Press Briefing -- December 5, 2000
Director Prewitt

STEVE JOST: Okay, I think we're all here. Thank you for joining us this afternoon. My name is Steve Jost. I'm with the U.S. Census Bureau. And this is another in our standard operational press briefings where we report to you on the status of Census 2000 ongoing operations.

I think most of you have been part of the exercise before, but I just want to make clear that we have a group of reporters here in the room and a group who are joining us by phone. After the director has some opening remarks, we'll go to questions, and we'll alternate from the room to the phone. And, with that, I give you Director Kenneth Prewitt.

DR. PREWITT: Thank you, Steve, and friends of the Census. As we've just mentioned up here, the census is the longest continuous scientific project in our American democracy. And we are very pleased in Census 2000 to be part of that tradition and to report again to you today that we are where we need to be at this stage in the census process. We have finished all of our major operations on schedule. We are now doing the data preparation work that's necessary before we release the apportionment numbers.

A word or two about that data preparation work, to give you some idea of its complexity. Every data file that we're preparing for the apportionment numbers is passed through what we call our disclosure avoidance procedure; that is, it's our procedure to make sure that no confidential data can be even inadvertently released. And that's a big project, and we're doing that right now. We've finished about 32 of the states. We've got the rest of them to go. But we will finish that on schedule.

Another thing that we're doing in getting the data ready is collating what we call the collection geography with the tabulation geography. The collection geography is the geography that we use when we send enumerators out in the field to try to get responses, and that geography does not perfectly map against what we call tabulation geography, which is, of course, the geography of state lines and county lines, city lines and so forth.

So I'll just give you a couple of examples of why we're still working very hard to make sure the data are exactly as they should be before we release the apportionment numbers. The apportionment numbers will be released the last week of December, in all likelihood on the 28th or the 29th. That is ahead of our obligation, of course, to have them released by the end of the year.

A word or two about what you will see when the numbers are released. There will be three tables that will be shared with the press and the public at the same time they're prepared for the president. One of the tables is the basic apportionment table, and that takes the population of the 50 states and the overseas military and diplomatic corps and allocates that, of course, across the 50 states.

That does not include the population of Washington D.C., nor of Puerto Rico nor the other island areas. So the first major table is a table that simply describes the apportionment-based population total. Then there will be another table that will be, in effect, the resident population of the United States, which will exclude the overseas military and diplomatic corps but include the District of Columbia, and as a separate line, the population of Puerto Rico. So that will be a different population count.

And then we'll also produce for you a population count of the overseas population by state, so you'll see exactly how we came up with the apportionment number itself. So those will be the three major data products that will be released, as I say, the last week of December.

Now, a word or two about the census, and then I'll really allow you to pose whatever questions you would like to. We continue to feel very good about census operations. We've now done a lot of quality control work, re-examined our data files, compared them with what we expected. And we are convinced that Census 2000 will have an unusually strong coverage; we say, that we manage to get to a very, very high percentage of all the households in the United States, and we think we've got forms from a very, very high percentage of those households.

One of the ways that the numbers will be looked at when the population count is released -- the press, other people will be wanting to compare our population estimate with the estimate that would come from demographic analysis. Demographic analysis, as you know, is an independent measure of the population, which comes from vital statistics. It comes from birth, death records, in-migration, out-migration.

That is an estimate of the population. It has its problems. For example, it's very hard to get a good accurate count of the magnitude of the undocumented population, of course, in the United States. But also, interestingly enough, it's hard to get a good estimate of out-migration. The assumption in the United States, of course, is that if anyone moves here, comes here, they want to stay; nobody ever leaves.

But, of course, that's not quite true. People do leave. But we don't have a good statistical measure of emigration as against immigration. And so that's one of the things that makes the demographic analysis number itself imperfect. But, nevertheless, it is a good national estimate of the population. And we will be comparing and the press will be comparing the census count to that estimate.

Historically, when we've talked about the net undercount, it's almost always been a comparison of our count to the demographic analysis count. And when you saw that the undercount, for example, in 1990 was 1.8 percent compared to 1980 at only 1.2 percent compared to 1970 at 2.1 percent, all of those differences were comparing the census count to the demographic analysis estimate.

We are hopeful, strongly hopeful, that our population estimate, based on the census data, in 2000 will be closer than any time in history to the demographic analysis estimate. And that is one indicator to us of the success of the census. However -- and this is the point I need to stress -- that is a net national estimate. That is, a net national estimate can include two types of what we call coverage error, two types of problems, one of which is persons missed and the other is persons erroneously included or persons counted twice. So a net number can still include both an undercount and an overcount.

When we release the apportionment numbers at the end of December, we will not yet have a measure of that undercount and overcount. We will not have that until we complete the work on our Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation. That work is also proceeding exactly on schedule.

