

Statement Rep. Carolyn Maloney
Senate Commerce Committee 3/28/01

Thank you Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Hollings for inviting me to testify today on the Census. Mr. Chairman, welcome to the "sampling debate." By that, I mean the national dialogue which has been held during the last decade in search of ways to produce a better Census, one that would cure the national problem of the undercount and racial differential.

It is a problem that has existed in every Census, beginning with the very first census conducted by Thomas Jefferson. The Secretary of State wrote to President Washington and our ambassadors overseas saying that he felt that the just-concluded census may have undercounted the fledgling nation's population by as much as a million. Perhaps, because he was Jefferson, he was taken at his word.

In today's modern census, the Census Bureau has to do more than assert the quality of the census. It must demonstrate to Congress and the American public that it knows with some precision about the accuracy of the so-called "head count." The modern solution is sometimes derisively called "sampling," but is better known in the scientific community as "dual system estimation." It is a proven statistical method that has been perfected by scientists during the last half century. The 1990 sampling results have been the foundation of nearly every major economic statistic of this country since the middle of the last decade.

In Census 2000, the Congress funded the most robust scientific measurement of accuracy ever conducted. We paid for a follow-up sample of 314,000 households, which was then compared to the data collected from those same households during the Census itself. The Accuracy & Coverage Evaluation, or A.C.E., is known at the Census Bureau as their decennial report card. The results are in for Census 2000, and the Bureau has announced that the ACE worked extremely well and that the Census staff believes as they made clear in their report, that it still favored statistical sampling, "The Committee believes it likely that further research may establish that adjustment based on the ACE would result in improved accuracy."

Even the opponents of sampling have apparently blessed this methodology, although they may not fully realize what they have done. The Administration has pronounced the 2000 Census the most accurate in history.

It came to this conclusion because the results of the very scientific tool they oppose, the ACE, demonstrate that the 2000 Census reduced the undercount as compared to the 1990 Census. As a result, they have decided that there is no need to use the ACE for its full intended purpose, to correct for the errors that remain in Census 2000. For the Administration, the ACE is sufficient only to buttress their own political argument against a more complete count.

Now that may be a legitimate call, but unless all of us--the Congress, outside experts, the scientific community, and the American public--unless we all have access to the ACE data, we can not prove Census 2000 is in fact more accurate. And I tell you Mr. Chairman, I have yet to meet any Thomas Jefferson's in this Administration, so I am unwilling to just take their word for it.

So here we are today, holding this hearing to ask why the ACE results are under lock and key, known only to a handful of government employees, and when even Congress itself has not been provided the data. Why is the Census Monitoring Board releasing net undercount numbers before the bureau? They took the extraordinary step of presenting what they believe are the net numbers for each state that were missed in the census because the Census won't release them. Those numbers show us that a net of 291,000 New Yorkers were missed in the Census, 188,000 in New York City alone, missed because the Census ran out of time.

Apparently, the Administration fears that we will not understand the data, or it may be used to advance political arguments the Administration opposes, or that we should simply have to trust them to look out for our best interests.

Well Mr. Chairman, I think we understand the numbers release today very well -- Americans were missed in the Census and we should not stop until we get them all included.

For another perspective on this debate Mr. Chairman, I direct you to remarks made just yesterday by Chairman Greenspan before a meeting of business economists. His presentation was titled, "The challenge of measuring and modeling the dynamic economy." His address was, in part, a call for more resources to enhance data collection methods. He said:

...the experience of the last 40 years underscores a fundamental dilemma of business economics. Should we endeavor to continue to refine our techniques of deriving maximum information from an existing body

of data? Or should we find ways to augment our data library to gain better insight into how our economy is functioning? Obviously, we should do both, but I suspect greater payoffs will come from more data than from more technique. (Remarks by Chairman Alan Greenspan "The challenge of measuring and modeling a dynamic economy" At the Washington Economic Policy Conference of the National Association for Business Economics, Washington, D.C. March 27, 2001)

What Mr. Greenspan knows and others often overlook, is that our key economic indicators, such as unemployment, poverty, inflation, and consumer confidence are all derived from "samples" of American households and businesses. This sample data is collected through interviews every month, conducted mostly by none other than the Census Bureau.

I agree with Chairman Greenspan's main thesis. There is a greater payoff for our country when we in Washington have more data, better data, complete data...data like that produced by the ACE. Statistically sound data allows policy makers and experts to calculate with more precision the true stories of economic or social policies or as former Census Director Prewitt might say, allows us to get closer to the truth.

Mr. Chairman, it is time now for the Census Bureau to release all the ACE results. I urge you and both Houses of Congress to call upon the Director of the Census to release those numbers today. I would like to put into the record a letter sent yesterday to Acting Director Barron from 107 House Members urging just that.

It is unprecedented that such valuable information should be withheld. Furthermore, no community in our country should be left shortchanged. Every state, every city, every town, and every neighborhood is entitled to information about the demography of our country.

Together we made a four hundred million dollar investment in this information. It belongs to the people and it should be given to the people.