

## *Tribes and the Census*

# **Senate Indian Affairs Committee Holds Hearing On Indian Country and the 2020 Census**

The US Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held a hearing yesterday on "Making Indian Country Count: Native Americans and the 2020 Census." Three tribal witnesses laid out a comprehensive case for why the preparations to date for 2020 are likely to lead to a substantial undercount of Native people unless the Congress provides the resources necessary to avoid such a result.

Members of the Committee participated actively during the question and answer portion of the hearing. They included Chairman John Hoeven of North Dakota, Vice Chairman Tom Udall of New Mexico and members Lisa Murkowski (AK), Steve Daines (MT), Heidi Heitkamp (ND), Catherine Cortez Masto (NV) and Tina Smith (MN).

Testifying for the tribes were: Carol Gore, the President and CEO of Cook Inlet Housing, the tribal housing authority for the Cook Inlet Region in Alaska; Jefferson Keel, Lt. Governor of the Chickasaw Nation and President of the National Congress of American Indians; and James Tucker, a pro bono voting rights attorney associated with the Native American Rights Fund.

The Census Bureau was represented by Ron Jarmin, who currently serves as the acting Director. A permanent Director has yet to be nominated by the Administration.

The full prepared statements of each of the four witnesses are attached.

The issue that stimulated much debate during the question and answer session involved the Census Bureau's partnership program. In the run-up to each of the last several decennial censuses the Census Bureau has hired "Partnership Specialists" to work with tribal governments, Native non-profits, state, county and municipal governments and community-based organizations to help promote participation in the Census. These Partnership Specialists are particularly important in the operation of the Tribal Liaison Program.

In her statement, Carol Gore highlighted the serious lack of Partnership Specialists to serve Alaska, including its 229 tribes, many in very remote villages. She told the Committee:

"In 2010, the Bureau employed 3,800 partnership staff during peak operations. Shockingly, the Bureau has so far been able to hire just 43 Partnership Specialists to promote the 2020 Census. Back home in Alaska,

a single Partnership Specialist conducts all of the Bureau's outreach to every municipality, city, borough, and other unit of local government across our state. As if that charge were not absurd enough, our Partnership Specialist does not just cover Alaska; she is responsible for a four-state region. That is an impossible task."

In response to a question from Senator Murkowski about lessons learned from the 2010 Census, Carol Gore said pointedly, "It's boots on the ground that really mattered."

Her point drew strong support from Senator Murkowski. And a weak rejoinder from Ron Jarmin from the Census Bureau. He said that just 800 Partnership Specialists were employed for the 2010 Census and the rest were only assistants. He said that the Bureau was not planning to hire as many assistants in 2020. He intimated that funding was a problem.

All of the tribal witnesses stressed funding as a key issue in the preparations and ramp-up to the national headcount in 2020. The emphasis was noted by Committee Chairman Hoeven, who himself serves on the Senate's Appropriations Committee, as do Senators Murkowski, Lankford (OK), Daines, Vice Chairman Udall and Senator Tester (MT) -- all members of the Indian Affairs Committee.

Senator Heitkamp stressed the urgency of getting a full and accurate count of all Native people in 2020. She said that "Our First Americans deserve to be counted as Americans." As an example of the trouble facing Indian Country in the preparations for 2020 she pointed to the cancellation of the field test scheduled for 2017 on the Standing Rock reservation in North and South Dakota.

Among the other problems mentioned was the limited number of Local Census Offices being planned for 2020. It is these offices that are responsible for conducting the field operations, including the critical function of following-up on households that do not respond to the Census form. Senator Smith pointed out that only three such offices are planned for Minnesota, none readily accessible to the large tribes in the northern and western parts of the state.

Interestingly, none of the witnesses, including Ron Jarmin from the Census Bureau, mentioned the budget request submitted by the Administration on Monday. (See story below.)

Although there were only three tribal witnesses invited to present testimony to the Committee in person, every tribe and Native organization has the ability to

submit a statement for the consideration of the Committee and for the hearing record.

Statements must be submitted within two weeks of the date of the hearing, that is by February 27th. The statements can be emailed to the Committee at [testimony@indian.senate.gov](mailto:testimony@indian.senate.gov) or mailed to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Attn: Avis Dubose, Clerk, 838 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510. It is important that statements also be sent to the Senators and members of the House of Representatives representing the area in which the tribe or organization is located.

### **Administration Sends FY 2019 Budget Request to Congress**

On Monday the Administration released its budget request for Fiscal Year 2019 for the Census Bureau and all other federal agencies. Although this request provides what is basically the Administration's "wish list" for future funding, it is the Congress that actually appropriates the money.

For the 2020 decennial program account in FY 2019, the Administration's request was over \$3.2 billion. According to budget accounting, this represents nearly 3.7 times the amount expected for FY 2018.

Although that sounds huge, it is not that large by comparison to what's needed in the "ramp-up" for the next decennial. It's unlikely to make up for the underfunding of the last several years and may not be enough to meet all the needs that seem likely to arise during the October 2018 to September 2019 period.

By comparison, if the Administration were to have requested an amount for FY 2019 proportional to the ramp-up before the 2010 Census, that request would be more like \$4.7 billion.

The budget request is now in the hands of the Congress. In the case of the Census Bureau, that task falls to the Appropriations Committees in the House and Senate, especially to the Subcommittees on Commerce, Justice and Science. These Subcommittees will hold hearings over the coming months and then make recommendations to the full Appropriations Committees which, in turn, will produce a bill for action by the full House and Senate.

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