We have now finished all of the field work. We're now getting those data files in shape. And when they're in shape, we'll begin to compare the responses from those 300,000 households, or including Puerto Rico, 314,000 households, to the census record we have for those households as of Census Day. And it's that comparison, of course, that allows us to make an estimate about the undercount and the overcount.

So I do want to simply emphasize at this stage that when we release the apportionment count, one of the things that it will be compared to is other estimates of population -- demographic estimates, our own intercensal estimate program. It'll be compared with other benchmarks. And we are convinced that when the data are out and those comparisons are made, it will underscore what we have been saying, which is that Census 2000 has been an operationally successful census.

But then, to be redundant, let me say it again. That does not mean that there will not be an under- and an overcount, and we will not know that until we've completed the work

on the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation. The time schedule for that, of course, is through January and February.

We anticipate by the end of February to have finished that statistical work, and on the basis of that, will make a decision about whether we can improve the census by using the adjustment factors. And we've gone over that before. We can go over that again. We'll certainly have an opportunity to do it between now and the latter part of February, when that decision will be made and, of course, widely announced.

I should say, just to revert to the first point, that we are very, very proud at the Census Bureau of having gotten this far in Census 2000 as successfully as we believe we have. We're very proud to be part of this, as we say, the longest continuous scientific project in American democracy, starting in 1790 when we were simply apportioning, of course, to only 16 states at that time, the initial 13 and then three that were added: Kentucky, Tennessee and, I think, New Hampshire. Is that right? Oh, no, that's wrong. I've really caught myself now.

STAFF: Georgia.

DR. PREWITT: Georgia was added after the first 13. And then, by 1890, you can see the migration of the forms. By 1890, we're apportioning 357 seats in 45 states. Not yet states were Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma, and, of course, Hawaii and Alaska; and then, of course, in 1990 the full 50-state complement, 435 seats.

And, of course, what we will be doing in that last week of December is sharing with you, sharing with the public, the numbers that the Secretary of Commerce will deliver to the president that will have counted the total population, spread it across the 50 states, and identify the allocation of those seats in the House of Representatives at that time.

So, with that, I'm happy to take your questions. Genaro?

Q Genaro Armas, Associated Press. If Governor Bush becomes president, how does that affect how the Census Bureau proceeds with the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation?

DR. PREWITT: We would hope not at all. The Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation, of course, has been built into the census plan from the beginning. It is part of making sure

that Census 2000 is as accurate as it can be. There's absolutely no reason to presume that a change in administration should alter the Census Bureau's plans with respect to the use of the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation.

Just to emphasize, for those who may not know, the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation is an evaluation of the census. It itself is also evaluated. That is, the Census Bureau will look at the quality of that piece of work, the quality of the basic census, and then ask itself, "Can we make that initial count more accurate by applying the dual-system estimation from the A.C.E.?"

If the feeling of the Census Bureau is yes, we will then adjust. If the feeling is no, we won't. And there's absolutely no reason for that scientific decision to be made differently if Mr. Bush is in the White House or Mr. Gore is in the White House or if Mr. Clinton were in the White House. This has been conducted as a scientific project, and we hope it will continue to be so conducted.

MR. JOST: Okay, we'll go to the room again. If you're on the telephone, if you want to get in the queue of reporters, please press "1" on your telephone. Over here.

Q Tom Hargrove, Scripps-Howard News Service. When can we expect to see household data brought down to the county and Zip code level?

DR. PREWITT: The next major data product from the Census Bureau is, of course, the redistricting data tape, which comes out on a flow basis starting in early March -- on a flow basis, state by state. By the end of March, all 50 states will be out. That data tape is down to the block level. It's the most refined -- that is, geographically refined -- data tape that we produce. That will have a limited number of variables on it.

It's the variables that are needed to enforce civil rights laws -- I mean, the Voting Rights Act -- make sure that boundaries are drawn, one person, one vote. That will have the count. It will have the age over and under 18, because, of course, that's the voting-age population. And it will have race and ethnicity and gender.

So as early as the beginning of March, you'll begin to see very refined population data with those very limited variables available down to the very, very smallest geographic level, obviously block-level data. Then you get aggregated back up to counties, cities and places, and so forth. Other data products then roll out on a fairly steady basis, starting almost immediately, as early as June. We have a handout -- I think it's in your packet -- of the data products and the dates.

What we do is we tend to bring them out earlier at higher levels of aggregation. That is, each stage of more refined data down to lower places simply requires more work, and so we'll start at higher levels of aggregation and then simply keep driving it down for all of our variables. But a lot of the data will be out in 2001; not all of it, but a high percentage of it.

And I should say that, unlike previous censuses, all of the data, of course, will be out electronically, be on the Web. It will be a much faster data dissemination than back in the old days, the really old days, but even the recent days, where it all came out in tabular -- you know, in bulk form, and you had to wait until we could print and distribute our huge books full of tables.

