

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

Hearing on the 2020 Census
October 12, 2017

If there is one key point we can get across to those watching today's hearing, I believe it is this: the Census Bureau is dangerously underfunded and has been for years, and unless we do something about it right now, this massive deficiency could imperil the fairness and accuracy of the census itself.

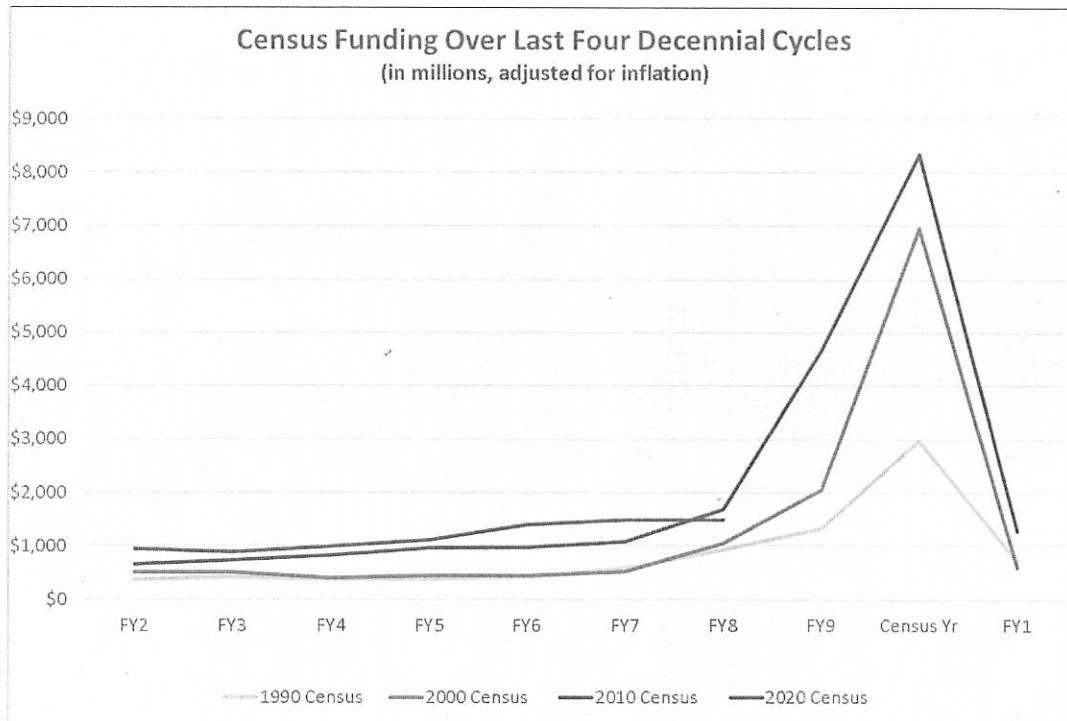
This is not a partisan observation. Both progressives and conservatives agree that current budget projections are way, way, way too low.

Eli Lehrer, the President of the R Street Institute, wrote an op-ed just this Tuesday warning that the census is "understaffed and underfunded" and that "America is in serious danger of the census going wrong."

Last month, the conservative American Enterprise Institute joined with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in warning Congress that the current level of flat, or near flat, funding "is unprecedented and would significantly undercut efforts to conduct an accurate survey." They warned that "shortchanging the census is penny-wise and pound foolish;" that it "jeopardizes the Bureau's ability to implement cost-effective new technologies;" and that it "could backfire, costing taxpayers more in the long run."

I would like to show a few charts that illustrate this urgent problem.

First, as we all know, funding for the Census Bureau historically increases dramatically in years 8 through 10 of each decade to accommodate the ramp up in activities for the census in year 10. This first chart shows funding for the last four decades in inflation-adjusted dollars.



