



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Inspector General
Washington, D.C. 20230

June 28, 2010

The Honorable Alan Mollohan
The Honorable Frank Wolf
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member:

The FY 2008 Supplemental Appropriations bill (P.L. 110-252) required the Commerce Office of Inspector General (OIG) to oversee the 2010 Decennial Census and provide quarterly status reports to Congress once the Census Bureau issued its baseline status report. As major field operations wind down for the decennial, we wanted to summarize for the Subcommittee, our oversight of the decennial to date.

As described in detail below, our Census oversight team produced or contributed to 22 products in the past two years—including seven quarterly reports and related products to Congress, testimony at five congressional hearings, two responses to congressional requests, three “flash” reports on decennial census field operations issues, and five reports that described general management challenges and findings. In addition, the OIG is scheduled for two Congressional hearings on the 2010 Decennial Census in the month of July and will be issuing several additional reports through the end of this calendar year.

We have been reporting on decennial planning over the past decade. However, based on the support of Congress, we were able to increase and accelerate our work considerably in the past year, culminating in extensive deployments of more than 100 OIG staff members to Census offices nationwide to oversee multiple decennial Census field operations, observe management practices, and review information technology systems. OIG staff established a detailed plan to monitor and systematically collect field observations. We successfully collected data to help determine if activities were being conducted in accordance with Census procedures (for example, whether the Census questionnaire was being administered properly and whether map and address list updating was being completed correctly); to examine local Census office practices; and to conduct a continuous, national-level review of decennial census finances, schedule, and risk assessment and mitigation activities.

OIG’s 2010 Decennial Census oversight will also benefit planning for the 2020 Decennial Census. Not only did our reports, testimony, and other products serve to help keep the Census Bureau on track during the current decennial, much of the work also sought to provide key lessons learned and recommendations to help the bureau plan for the next decennial in 2020. We



intend to continue our oversight through the end of the year, issuing a final capping report on the 2010 Decennial Census operation early next year.

Quarterly Reporting to Congress

The Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008 included an explanatory statement that required the Census Bureau to submit to the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations a detailed plan and time line of decennial milestones and expenditures, and a quantitative assessment of associated program risks. It further required OIG to provide quarterly reports on the bureau's progress against this plan. The following are highlights from these reports:

- *August 2009:* Limitations in the Census Bureau's ability to oversee the systems and information necessary for tracking its schedule, cost, and risk management activities during the 2010 Decennial Census. The OIG subsequently issued a separate report to Census with recommendations to help improve the program management of both the current and 2020 censuses.
- *December 2009:* Cost overruns for the address canvassing operation, revisions to cost assumptions for the nonresponse follow-up (NRFU) operation, contingency funds for FY 2010 operations, and spending of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds for the census; and an update on program-level risks.
- *February 2010:* Development and testing of the bureau's paper-based operations control system (PBOCS), an update of OIG field observations, analyses of cost overruns for address canvassing, an update on NRFU budgeting, and planned spending of Recovery Act funds. The OIG subsequently issued a separate report to Census with recommendations for addressing the PBOCS risks and improving cost containment of subsequent operations by developing and implementing effective internal controls over wage, travel, and training costs.
- *May 2010:* The status of PBOCS and its relationship to the success of several decennial operations, especially NRFU; the status of the 2010 Census budget and spending of Recovery Act funds; and an update on program-level risks, including the development of contingency plans and tests of physical security at key Census facilities. The OIG subsequently issued a separate report to Census with recommendations for, among other things, ensuring the quality of the clerical workarounds implemented to compensate for PBOCS shortfalls, improving the transparency of financial reporting, better informing the public of decennial enumeration methods, and developing an improved process to estimate the work load for various field operations.

Congressional Testimony

The OIG also delivered testimony before Senate and House committee hearings in support of the committees' oversight of the 2010 Decennial Census:

- *The 2010 Census: An Assessment of the Census Bureau's Preparedness.* Associate Deputy Inspector General, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, March 25, 2010

- *The 2010 Census: Update of Schedule, Cost, Risk Management, and Communications Activities*. Inspector General, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, February 23, 2010
- *Census 2010: Importance of the Master Address File and Steps Census Can Take to Strengthen Its Quality*. Inspector General, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, October 21, 2009
- *The 2010 Census: Update of Key Decennial Operations*. Inspector General, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, October 7, 2009
- *The 2010 Census and Integrated Communications Campaign*. Principal Assistant Inspector General for Audit and Evaluation, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, September 22, 2009

Congressional Meetings and Responses to Requests

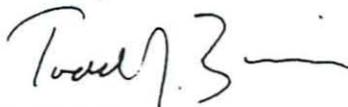
In addition to reporting and testifying before Congress, executives and staff of the Commerce OIG have met with Members of Congress and congressional staff formally on 16 separate occasions. OIG staff met with congressional staff numerous times on an informal basis in response to specific requests to update and provide oversight summaries related to the 2010 Decennial Census and efforts to improve the 2020 decennial Census. OIG staff have provided input on legislation in response to congressional requests to identify areas of improvement to the 2020 Decennial Census and briefed, attended meetings, and participated in teleconferences with congressional staff regarding the status of current decennial operations.

Summary

The decennial census is a once-a-decade event that carries a decade-long cumulative impact on Congressional representation and federal agency service. Oversight of the decennial census and helping ensure that it is carried out properly is, for many on the OIG's staff, a once-in-a-career opportunity to make an important difference. By promptly alerting Census officials—and the appropriate Senate and House oversight committees—of problems in need of immediate attention, OIG made an immediate and measurable difference in the 2010 Decennial Census. In addition, OIG's extensive monitoring, analysis, and reporting provided both Census Bureau and congressional decision-makers with critical information needed to plan for the next decennial in 2020. We plan to issue our next quarterly report in October, 2010 and, as noted above, a capping report in early 2011.

On behalf of the OIG staff, we appreciate the opportunity to serve the American public on such an important undertaking, and we appreciate your support and that of the Subcommittee.

Sincerely,



Todd J. Zinser

cc: Secretary of Commerce