Of course, back in the 1790, 1800, 1800s and on, sometimes you had to wait a year or two before you could see census data. It took a very long time to tabulate it all. But now we'll be talking a matter, even though it's a very complicated tabulation process, we'll be talking a matter of weeks and months to get all the data out.

MR. JOST: Okay, we'll move back to the telephone. Judi Hasson with Federal Computer Weekly.

Q Hi. It's Judi Hasson with Federal Computer Week. How are you, Dr. Prewitt?

DR. PREWITT: Very well, thank you.

Q I wanted to ask you about security. Did you experience any hacking that was successful? And, if not, why not?

DR. PREWITT: Well, why not is because we may be smarter than the hackers. No, we did not have any hacking problems. As I think I reported to you before, we actually have contracts with experts to try to get into our system, and then we use that to probing for weaknesses. We then use that to identify if there are weaknesses and tighten them up. And we believe that. Of course, you never know. You're in the business; you would know better than I. But you can't know definitively, of course. But we believe that no one got through any of our firewalls with respect to any census data.

As you know, we also allowed Internet filing. We did not use that heavily because we

wanted to test its security. We've now begun to evaluate that. And early indications are that it easily met all of our security tests, and we will be wanting to use the Internet much more heavily in 2010 than we were able to use it in 2000.

So at least, based on the information we have, no hackers were able to get through our firewall. The Census data are completely protected. And we believe that will continue to be the case.

MR. JOST: Back in the room, over here.

Q John Mercurio with Roll Call. I know you have a schedule for releasing information on reapportionment. I was wondering, though, if there's any way to get any sense of preliminary estimates from the Bureau on any sort of demographic trends for that process.

DR. PREWITT: Well, you mean, between now and December 28th?

Q Yes.

DR. PREWITT: No. (Laughs.) No, there are no preliminary data that are available at this stage. I can tell you, we keep the apportionment count data very, very, very secure, which is to say the director will not know it until the very last minute. Of course, there are many things about the Census Bureau that probably the director doesn't know. But what happens, quite honestly, is that we do quality check and quality check and quality check these data to make absolutely certain that there are no mistakes or errors.

The apportionment count itself doesn't exist until the overseas military and diplomatic staff have been added to those counts. And that's the last thing we do.

Q [Inaudible.]

DR. PREWITT: No, absolutely not. And that will not happen until we're just ready to produce them, because we realize the level of public interest in these data and we are very determined to have no preliminary data out. It would create mass confusion in the American public if some data kind of slipped out inadvertently earlier and they turned out not to be the most accurate data. So we will hold very tight to those data until we have finished all of our work, and then we are right on schedule to do that. And that's

really the good news.

You know, you don't know, when you start this kind of operation, whether you will finish all the operational steps. You've got a schedule, but it's not necessarily self-evident that you can meet all of those scheduled requirements. As I just quickly alluded to in the beginning of my comments, a lot of very difficult stuff goes on after the data are in. For example, I didn't mention, but the data actually come in, as you know, as census forms, individually household-responding census forms. But then you've also got all this data of addresses that are on your geographic data file.

Well, the geographic files have to be brought together, of course, with the census files. That's one of the early things we have to do, and in the process of doing that, make certain there are no mistakes, errors and so forth. So all of that is the work that's going on now. But as of this morning, when I was given a briefing on exactly where we were before this session, I just feel very, very confident that we'll make our deadlines.

MR. JOST: We'll go back to the telephones. Paul Johnson with the Bergen Record.

Q Yeah, hi. I had a question on the apportionment data you guys are releasing in December. Will you be releasing that by age or race as well, or is it just going to be aggregate numbers for each state?

DR. PREWITT: The only thing that will be released in late December is just a population count.

Q And that's not just voting age, it's all ages?

DR. PREWITT: It will be just how many people live in Maine, New Hampshire, all the way to Hawaii, so forth; no, just a population count. That's our obligation. And we simply stagger our work to meet the current obligation, and that is our first one. We want to make sure we get that right. So, no, we won't be able to tell. And you won't know anything about within a state, you know, suburb versus city, any of those things, until about six or eight weeks later.

Q Okay, thanks.

MR. JOST: Over here in the front row.

Q I'm Elizabeth Marchak, Cleveland Plain Dealer. I'd like to know when you're going to be releasing what was known in 1990 as the STF-3 tape file. And what will you be calling it this time?

DR. PREWITT: We're going to call it --

Q It's my favorite.

DR. PREWITT: We're going to call it Summary File 3, because we don't use tapes anymore. And I believe the schedule in your packet has the month that's scheduled for release. Summary File 1 will be released in June 2001. So Summary File 3 is in line after that. And if it isn't answered, somebody will give you the exact correct answer at the end of this session. I want to make sure I didn't give you the wrong answer.

MR. JOST: We'll go back to the phones. Ariel Sabar with the Providence Journal.

