2024 Annual Conference of the Federal Statistical Research Data Centers at the University of Utah

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

September 13, 2024

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Good morning, everyone. It's an honor to be here with you.

- It's a pleasure to be here at the Wasatch Front FSRDC. The Federal Statistical Research Data Centers are such important partners in our work. We are so appreciative of those ongoing relationships and the insights you have given us over the years.

- I've previously been able to visit the FSRDCs in Texas and Michigan, so I have had the pleasure of meeting several of you and learning more about your centers.

- Research conducted in these centers is vital to improving our understanding of the population and economy of the United States.

- By providing local researchers secure access to federal data for advanced research and analysis, FSRDCs allow academics to address previously unanswerable research questions.

- And they are an important aspect to enabling local officials, industry leaders, and the third sector to make more informed, timely, data-driven decisions.

- That's one reason why I'm so excited that we are partnering with the University of Puerto Rico to open a new FSRDC on the island later this year—our 34th center, and the first in a U.S. territory.

- These partnerships between federal statistical agencies and research institutions have the potential to help PR and the U.S. Census Bureau better understand the socioeconomic conditions in the island, which in turn enhance the ability of federal and local officials, to make well-grounded decisions that are crucial for Puerto Rico's future well-being.

- Moreover, this effort supports our objective of sharing expertise externally and collaborating with key stakeholders to build a more permanent data, technical, and statistical infrastructure and capability in Puerto Rico.

TRANSFORMATION AND MODERNIZATION

- This is a time of great change for the federal statistical system. The Census Bureau—and all our fellow statistical agencies—is facing new and complex challenges.

- As we advance into the 21st century, we are faced with a new statistical universe that comes with new and complex data user needs, data collection challenges, the demand for doing more with less, the need for improved collaboration with stakeholders and partners, stronger computing power, the proliferation of alternative unofficial data products, and new technologies.

- The Census Bureau has a long proud history of innovation, which helps us deliver on our mission to serve as the nation's leading provider of quality data about its people, places, and economy.

- Our mission exists to answer simple and complex questions, which we have historically done by conducting censuses and surveys.

- But censuses and surveys alone, while still critical, can no longer answer the questions completely or quickly enough to satisfy the modern need for data. We need a better approach that combines new and traditional data sources and aligns our talent and resources to meet these challenges.
- To adapt in this changing environment, we understand the need for new innovations and approaches to help us transform and modernize how we do our work.
- And threats aside, modernization introduces new opportunities to increase the timeliness, relevance, and value of official statistics. Many facets of our data production, even ordinary processes, stand to benefit from modernization.
- But the modernization of official statistics requires more than the latest technology or the latest statistical methods. It requires a transformation in our thinking—how we think about data, their relevance in a rapidly evolving society, and how the needs of the public can be met.
- That's why the Census Bureau is engaged in an enterprise-level transformation and modernization initiative.
- This is a multiyear, enterprisewide effort to evaluate and improve current processes, infrastructures, and mindsets to ensure that we equitably collect, analyze, and disseminate valuable information that reflects the changing nature of our nation's population and economy.
- While this effort doesn't focus on any single initiative or program, it seeks to assess and improve the universe of current and future Census Bureau activities.
- The Census Bureau is the largest federal statistical agency, and as I mentioned, we conduct many censuses and surveys. As such, the path to modernization is necessarily multipronged and complex.
- It involves an enterprisewide, community-of-the-whole approach—one that combines both an internal common strategy of modernization, with continuous external outreach to stakeholders and partners. This outreach is meant to share and reinforce the value of the data we produce and to grow trust within hard-to-count and historically undercounted populations.

COMMUNITY-OF-THE-WHOLE EFFORT

- So, as we go about our work, it's critical that I—and more importantly, we, at the Census Bureau—connect with our partners, stakeholders, data users, policymakers, and the public. We need to understand their needs, concerns, and, more generally, their perspectives on matters related to statistical data products.
- That is why a principal priority of mine as the director is to seek out, listen to, and converse with the multitude of diverse voices across our nation. We are actively engaging the public.
- We recognize the value and importance of different perspectives. They help us to be innovative and creative, and ultimately produce accurate, relevant, and useful data on our nation's people, places, and economy.
- Toward that end, I continue to make a concerted effort to engage stakeholders, partners, and local communities across the nation—which of course includes you, as part of my overall efforts here in Utah this week.
- As director, I have been traveling across the country to get the message out about Census Bureau data, and hosting listening sessions so I can better understand the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.
- I have met with hundreds of users of Census Bureau data across America. This includes our partners, state, local and tribal government officials, community groups, and businesses.
- In all this, our goal is to strategically organize and engage a widening diversity of talent and stakeholders to achieving our transformation and modernization goals. By leveraging our core values of scientific integrity, objectivity, transparency, and independence, we can strengthen our data portfolio.

