

**Questions for the Record for Ms. Mary Toman**  
**U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation**  
**“Nominations Hearing”**  
**June 16, 2020**

**Questions Submitted by the Hon. Maria Cantwell to Ms. Mary Toman, Nominated to be Under Secretary of Commerce for Economic Affairs of the Department of Commerce.**

***Political Interference.*** If confirmed, you will be charged with overseeing the Bureau of Economic Analysis, which produces sensitive economic data like the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) numbers, as well as the U.S. Census Bureau which is currently fully engaged with the 2020 Census.

***Question 1.*** If confirmed, do I have your pledge that you will respect the work that career professionals carry out in both offices, and not subject them to political pressure to change numbers or statistics?

***Answer.*** Yes. Throughout my career in both the government and the private sector, I have valued the reliability and accuracy of the information produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis and the Census Bureau. I understand the importance of their work, from the principal economic indicators to the decennial census. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the career professionals to ensure the continued success of their programs.

***The 2020 Census.*** The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the functions of many federal agencies, including the Census Bureau. This has raised concerns about the ability of the Census Bureau to effectively count hard to reach groups, including the homeless and other transient populations.

***Question 1.*** The Census Bureau’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic was to delay 2020 Decennial Census field operations for the health and safety of its workforce and the American public. Respondent data quality degrades as the gap between the reference period (April 1, 2020) and the date of collection (now late summer) increases. How can we be assured the counts are valid for reapportionment, redistricting, and general purpose uses (i.e., will you remove misreported children born after April 1; will you remove individuals duplicated because they were enumerated by the Census multiple times and how will you select their correct location; will appropriate field resources be directed to close the current significant gap in response rates by race)?

***Answer.*** Thank you for shining a light on this situation. If confirmed, this would be one of the key issues I would examine. I would welcome an open exchange of ideas. I understand there are a range of quality assurance practices for the 2020 Census and the Census Bureau is working tirelessly to ensure the accuracy of the census for all communities, including efforts to resolve duplicate responses and counting people in the right location. If confirmed, I look forward to

*working with the Census Bureau leadership on the ongoing efforts to ensure accuracy, including adapting to the challenges from COVID-19.*

**Question 2.** To protect the identity of 2020 Decennial Census respondents, the Bureau will be applying differential privacy methods to infuse noise into its substate tabulations. While this approach does not impact apportionment tallies, it could have a significant impact on the quality of data used in redistricting, assuring voters rights, and a variety of applications used for small geographic areas. When will the Census Bureau determine the categories of data to be perturbed and the level of noise to be infused? What are the Bureau's plans to ensure the public's trust in the validity of these products, will you provide measures of uncertainty by characteristic at the Census block level, and will you train data users on how best to use these new products?

*Answer. Differential privacy is an extremely important issue, so thank you for this question. If confirmed, I would look into the current state of affairs right away. I understand the Census Bureau is implementing a new cryptography-based disclosure avoidance system to protect confidentiality for the 2020 Census, which is required by statute. The Census Bureau is publishing a series of data releases throughout this summer for data users to evaluate this new system, and it is committed to working with data users and other stakeholders, and has recently engaged the National Academy of Sciences Committee on National Statistics for this express purpose. I would look forward to hearing your views and those of your staff.*

**Question 3.** The 2020 Census enumerations will be the basis for the Bureau's Intercensal Estimates that are subsequently employed as demographic survey controls (e.g., the American Community Survey). These statistical measures are used to distribute trillions of dollars in federal domestic assistance over the course of a decade. Given the uncertainty of the 2020 census enumeration quality, what avenues do state and local governments have to challenge their 2020 enumerations? Does the Bureau plan to be more flexible in accepting challenges from impacted governments in either its Decennial Census or Intercensal Estimates Challenge process. If enumeration anomalies are discovered in this decennial census, would the Bureau be willing to modify the file used as the basis for its population estimates, in a manner similar to its development and application of the 1990 Modified Age Race Sex file?

*Answer. The Census Bureau has not published guidelines for the 2020 Census challenge program, but if confirmed, I am committed to working with the Census Bureau to fully understand how this program will be implemented. Moreover, the Census Bureau will conduct two important coverage evaluations for the 2020 Census, including the Demographic Analysis and the Post-Enumeration Survey, to assess the quality and coverage of the census. Sharing views and cooperation are important ways to yield the best results.*

**Questions Submitted by the Hon. Jon Tester to Ms. Mary Toman, Nominated to be Under Secretary of Commerce for Economic Affairs of the Department of Commerce.**

**Question 1.** It is absolutely critical that we get a fair and accurate count in the 2020 Census. In light of the challenges posed by COVID-19, I have strong concerns about the response rate in my state, especially among tribal communities. How do you plan to overcome these challenges and get an accurate Census?

**Answer.** *The Census Bureau is working directly with tribal leaders to ensure that the local operations are consistent with tribal communities' needs. I know that leading up to the 2020 Census, the Census Bureau had extensive consultation with tribal leaders, and that work is continuing now to overcome the delays in operations in tribal areas necessary for the COVID-19 outbreak. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that the strong partnership with the Census Bureau and tribal leaders continues. I would be happy to work with you and your staff to address your concerns.*

**Question 2.** What actions, if any, must Congress take in the coming months to ensure the accuracy of the 2020 Census?

**Answer.** *Thank you for bringing this up. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your staff to produce the highest quality 2020 Census. I understand the most important actions the Census Bureau needs are the commitment of Congress to ensure appropriations for FY2021 are in place for the continuity of the operations and that Congress supports the need for the Census Bureau to have enough time to produce accurate tabulations of the apportionment data and the redistricting files.*