Q Dr. Prewitt, I was wondering whether the Census Bureau has made any determination on whether it would release some of the more detailed data to the media on an embargoed basis.

DR. PREWITT: I'm sorry, do you mind saying that again?

Q Yeah, I was wondering whether the Census Bureau had made a decision on whether it was going to release some of the data to the media, some of the more detailed data that will require some computer knowledge on our part --

DR. PREWITT: Oh, right, right, right.

Q -- on an embargoed basis.

DR. PREWITT: Yes. No, that's a very active conversation. That will not be true for the apportionment count, by the way. That will not be released in an embargoed environment. But some of our subsequent data products, which do require, as you know, a lot of computer preparation in order to do quick analysis; we are working right

now with -- I don't know. Steve, you may want to fill this in. Do you want to talk about it in more? Yeah, go ahead.

MR. JOST: We're actively meeting with the Associated Press and major broadcast and print media to talk about timetable for the data releases for especially the redistricting data, but more importantly, I think, the summary file releases, which are big numbers, a lot of crunching. And we're very close to working out arrangements for that data to be made available to the media a little bit in advance.

I'm not sure we're going to label it as an embargo process. And the Associated Press will be packing it for their customers, and any other major media outlets will be getting access to it. And you all will be getting access to it through a major FTP pipeline, which we don't think will cause anybody any delays or backlogs or wait times. But we're probably a couple of weeks away from getting the details of those arrangements out to you all.

Okay, we'll go back to the room; right back here.

Q Carl Weiser with Gannett News Service. What recourse is there for states, when you release your apportionment data, if they object or don't like the numbers that you've come up with? What can they do?

DR. PREWITT: The Census Bureau does have a process where, as a jurisdiction, a state or even a city or county, any jurisdiction can appeal its number. That process kicks in, I think, starting -- not immediately; it kicks in later in the spring, after the numbers are out. And if it's required, if we then examine the nature of this appeal, the appeal period is, I think, about two and a half years, a very long appeal period during which jurisdictions can, as I say, make an appeal that the numbers are wrong in some respects. And we then make adjustments if necessary.

Sometimes it's a geographic problem. For example, I said we're still looking hard at the data to make sure it's right. I won't get the example exactly right because I just don't have all the details. But my understanding is, for example, in one of the states we had a prison that was out on an island. And its address was someplace on the mainland, and so initially all of the forms got coded to that address on the mainland, which put it in a certain block, in a certain city. When we discovered that, of course, we had to redistribute those back out to where they really belonged, where the people really lived.

That kind of thing can happen. And what we've done this year to try to minimize those

problems, we have brought in state demographers from every state that wanted to cooperate. And I think eventually 40, 41 states did cooperate in this program. Is that the number? That's the number that I remember. A very high percentage of all the states cooperated in this program. Their demographers came in and they looked at the data, as we were beginning to prepare it, to look for anomalies. They would say, "Well, that doesn't make sense." And then we'd go back and look at it to try -- and the prison example is an example of where they detected something.

We will bring them back in before we do the redistricting data tape. We will ask them to look at anything that they think looks strange from what they know about their state, their cities. And these are people very, very well-equipped. So we hope to minimize those kinds of errors by correcting them before the data are already out. Nevertheless, there is this appeal process.

If people do successfully appeal, and we come to the determination that we did make an error of some sort of that type, it's almost always a geography error, we then make the correction, and that correction then goes into all subsequent census products, intercensal estimate programs and so forth. At that stage, of course, we could not go back and correct the apportionment numbers or the redistricting numbers. I mean, those data would have already been completed.

MR. JOST: I think the details of that appeal process will likely appear in the Federal Register in January with the kind of proof that would be required on the part of anyone who would make an appeal.

DR. PREWITT: Sorry, you had a quizzical look, so I didn't quite answer.

Q So they won't be able to appeal the apportionment numbers?

DR. PREWITT: No, the apportionment number itself, once it's given to the U.S. Congress, it is the number. Yeah. And they can appeal the number. And if the appeal is successful, we're not going to go back and move a seat from one state to another. That's what I meant. But that doesn't mean the number for that state wouldn't be changed. And the population of that state would recognize the success of that appeal.

This happens after every census. The adjustments are really very marginal. They're the kinds of things I just mentioned. It's almost always a geographic problem. You know, we thought the boundary was here, but the city comes along and says, "Well, actually, our boundary -- you know, we forgot to tell you, but it moved about two blocks.

Therefore, those people that you have out in the county really belong to the city." And so we then make those adjustments.

MR. JOST: We'll go back to the phones. Tom Ginsberg of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

Q Hi, thanks. Just one quick question I may have missed. When do you expect, after you've made the decision in late February whether to use the adjustment, when will we get the adjustment?

