

Representative Carolyn B. Maloney (NY-14)
Information Policy, Census, and National Archives
Subcommittee Hearing – July 10, 2008

Mr. Chairman:

You are to be commended for scheduling this vital oversight hearing. The timing could not be more critical. It comes on the heels of a decision by the Department of Commerce to cancel their long-planned automation of the 2010 Census data collection, as well as press accounts this week of growing concerns about the planning and management of the Decennial Census by this Administration.

Since the first American Census in 1790, the challenge for the career Census professionals has always been to improve on the most recent Census. They strive to make the next Census even more accurate, and to ensure to the best of their abilities that we count every resident in America. Today, that challenge is the most difficult they have ever confronted. By all measures the 2000 Census was the most successful and most accurate in history.

A great part of that success in 2000 was due to the first ever use of paid advertising. Indeed, President Bush's good friend and former Secretary of Commerce Don Evans testified before the Senate in May of 2001 and made exactly that point. I quote:

"Census 2000 was an operational success. The Census Bureau met or exceeded its goals, including meeting the mandated deadlines for releasing data for use in apportionment and redistricting. This success can be attributed to the Congress' commitment to provide full funding for a number of improvements, including unprecedented outreach programs to groups that historically had the highest undercounts."

Further on in his testimony, Secretary Evans singled out and gave the most credit for this achievement to the advertising program, the partnership program, Census-In-Schools and improved census forms.

Without objection Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit the entire testimony of Secretary Evans in the record here. I believe it represents an important benchmark for us to measure against the current planning.

Amazingly, in our hearings and in press accounts we are learning that instead of building upon these successful operations, this Commerce Department is trying to scale them back! You have shrunk the Census-in-Schools program; delayed by a year the start of the partnership program; and in real dollars you are spending less on paid media to a population that has grown and is even more diverse.

I have to say Director Murdock, this makes no sense. Just when your Decennial plan is in crisis, when the GAO, MITRE Corporation and other independent reviewers saying you face a critical challenge to increase response rates and reduce the universe of households you must visit, you are shrinking programs proven to increase cooperation with the Census.

Through 22 Decennial head counts in our history, the career professionals at the Census Bureau have set a new Olympic record for accuracy in all but one. As they prepare for the 2010 Census, it seems their coaching staff has let them down and is failing to give them the tools they need to succeed. You instead are asking them to do much more with fewer resources. Our population is much larger than ten years ago, more diverse, living in more complex housing arrangements, relying upon incredibly more varied media, with polls showing historically low levels of trust in their government and leaders.

Mr. Chairman, I think it is very important that we use this hearing today to formally get on the record the true scope and scale of the advertising, partnership and promotion effort being planned in 2010, and how those plans compare with actual spending in 2000. I hope we can wade deep into the details of how much is being spent to help cure the undercount that every Census experiences, and how much is being spent on those communities that are historically hardest to count.

Thank you.