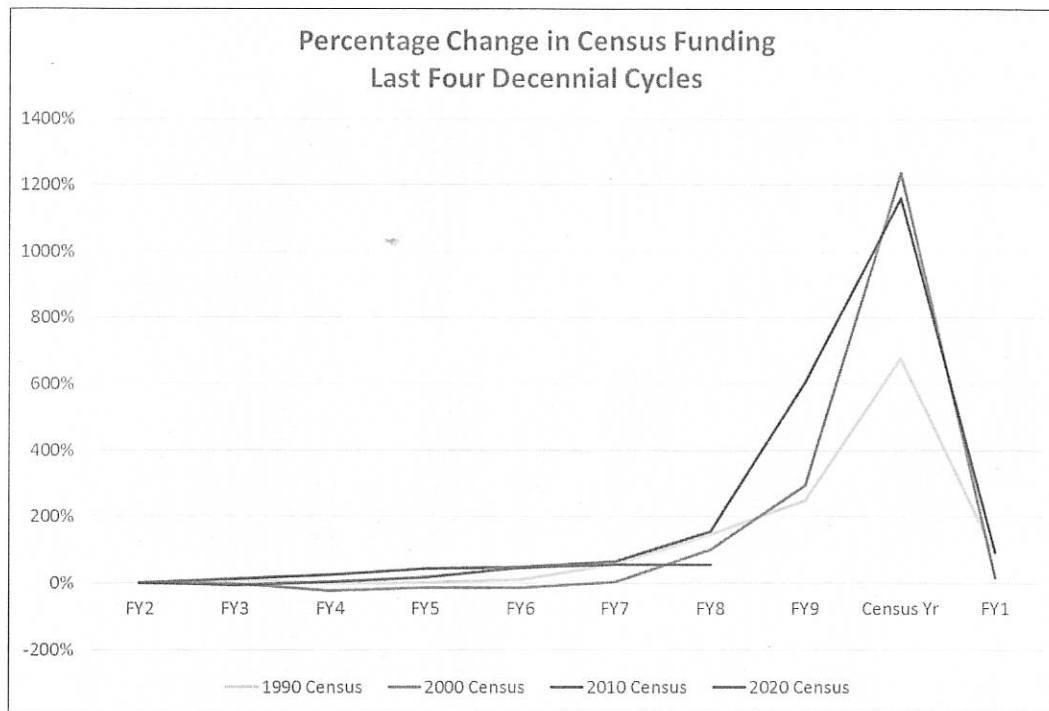
For the 1990 Census, the budget increased from \$596 million to \$3 billion over the last four years.

For the 2000 Census, it increased from \$535 million to \$6.9 billion over this period.

For the 2010 Census, it increased from \$1.1 billion to \$8.4 billion over this period.

But what are we doing now? We are basically flat-lining. The Trump Administration did not request a significant increase for 2018.

You can see the same trends when you look at the budget from a percentage basis, which is what this next chart shows.



The 1990 Census had a massive increase in the last four years of the cycle.

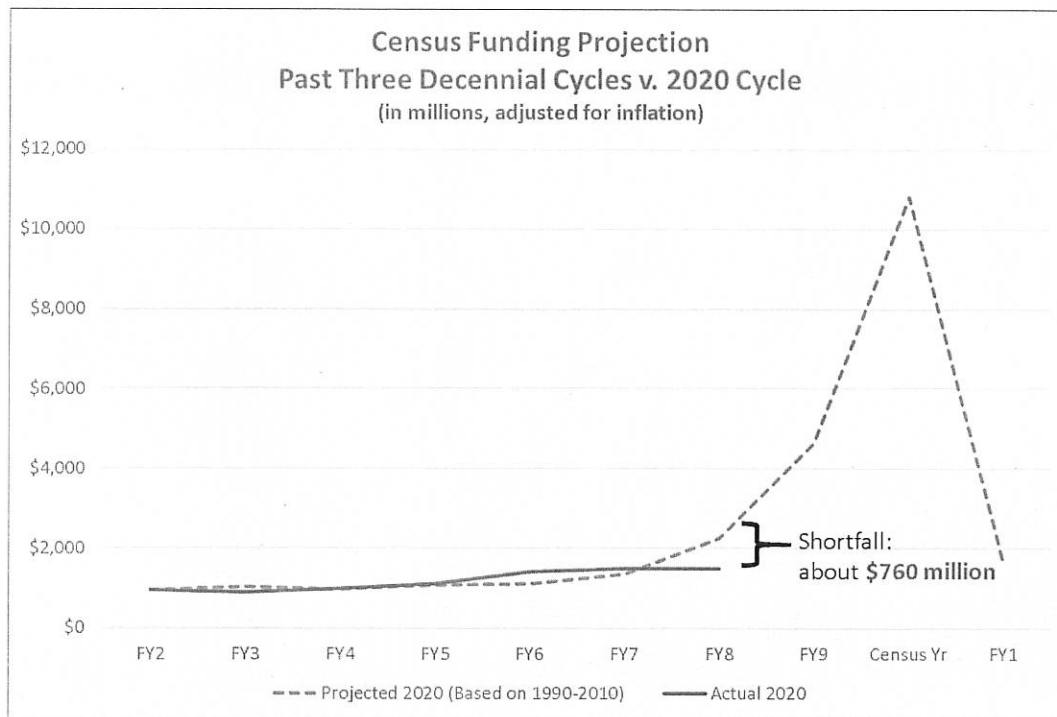
As did the 2000 Census.