DR. PREWITT: Well, as soon as we make the decision, we will start rolling out the data on a flow basis. And the actual work that it takes to prepare a state's redistricting file is considerable. And depending on the size of the state, it can take as long as a day or two to just do the work, and again, quality-check it and so forth.

So we will put, at the head of the queue, those states which have early redistricting requirements by state law, and states that aren't going to redistrict for another sort of six or eight or 10 months or a year or whatever, they'll be later in the queue. We fully expect to have every state out by April 1st, our statutory deadline. And the earliest state will come out the day we can get it out. And our schedule calls for us to make this decision -- there's not a fixed date, but sometime in the latter part of February. So by March 1st, we are starting to produce data.

Is that adequate for your question?

MR. JOST: In the room. Yes.

Q Sean Higgins, Investors Business Daily. You said there's no reason to presume a Bush administration would change the policy on using adjustments. But it would be within their authority, wouldn't it?

DR. PREWITT: The census plan calls for the collection of the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation to be conducted and then to be used. Like all of our quality control procedures, we do our quality control procedures. We then use them as best we can. There is a federal reg that was introduced or went into law, I think, December 4th, somewhere in that period, early December, if I'm correct.

MR. JOST: September.

DR. PREWITT: No, earlier than that. September. No, sorry. It's been a fast fall. Excuse me, December 4th was just now -- anyway, a federal reg that we can get you if you would like, that stipulates the following: that the decision about whether to adjust or not is a Census Bureau decision. There is a standing committee that meets almost every week. It's examining all of these data as they come in.

The amount of data to come in before you make this adjustment decision is enormous. It has to do with all kinds of things -- response rates, match rates, housing match rates and person match rates. When we're trying to compare the responses from 300,000 surveys to the census records, there's just a lot of stuff that you have to look at. And that's what I say we'll start doing in about another two or three weeks, and that takes a couple of months to do that.

The Federal Register notice stipulates that this standing committee, which is identified, will evaluate those data and then make a recommendation to the Census Bureau director. And the Census Bureau director will then make the final determination about whether to adjust or not. This is a change from 1990, but it replicates what was true in 1980. In 1980, the Census Bureau collected these kinds of quality surveys, called a Post-Enumeration Survey then, and determined that the data were not strong enough to use, and itself decided not to adjust. That was litigated, but the position of the Census Bureau prevailed. In 1990, the Census Bureau did recommend that the adjustment procedure be applied. That recommendation went at that time to the Secretary of Commerce, and he overruled the Census Bureau. And what this Federal Register notice does is it changes the policy back to the 1980 policy, which is it is properly a decision of the Census Bureau, not a decision of the Secretary of Commerce or any other political appointee.

For an administration to change that -- I guess they could change that -- I am not an expert in statutory law. But certainly the Census Bureau is proceeding on the assumption that what is now the expected practice will continue, irrespective. There is absolutely no reason for this. As I say, it's a project. It's a scientific project. We will complete it on schedule, do our job. And I would hope that there will be no disruption of that.

MR. JOST: We'll go back to the telephones. Sherry Sylvester of the San Antonio Express News.

Q Thanks. You got my question earlier.

MR. JOST: Okay. And to the room -- I think we saw a hand over here.

Q Obviously the figure you were seeking to be at in the 1980s, was a 1.2 percent undercount. Can you give us a hint of what the undercount appears to be this time?

DR. PREWITT: Certainly. Carefully. The hint is as follows. The Census Bureau feels very, very good about the quality of its coverage programs; that is, the programs that try to go out and find everyone it could in the United States. And we believe that the differential between the count that we'll report at the end of the month and the demographic analysis estimate will be smaller than at any time in history. That's what we believe. We could be surprised when we finish the numbers, but that's what we expect. That does not itself tell you anything about whether the magnitude of the undercount and the overcount, and whether those under- and overcounts are differentially experienced by different demographic groups in geographic areas. You could have a net number which is very close to the demographic analysis estimate, and you could still have in that net number persons who were missed and persons who were overcounted, and they netted out to be close to the demographic analysis estimate. But we will not know until we have done the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation, which is for us the gold standard. It is the real measure of, in our judgment, the population size of the United States.

The demographic analysis is an important benchmark, but it has its own flaws of the sort I just mentioned. It doesn't have an accurate count of out-migration, in-migration. It doesn't have a fully accurate account of course of the illegals. We are counting the undocumented people in this country, as you know, in the census, because we don't even bother to ask. And, therefore, we think we get a higher response rate from them than maybe some other ways in which the data are collected on them. If we did a good job with those population groups they will be in the census, so that in effect the census could have a number that's even higher than demographic analysis. If we manage to reach further into the population than that particular statistical procedure does.

What we are hopeful of is that our own count -- and we have said many, many, many times and we will say it again -- any large statistical operation such as a census is an estimate of the truth -- it is not the truth. We want to get that estimate as close as possible. And one of the ways that we will evaluate it is how close did we get to the demographic analysis estimate. And if it's close we'll feel good. That doesn't make it right. It doesn't make either one of them right. And what will give us our final measure of the quality of the census will be the results of the A.C.E.

