

Congressional Black Caucus

Director's remarks as prepared for delivery

November 13, 2024

- Thank you, Chairman Horsford, and thank you caucus members for the opportunity to meet today.
- I'll start by saying that we at the Census Bureau embrace our public service mission to provide the public with quality data on our nation's people and economy.
- That mission casts a broad net across all types of data we collect.
- We conduct three censuses—population, economic, and governments.
- We conduct over 130 surveys of people, households, businesses, and education and health systems, just to name a few.
- We collect administrative data from federal and state sources, from businesses, and even from tribes.
- And all that data yields our standard data products, plus some new ones that combine economic and population data and are easy to use for local jurisdictions and communities.
- Now, while we take great pride in the quality of our data products, we also are aware of their strengths and limitations.
- For instance, we recognize that more work is needed in reaching your constituents and urging them to respond to the decennial census—especially given all that's at stake, including for the Black populations and the organizations that serve them.
 - For example, Census Bureau data was involved in the allocation of \$2.8 trillion in federal funding in FY 2021.
 - Funding went to states, communities, tribal governments, and others.
- And that brings me to the 2030 Census . . . to our plans and our strategy.
- I'll start with our collective vision: to count everyone once, only once, and in the right place.
- We apply the best science, the best methods, the best technology and data, and all the rigorous research and testing that budget allocations allow.
- Our work is scientific. It's objective. It's nonpartisan.
- We operate as an independent federal statistical agency, consistent with the new Trust Regulation just released by the Office of Management and Budget.
- We also tap national and world-renowned expertise.
- We engage with the public and with stakeholders.
- Extensive quality reviews and quality checks are embedded in every step of a census.
- Having said that, we know that census results are never perfect, nor have they ever been for us, or for any nation throughout history.
- But they need to be good enough for their intended purpose, which is why we have such rigorous quality checks and assessments.
- We also publicly release assessments of the census because of our commitment to transparency.
- In 2020, we undercounted children—especially children under 5 years old.
- We also undercounted the Black and Hispanic populations, American Indian and Alaska Native populations on tribal lands, and others.

- We also know that we overcounted the White population.
- We found that the best, most accurate information comes from self-response—when a person submits their own household information.
- We know that real improvements to census results can only come from better enumerations among the historically undercounted.
- And that’s best accomplished by increasing participation in the census.
- But how do we do that?
- Well, we know that trust in the Census Bureau was a big issue in 2020.
- In fact, we’re still experiencing participation challenges in our current surveys.
- We also know that when trusted messengers are communicators, communities listen.
- That’s why external engagement has been a high priority for the Census Bureau since my term began 3 years ago.
- Our strategy is one of continuous, evergreen engagement across all years in a decade, not just in the few years preceding a census.
- Now, there are two aspects to our engagement strategy.
- First, we need to put human faces on the Census Bureau.
- We do this by going out into communities and presenting ourselves as the public servants we are, especially in communities of color.
- And secondly, we show that we care about serving these communities in a way that’s culturally relevant.
- We listen. We engage.
- We’re doing this by showing the value of our data . . . how it can directly help communities through things like community needs assessments, economic development plans, profiles of community risks to natural disasters, infrastructure reviews, and so forth.
- And we tell communities about our work to transform statistical data products with tools easily accessible to them and with information relevant to their communities.
- We also share how we’re working to modernize how we collect data to meet current challenges, which includes reducing their burden of participation and increasing data access with easy-to-use tools.
- By empowering communities with high-quality data—with their data that they paid for—we’re nurturing the partnerships that proved so valuable for the 2020 Census . . . and we’re building new ones.
- Our engagement efforts are creating a lasting, trusted messenger ecosystem in communities that have been hardest to count.
- To illustrate, over the past 3 years I—accompanied by Census Bureau staff—have completed 166 community engagement trips across 30 states, plus DC and Puerto Rico.
- While on these travels, I’ve conducted over 550 community conversations with the public.
- I’ve engaged with numerous stakeholders and elected officials in public and private meetings.
- I’ve made presentations at college and university campuses, including almost a dozen historically black colleges and universities, and several Hispanic-serving institutions and community colleges.
- We’ve focused on historically undercounted populations and their communities, including the Black population.
 - I’ve conducted numerous ethnic media interviews and a Black radio podcast;
 - I’ve met with local pastors and Black community leaders.
 - We’ve toured the south, including New Orleans, Montgomery, Selma, and Tuscaloosa in a week-long trip.

- We've met with organizations like the National Business League, the National Urban League and its local chapters, and Black sororities like Delta Sigma Theta.
- I've met with members of Congress in their districts, including Rep. Alma Adams of North Carolina and the staff of Rep. Maxwell Frost of Florida.
- We're using these visits to catalyze the next phase of our engagement, where we formally bring together our partners to develop culturally relevant tools . . . tools that partners can use to promote participation in the 2030 Census.
- It's only through real partnership and public service what we believe we can improve the enumeration of the historically undercounted populations.
- Yes, perfection is what we aspire to.
- But it's significant improvements that are very realistic.
- And those improvements require that historically undercounted people trust what we are doing, value the products we release, and understand the confidentiality of their responses.
 - We've assessed our allocations for the Continuing Resolution and have determined that a budget anomaly is not needed at this time.
 - We'll continue to monitor the Continuing Resolutions and if an anomaly is needed, we will request one.
- Now, we're here today because we want to work with the Congressional Black Caucus to develop new and innovative ways of reaching people that are among the hardest to enumerate.
- Today represents the beginning of an ongoing dialogue — one that we'll support both at the national level with you, and through efforts with local partners in your districts.
- In fact, I'd like to propose that we come back early next year to share a deeper dive on decennial planning and operations.
- And we're prepared to return regularly to report on updates and plans.
- We need to involve you in the development, implementation, and execution of our plans.
- We need you to be a true partner in working together on the 2030 Census.
- We're here because of our deep commitment to the mission of the Census Bureau and to serving the public, including Black communities throughout our nation.
- Now, we've benefitted greatly from your support over the years, and we're enormously grateful.
- We both want the rich diversity of America to be better reflected in the statistics we produce.
- So, let's please work together to make that happen.
- Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.