

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 17, 2018

The Honorable Wilbur L. Ross, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Mr. John DeStefano
Director
Office of Presidential Personnel
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Secretary Ross and Director DeStefano:

We are writing to reiterate our desire that the nominee to be the next director of the Census Bureau be a nonpartisan, experienced, and scientifically-qualified public servant. We are two years out from the 2020 Census, a constitutionally mandated enumeration of all persons in the United States. The upcoming decennial census will require clear leadership if it is to be successful.

It has been a year since former Census Bureau Director John Thompson resigned, and over five months since you received a letter sent by thirty-four senators urging you to prioritize finding a new director. Secretary Ross's response to the November 2017 letter stated that "the selection and confirmation of a new Census Bureau Director is a top priority." In addition, at the Commerce Department's fiscal year (FY) 2019 budget hearing before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies on May 10, 2018, in response to questioning, Secretary Ross said, "We have proposed to the White House a candidate and they're processing the candidate as we sit here."

While we thank you for your continued work to find a nominee, we urge you to consider the importance of an accurate census count to the nation, the novel challenges that the 2020 Census presents, and the role a permanent director will play in ensuring budgetary and planning stability for the Census Bureau.

Since Director Thompson's resignation, the Commerce Department has reassessed its life-cycle cost-estimate for the 2020 Census, significantly increasing the expected cost of the decennial census. In response, Congress appropriated \$2.8 billion for the Census Bureau for FY 2018, more than \$1.2 billion more than the president's adjusted FY 2018 request. Yet two of the three end-to-end tests for 2018 were cancelled due to budgetary constraints. And the inclusion of an untested citizenship question, as well the \$500 million being in part spent on an untested communications program to explain the question, will further exacerbate the budgetary problems the Census Bureau faces.

While we applaud Acting Director Ron Jarmin for stepping into this role at such a precarious point in the decennial census's life-cycle, a non-acting, Senate-confirmed director is needed to guide the agency through 2020. Such a candidate must not be political and must direct the

agency through the nonpartisan task of counting every person in this country. The Census Bureau already raised concerns about respondent confidentiality and potential trust issues related to immigration data that could lower response rates. In recent tests, the Bureau observed “unusual respondent behaviors” from immigrant communities, with fears regarding “[l]egal residency status, fear of deportation, concern about how the data are used, and which agencies can see it.”¹ The next director must ameliorate these concerns with a commitment to political neutrality.


The candidate must be both experienced in both technical expertise and leadership, in accordance with 13 U.S.C. § 21(a)(2).² The decennial census is the largest peacetime undertaking in our country, and the Census Bureau will oversee one of the biggest workforce mobilizations. In addition, the Census Bureau will roll out new data collection techniques, including the ability to take the census online, which demands a clear understanding of these new techniques as well as the novel concerns they may raise.

In addition, as the premier statistical agency in the federal government, the candidate must be scientifically qualified to understand both the data and the integrity of data collection methods. This will ensure that the final count can be trusted by scientists, businesses, other federal agencies, and many additional entities that rely on census data for their activities. For example, census-derived data directs more than \$800 billion annually in federal spending. Census-derived data also determines congressional apportionment and guides redistricting at the federal, state, and local levels.

The Census Bureau has one chance to get the count right. Achieving an accurate count will require a nonpartisan, experienced, and scientifically-qualified public servant to lead the Census Bureau, and we ask that you take these considerations into account when choosing the best candidate. Additionally, a timely nomination is vital as we are only two years away from 2020.

Nominating the best candidate possible, as soon as possible, will help to ensure a quick confirmation in the Senate. Thank you for your commitment to a full, fair, and accurate 2020 Census, and we look forward to receiving your nominee for director of the Census Bureau.

Sincerely,



BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator



CHARLES E. SCHUMER
United States Senator

¹ <https://www2.census.gov/cac/nac/meetings/2017-11/Meyers-NAC-Confidentiality-Presentation.pdf>.

² 13 U.S.C. § 21(a)(2) Qualifications.—Such appointment shall be made from individuals who have a demonstrated ability in managing large organizations and experience in the collection, analysis, and use of statistical data.


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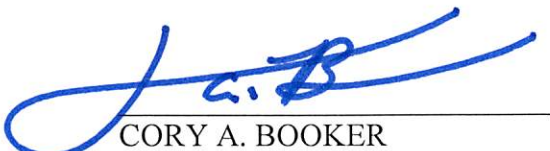

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