MR. JOST: Back to the telephones. Michael Simmons with Gannett in New Jersey.

Q Hello, Dr. Prewitt. I have a question regarding the redistricting data being released early in March. Ten years ago, it was released earlier than that. At the end of January was when New Jersey received it. There's some concern --

MR. JOST: Mike, I'm sorry, you're breaking up.

Q I'm sorry. There's been some concern expressed in New Jersey that the redistricting data will be received too late this year for the state to be able to keep its schedule regarding its legislative primary election in June. Is there any chance of the schedule being moved earlier, or can you explain why it has to be released in part?

DR. PREWITT: Yes. Obviously the Census Bureau is well aware of New Jersey's particular needs. I should say, of course, that -- the federal law under which we are governed obligates us to provide the redistricting data no later than April 1st. If an individual state, of course, for its own reasons has a law, regulation or practice which requires the data to be available earlier, there is not much we can do about that. We can only meet our own statutory requirements. We are well aware of New Jersey's needs, and they clearly will be close to the top of our queue in terms of when we process the data. But there will be no way that we can process any individual state's data until we have made the decision about adjustment to all of the work that has to go into that. This is a national census, and is not just a state-by-state census. We have to get the nation's numbers right before we will release them. We will do everything we can to accommodate New Jersey's needs, but we are really finally only governed by the federal law that obligates us to meet the April 1 deadline.

MR. JOST: Genaro?

Q Along the same lines of an earlier question, is there any early indication of just the quality of the work done on the A.C.E. program, and how likely it would be used?

DR. PREWITT: Yes. Well, two questions in that, Genaro. Yes, there are some early indications of the quality of the A.C.E survey itself, and these are very positive. These have to do with response rates. They have to do with whether there is a match between the housing units, for example. We are already beginning to look at that data. We haven't done the person match, but we can do some housing unit matches. We know that it was done in a timely fashion. That is always better, because that means you have higher quality data.

As you recall when we were talking about it in the earlier period, we managed to complete a very high percentage of the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation survey on the phone. That is a computer-assisted instrument, and that gives you, again, high quality data, because all the bridging rules are right there in front of the screen. We also use the CAPI instrument -- computer-assisted personal interview instrument -- in the field. Everything worked well is the point. All of our field worked well. The data have come in, they look clean. At this stage, everything is preliminary. At this stage we are not running into any big operational problems with the A.C.E survey.

And let me just pause for a moment. This is one major task. It's only in the environment of a census that we don't talk about a successful completion of the survey of 300,000-plus households in a very short period of time as anything other than a magnificent accomplishment. And the fact that our field people managed to do that at the same time that they had to complete the census was, we consider, a quite significant operational accomplishment.

Now to your question. The fact that the A.C.E. is operationally robust, and the census appears to be operationally robust, means that you are well-positioned to make the decision. If A.C.E. had collapsed, if we had a low response rate, if we had interviewers -- we thought the data quality were no good -- then we would have a very hard time using it. But we think it is going to be strong enough to use. That does not mean we will adjust. The decision about whether to adjust has to do with when we actually look at the data are we able to significantly improve the census. And if there are undercounts -- people who were missed -- and overcounts, and these are differentially distributed across different geographic areas and population groups, then we will conclude we should adjust, because that will make it a more accurate census. But we really cannot make that determination until you actually look at the results of the match itself. And, as I say, that really is not available until basically early February.

But the good news is the survey is strong enough to sustain that. And that -- you know, I wouldn't have known that three months ago. It doesn't happen until it happens.

MR. JOST: Okay, a couple -- anyone back there? Oh, sorry. Two -- Ellyn and the gentleman over here.

Q Ellyn Ferguson, Gannett News Service, and I guess I have two questions. Dr. Prewitt, how long do you think you will stay on as census director? Do you think that you will remain in your position through April 1, through the releasing of the redistricting data? And, two, do you think that there is going to be -- do you expect to have that rule

changed that shifted the authority from making the decision on the fiscal adjustment? Do you expect that to perhaps be put on hold through legal challenges? Have you gotten any indication that anyone is going to be filing a lawsuit?

DR. PREWITT: Let me take the second one first. There has been to our knowledge, to my knowledge anyway, no legal questions raised. There were, as you know, early when the reg was first issued, there was interest on the part of the Congress whether -- and Chairman Miller said perhaps it was an illegal regulation because it delegated too much authority to the Census Bureau director. Examinations of that subsequently suggested it's very hard to understand why this particular delegation could be called illegal. But I leave that finally to the lawyers.

