 - We need to seek and act on feedback from stakeholders, partners and the public.
 - We should be continuously communicating a value proposition that highlights the utility of our statistical data products for your communities.

- We need to expand and nurture a trusted-messenger ecosystem of partners and stakeholders that operates continuously, not just near the time of decennial census.
- Such an ecosystem is a key for us to collect data from historically recalcitrant segments of our wonderfully diverse population.
- And that's why we wanted to meet with you today.
- Yes, it's clear that we need to exploit new technologies, new methods, and new sources of data.
- But we need to do this in a way engages with and benefits partners, data users, communities, tribes, government, and the public. That is, people like you.
- That necessarily includes underserved communities, communities of color, rural populations, and tribes—all the people who pose measurement and participation challenges to us
- Only then will we be able to stay true to our mission: to produce quality data on our nation's people and economy.
- Bottom line: We want to help you to serve your constituencies better by helping you to leverage the value of our data.
- Let's now turn to this year's planning priorities for the Census Bureau. We've been working on them for six months.
- I'll start with the modernization of surveys. Household and economic surveys are increasingly difficult to conduct.
- We see declining participation rates and rising per unit costs. So, we need to explore and invest in more tailored approaches.
- We'll be modernizing our data collection operation by exploring alternative data sources to supplement survey data, blended data approaches, and the expansion of AI to ease the burden of collection.
- The next priority area is administrative records enumeration. The 2020 Post-Enumeration Survey suggested that the accuracy of responses using administrative records exceeded those provided by proxy interviews.
- We need to exploit that. We'll focus on expanding administrative data sources and conducting research to improve decennial census coverage and quality.
- Research will guide us to where administrative records are most effective including among historically undercounted populations.
- Ultimately, administrative records usage will permit more resources for tailored approaches to historically undercounted populations.
- External engagement is a priority area. As I said earlier, we need a community-of-the-whole effort to accomplish our mission.
- The net must be cast broadly and involve a two-way flow of ideas, suggestions, concerns, and feedback.
- We'll continue to strengthen ties with our data users.
- We'll developing data tools and products tailored to different user communities.
- And we'll review and facilitate access to data from our Federal Research Data Centers.
- We'll strengthen ties with tribes on a nation-to-nation basis, and conduct outreach to communities that have concentrations of historically undercounted populations.
- Partnerships will be leveraged with universities in historically Black and Hispanic colleges and universities and tribal colleges, like those we have in place with Bowie State University in Maryland and the University of Texas at San Antonio.
- Besides external engagement, we will have complementary efforts with internal engagement.

- After all, a community-of-the-whole approach also includes the Census Bureau’s most valuable assets—our career staff.
- And finally, there’s our economic statistics modernization priority area. We seek to leverage emerging methods including AI and machine learning.
- Those are our priority areas for 2023.
- Ok, now let’s turn to a really important program at the Census Bureau, one that you’re familiar with.
- I’m talking about our annual population estimates.
- Population estimates help determine how billions of dollars in federal funds are distributed over the course of a decade.
- And partnering with demographic experts including those at the TDC is incredibly helpful.
- After all, you possess specialized local knowledge that helps us produce estimates for your state.
- You provide valuable support by reviewing our population and housing unit estimates and methodology.
- We recognize your crucial role in the Population Estimates program.
- We need your participation to achieve our mission.
- So, again, thank you.
- Now, the Population Estimates program remains a continuing priority.
- We’re adding resources and staffing to bolster the breadth and capacity of the program.
- But let me tell you the story behind this.
- Historically, the base, or starting point, for these estimates has been the decennial census counts.
- However, we experienced a delay in 2020 Census input data due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges.
- The data we needed for our 2021 Population Estimates under the usual approach was simply unavailable.
- As a result, the Census Bureau developed a new April 1, 2020, estimates base—which we call the “blended base.”
- It integrated three sources of data:
 - The 2020 Census data available at the time.
 - The 2020 Demographic Analysis estimates.
 - The Vintage 2020 estimates.
- By adopting this approach, we saw a mitigating effect on the known undercount of young children.
- This opened the door to exploring what else may be possible to improve our base estimates.
- For instance, can we incorporate other sources of data, such as administrative records?
- Can we use coverage measures to inform adjustments to the base population?
- That could mitigate coverage issues for other populations.
- Many avenues of research are now being considered by our Base Evaluation and Research Team, fondly known as BERT.
- The team includes experts in areas like: population estimates, age and sex statistics, coverage measurement, race and ethnicity, demography, and disclosure avoidance.
- The BERT has been conducting research and speaking with outside experts.
- Assuming that funding is available, BERT’s work will continue and include outreach to and feedback from TDC as part of our FSCPE activities.

- Ok, so here are a few updates I think you'll find interesting.
- Later this week, the Census Bureau is releasing the Demographic and Housing Characteristics File (DHC) and Demographic Profile.
- These 2020 Census data products provide demographic and housing characteristics of local communities.
- And in September, we will release the Detailed DHC-A.
- This dataset will provide the population counts and sex and age statistics for approximately 370 detailed racial and ethnic groups and 1,200 American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.
- Disaggregated data are critical in understanding differences within a community.
- The DHC-A will provide a level of racial-ethnic detail that is unprecedented.
- That's why we are so excited about that product.
- I also want to touch on some of the ways that we are preparing for the next census in 2030.
- Last August, we issued a Federal Register notice seeking feedback on the 2030 Census—the first time we have sought public comments on the design stage of a census.
- This outreach represented an important part of our overall commitment to engaging with stakeholders, tribes, partners, and communities.
- I am pleased to report that we received over 8,000 comments from people across the country.
- Our partners and the public fully embraced this opportunity and provided valuable feedback on various aspects of the census.
- So, what's next?
- We are currently assessing, evaluating, and synthesizing them.
- The feedback is being shared with Census Bureau experts for their processing and analysis.
- We're also seeking feedback assessments from our esteemed federal advisory committees, specifically the Census Scientific Advisory Committee and the National Advisory Committee.
- The public comments are also available to the public!
- This spring and summer, our advisory committees are helping us prioritize the suggestions we received.
- This fall, we'll release a report on how we are moving forward.
- This public feedback represents one of multiple inputs that are critical in developing the 2030 Census operational plan.
- Other sources include: our analyses of 2020 Census operational quality metrics, our Post Enumeration Survey, our Demographic Analysis, independent 2020 Census quality assessments conducted by the National Academies and others, and ideas from our career staff and leadership.
- We will also be considering input from other government agencies, oversight and advisory bodies, external experts, and stakeholders.
- We plan to release the operational plan at the end of 2024.
- And for the people in this room, I imagine you may have some specific suggestions for us on the role of the TDC—and more generally—the State Data Centers in the decennial census.
- I would love to hear about how we can engage you better and more effectively in our preparations for 2030.
- I can't thank you enough for your work in bringing Census Bureau data to the people of Texas.
- I appreciate your support and enthusiasm and look forward to receiving your ideas.
- Thank you again for having me.
- That concludes my remarks this afternoon.

- Thank you again for your engagement, and invaluable help getting information on the 2020 Census out in Texas.
- I look forward to our discussion today.