And the 2010 Census.

But here is where we are now—the Administration is not on track to match past increases for 2020.

If we used these historical trends to project forward, total Census Bureau funding would be increasing over the next several years. But that is not what is happening.

As this next chart shows, there is a shortfall of about \$760 million when you compare what the Administration is requesting to past trends.



Now, Congress shares part of the blame. In 2012, Congress insisted that the Census Bureau spend less on the 2020 Census than it spent on the 2010 Census. Congress refused to acknowledge or budget for two of the most significant—and predictable—drivers of cost increases that occur between each decennial census: inflation and population growth.

Aggravating this problem even more, Congress appropriated even less than the Census Bureau requested in every single fiscal year since 2012.

Shortfalls in Census Funding Since 2012				
Fiscal Year	Requested	Enacted	Shortfall (dollars)	Shortfall (percentage)
2012	\$1,024,765,000	\$888,300,000	- \$136,465,000	- 13.3%
2013	\$970,425,000	\$840,600,000	- \$129,825,000	- 13.4%
2014	\$982,484,000	\$945,000,000	- \$37,484,000	- 3.8%
2015	\$1,211,428,000	\$1,088,000,000	- \$123,428,000	- 10.2%
2016	\$1,499,974,000	\$1,370,000,000	- \$129,974,000	- 8.7%
2017	\$1,633,606,000	\$1,470,000,000	- \$163,606,000	- 10.0%
Total	\$7,322,682,000	\$6,601,900,000	- \$720,782,000	- 9.84%

Now, some people will argue that the Census Bureau was supposed to save billions of dollars this time around by using new IT innovations to reduce the number of workers it needs to hire and increase the number of people who submit their forms online.

The problem is that when you starve the Census Bureau year after year after year, it cannot make the investments needed to implement these innovations. And this is exactly what happened.

As the former Director of the Census Bureau, John Thompson, who left his position this summer, explained to the *Washington Post* just this week: “Had we been funded to do everything we asked for then we’d be much farther ahead.” He continued: “At this point, they’re going to have to go back and do some of it the old way ... with paper and pencil.”

Secretary Ross, I want to thank you for being here today, and for briefing Members of the Committee last week. I know you will get into this during your testimony, but I appreciate that, as a result of your own team’s review, you have also recommended that the Administration increase its request for 2018 by \$187 million.

I commend you for taking this step, and I know you understand the importance of this issue as a former enumerator yourself.

However, I believe that even this request is far too low, especially given the number of tests that have been cancelled and the extremely low number of hires at the moment.

I know you are constrained somewhat in your current position. I was dismayed to hear that the Office of Management and Budget rejected your request for an additional \$50 million for contingencies that are virtually certain to occur.

Nevertheless, we have a responsibility under the Constitution to ensure that the census is funded adequately, and that the Census Bureau has the resources it needs to conduct a fair and accurate census. This should matter to each and every one of us, because while we historically discuss minority and immigrant populations being undercounted, low-income and rural communities are also at great risk of being missed, particularly in a digital census.

For this reason, yesterday I joined my colleague, Rep. Carolyn Maloney, who also chairs the congressional census caucus, in introducing legislation to fund the Bureau at \$1.935 billion this year—an amount that reflects budget projections from the Bureau’s Fiscal Year 2017 budget and an extra \$135 million for increases in necessary funds for the CEDCaP Program.

We must recognize the gravity of the situation we are facing, and I hope all Members will consider joining our bill.

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