I would only say for sure, Ellen, that if there is a legal challenge that is emerging, it has not surfaced at the Census Bureau. I would be surprised -- it could happen, but I would be surprised. I think that my guess is that that process, which is a perfectly reasonable process from the point of view of how scientific projects should unfold, should stay in place. I'd like to point out that we're obviously going to release the apportionment numbers as the Census Bureau. That is, the Census Bureau is going to release those numbers. Nobody else is going to do it. We are going to hand them over to the president, who then, in turn, hands them -- well, we hand them over to the Secretary of Commerce, who hands them to the President, who hands them to the U.S. Congress. That is, nobody is coming out to Suitland to look at those numbers before they are released. And I have no reason to believe that the redistricting data should be handled any differently. It's one more Census Bureau product. If people then litigate it after the fact, they litigate it. But at least from the point of view of our task, we simply will move through the steps.

You ask as well about my appointment. If people aren't aware, the director of the Census Bureau is not on a term. It is presidentially nominated and Senate-confirmed, and serves at the pleasure of the President. As I understand it, I could be asked to leave by any president. I could be asked to leave by Mr. Clinton today; I could be asked to leave by Mr. Gore or Mr. Bush, who happens to be the President at the time. I will remain in my position until I am asked to leave. Well, some caution on that. (Laughter.) I mean, at some point.

But, speaking more candidly, you know, obviously, to get to the burden of your question, I think that it would be healthy for the census, indeed, healthy for the American society, if the Census Bureau director were not thought of as a political appointee who has to be removed immediately upon the appearance of a new administration. I can fully understand that a new administration would like its own director. We all know that takes time. That person has to be identified, has to be nominated, has to be confirmed and then appointed. And I would hope for the stability

of the Census Bureau and the stability of this Census 2000 process that I would be there until my successor were confirmed. And then I would obviously be happy to depart immediately. And if that successor happened to be confirmed early, then I would step aside. If it takes two or three months for that successor to be confirmed, then it seems to me appropriate that I would be willing to stay there.

I will do whatever I am told to do, of course, I have not a whole lot of choice. But my own preference would be that the Census Bureau be allowed to do its work completely and independently of any kind of political influence, as it has tried to do its work, and that the director be left there in order to create stability in this process. It's no different from if you were about to do if you are in the middle of a big scientific project at NIH, the war on cancer or space exploration, why, there is some value to having stability in the leadership position while you are completing this big task. So I would hope that I would be allowed to stay there until my successor were confirmed.

MR. JOST: Right back here in front of the cameras.

Q Jonathan Nicholson with Dow Jones. Continuing on the two-question track here, if I may, there are two things -- I am relatively new to this. Is there a criteria that, a set criteria you guys will use in deciding whether to adjust that's laid out somewhere? And, secondly, are there different -- are there two or three different estimates that we'll have then for population 2000? Our Census counts of A.C.E. and the equivalent of like an inter-Census estimate, and what's the difference between these types of --

DR. PREWITT: Surely, surely. Let me just take a word and try to clarify some of these issues. I appreciate that they are not intuitively obvious.

Let me go back to 1990. We did a census in 1990. We recommended adjusting it; that is, there were about 12 million errors in the census by our own quality work -- an overcount of in excess of 4 million, an undercount of in excess of 8 million, that netted to about a 4 million person difference. We recommended that the census count be adjusted to that number. This was not accepted by the Secretary of Commerce. Yet about two years later, a year and a half later, the Bureau of Labor Statistics in particular said, "Look, we don't want to try to collect labor statistics, labor force behavior data for the next eight years based upon what the Census Bureau has told us is an incomplete count of the population." And so we worked out with the Bureau of Labor Statistics that all of their data would be collected based upon the adjusted or corrected Census numbers. And since that day not just the Bureau of Labor Statistics -- let me just read to you the American Community Survey, the American Housing Survey, time-use survey, long-term care, ambulatory medical care survey, crime victimization, hospital, home hospice care, Health Interview Survey, prisoner statistics, school surveys, Survey of

Doctorate Recipients, Survey of Income and Program Participation. I have got a list of that long of all of the major surveys that either the Census Bureau does or some other federal fiscal agency does, which are all calibrated back to the adjusted 1990 number -- not to the unadjusted number.

That's one of the -- so I only mention that because the country is actually quite capable of functioning intelligently with more than one basic number. The apportionment redistricting number of 1990 was unadjusted, but all of the statistical work when Alan Greenspan goes before the United States Congress and tells you about the state of the economy, he is making his assessment on the basis of data, all of which have been corrected to account for the 1990 undercount. So that's just observation one.

And observation two is the first thing I said is the apportionment number itself is a single number. It is the population of the United States and the overseas military and so forth scattered across the 50 states. So that's an estimate. The other number we are going to be releasing even then is a different number, because it includes the District of Columbia, but excludes the overseas and diplomatic corps, and also as I say has a special line for Puerto Rico if you want to, because after all the Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States. And if you want to make that part of the U.S. total, then the number is right there. So that's a different number. If you want to leave Puerto Rico in, take it out, it's a different number. But all the numbers are there for the press and the public to use as they will.