- The key is to combine technological advances and rigorous research with innovation and creativity through promoting diverse perspectives and engaging communities.

MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) WITH COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

- Another key component of my outreach is speaking to students and colleges and universities throughout the country.
- In Utah this week, I have been able to meet with faculty and students from Utah Valley University, Brigham Young University, the University of Utah, and others.
- We're also seeking to deepen our relationships with colleges and universities through memoranda of understanding, such as those we have with institutions like the University of Texas at San Antonio, Bowie State University, and the University of Puerto Rico.
- The goal of these MOUs is to collaborate on projects that help us collect better data as well as to facilitate the development of a more diverse Census Bureau workforce.
- These partnerships are a critical part of our effort to engage the public . . . to empower communities with the data they need to make informed decisions.
- It will also open doors for students to seek internships and career opportunities at the Census Bureau. These engagements are a critical part of the Census Bureau's efforts to achieve a high-quality, motivated, diverse workforce that has the education and experience to productively serve in the growing field of data science.

RECENT RELEASES

- Now, I want to acknowledge that this is a big week for data releases at the Census Bureau.
- Yesterday, we released the 2023 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, the latest data available from the ACS covering all places with populations of 65,000 people or more. And on Tuesday, we had our annual release of national-level income, poverty, and health insurance coverage statistics.
- These datasets are critically important and are widely used for policymaking and decision-making by communities and businesses across our nation.
- I want to thank the Census Bureau staff who worked on these releases—and also to add a thank you to all of our respondents, without whom these data wouldn't be possible.

2030 CENSUS

- Additionally, as you know, the last remaining data products from 2020 are being released this year.
  - In August, we released the last products from the 2020 Census—first is the Detailed Demographics and Housing Characteristics File-B that includes household type and tenure data for approximately 1,500 detailed racial and ethnic groups and American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.
  - And later this month, we'll release the Supplemental Demographic and Housing Characteristics File that reflects especially complex relationships between the characteristics about households and the people living in them.
- As our 2020 Census activities draw to a close, we're focusing more and more on our preparations for 2030. We're doing a lot of exciting work and research ahead of the next census.
- In January, we announced that our initial operational plan for the 2030 Census will be released in 2025, and we'll hold a major field test in 2026.
- In March, we announced the 23 members of our new 2030 Census Advisory Committee, which will hold its first meeting later this month.
- In April, we released the 2030 Census strategy documents outlining how we're approaching fundamental aspects of our census preparations, including stakeholder engagement.

- Also in April, we shared the scope of the 2026 Census Test in a webinar, and we announced the six test sites in July.
- I want to point out our redesigned website at <www.census.gov/2030census>. The content there will give you a better idea of all the work that we're doing, and many of the resources I've mentioned—such as the strategy documents—are posted there.
- And as part of our commitment to open and transparent communication, we will be continuing our series of webinars to share information about our preparations for the 2030 Census. I hope that you will follow along on those webinars.
- Our main goal for the 2030 Census—and for every decennial census—is a complete and accurate count of the nation's population. To accomplish that, it's so important that we engage with diverse voices and perspectives.
- After 2020, stakeholders asked us to do more to engage with them earlier in the decade—and we listened, and are acting on that.
- We learned a lot from the uniqueness of the 2020 Census, but hearing from our partners, like you, early in the planning will help us shape the 2030 Census and beyond.
- Your knowledge of your communities is one reason why we're so keen to hear your ideas about what to research and how to conduct the 2030 Census.
- We know that the census is a job that we don't complete alone. Without your support, we could not have achieved the measure of success we did attain in 2020. We recognize and deeply appreciate that.
- We needed the help of the people in this room, 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.
- We need to hear from people across our nation about how to reach hard-to-count and historically undercounted populations, how to leverage technology, how to collect information in an easy and efficient manner.
- And we need to work with stakeholders like you to identify hard to find populations and tailor our strategies to reach them. I hope you will provide your valuable input and feedback.

CONCLUSION
- I can't thank you enough for your work to enhance your states' statistical capacity.
- Thank you again for having me. Thank you again for your engagement, and I am so excited to be part of the decade-long journey working toward the 2030 Census with you.