Then there are other estimates of the population size. And one I described with the demographic analysis estimate -- that is not based upon census data; that is based upon vital statistics and administrative records. There is also an estimate of the population of April 1st, 2000, that is the Census Bureau's own what we call the intercensual estimates program. And what that program is it takes the 1990 census and updates it every month -- every several months depending -- and says, "How many people now live in the United States?" That estimates program is based upon the 1990 unadjusted data, for reasons I won't here try to explain, but it had to do with legal reasons. The unadjusted data, which means if you now go to our Web site -- you can go to our Intercensual Estimate Program and say, "How many people lived in the United States on April 1st?" And that number we know is lacking the undercount numbers from 1990. But we have added since 1990 about 25 million people of the United States population through that program. Obviously the country has grown since 1990. From 1990 to 1995, I think -- and 1999 -- I think the number is roughly 25. So there are different numbers out there. And there just always will be -- that's the nature of the enterprise.

Now, finally, to get to your -- what I think the burden of your question is -- is that there will be a population count of the 50 states that will be not adjusted that will be used for apportionment. There will be about eight weeks later a new count of the population of

the 50 states all the way down to the block level that could in principle be adjusted; that is, could account for over- and undercounts. And that will be a new number. We think it will be a more accurate number.

Just to be a little bit redundant about all this, the census is a process of trying to get its numbers closer and closer to the truth. If we had stopped the census on July 1st, we would have had a reasonably good count of the American population. But that's before we did about 16 different quality control procedures, which improved that count. But we had the mail-back in, after all, we had gone out and knocked on doors -- we had all those data. We could have said, "Aw, we're finished -- here's our best estimate." But we know we improve that with our quality programs that went on through the summer. The Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation is nothing more complicated than yet another quality procedure. It's a particularly ambitious one. It's statistically complex. But it is nothing in principle other than, "Look, we have got the time -- let's try to get it better." And so that's what we will do. We will tell you in February whether we believe we could get it better with that procedure; and, if so, that will become the basic number. Sorry to be so lengthy on all that, but it's an important, big question.

MR. JOST: Okay, Genaro?

Q Just a follow-up. If the decision is made then not to use the adjusted data for redistricting, how does that affect the way all these other surveys are collected, how the data is reported in all those other surveys?

DR. PREWITT: It's again quite important. It depends on how the decision not to adjust is made. If the decision not to adjust is made by the Census Bureau because it believes that the A.C.E. doesn't materially improve the basic Census, then that number will be the, in effect, statistical control for all of these surveys. If, however, the Census Bureau believes that that number is the better number, and some of the process disallows it from being used, a legal or political process, the Census Bureau would argue very forcefully that the adjusted number should be the base number for all of these other surveys for the rest of the decade. We would not want to cripple the country with what we knew to be an inadequate number if we could possibly avoid it.

So you are quite right, it is possible that a legal challenge or some other process will preclude the adjusted number from being used in the redistricting process. But then we would very much hope that we would be able to go ahead and do that for all the rest of our statistical work. These surveys after all are the basis for the spending over the next 10 years of approximately $2 trillion, and you know, you just don't want the fundamental numbers used for expending $2 trillion of taxpayer money to be out of focus. And we would have out-of-focus numbers if we believe they should be adjusted

and they weren't adjusted.

But I do want to emphasize that the decision about whether to adjust or not is a, and should be, a Census Bureau decision. It should be based upon the best science we can bring to bear within the timeframe that's available to us, which is, as I say, late February or early March.

MR. JOST: Any closing remarks, director? I don't see any more hands up.

DR. PREWITT: No, thank you. Well, we'll probably reconvene right around -- right after the release of the apportionment count itself. We'll obviously have a press event then to do any further explanation of the numbers that might be useful. Thank you all very much.

Q The day of, or are you talking --

MR. JOST: Day of.

DR. PREWITT: Try to do the day of almost immediately. Right.

Q Do you have an actual date?

DR. PREWITT: Well, it will -- we expect it to be the 28th or the 29th. And I might say this: We are ready -- will be ready -- but we are obviously having the conversation with the White House about their own judgment about when they would like to receive these data.

MR. JOST: A couple of housekeeping duties. In your packet, this is a table that was just cleared and approved by the Census Bureau -- how the data on that date will appear. The three tables that will be part of the press release, showing the apportionment population, the overseas population and the resident population. Also in your packet is a CD-ROM of historical footage from Census 2000. And I bring these points up -- if you are not with us here today but you are on a telephone, if you call our decennial media relations office at 301-457-3691, you can get your own copies or additional copies of both of these, and the other materials that were in the press packet here at the Press Club. Thank you very much. We'll see you near the end of the month.

[END OF EVENT.]

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