Press Briefing -- March 30, 2000
Director Prewitt

MR. JOST: (In progress) -- from the local dignitaries that are here and by Director Prewitt, and then we'll throw it open to questions and answers. We will have mikes to help everybody out. So, if you can, when you get your mike, identify yourself and your affiliation. And thank you for joining us.

CHIEF STINNET: Good morning and welcome. I'm Chief Stinnet. I'm chief of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department, and I want to thank all of you all for joining us here this morning for this very important event. But I also want to take the opportunity to thank the men and the women who are working here today at Fire Station 18. They join the other men and women who provide a valuable, 24-hour-a-day, seven-days-a-week service to our citizens. So, when I have the opportunity in public to thank them, I certainly want to do that. Thank you all.

As you know, service is a two-way street. The citizens call on the fire department when they need us. Today, we're asking them to join us and the Census Bureau during our time of need, and for them to fill out and return their census forms. Being in the fire service, I cannot overemphasize the need to have the resources you need to do your job.

The census forms and the census information and data are vital to all the agencies in the county to provide services, so that they can provide services to our citizens. There is no doubt that proper resources save lives. Proper funding allows us to have better equipment, maintain our training and provide the highest level of service to our citizens. Again, it is important that everyone take the personal responsibility to fill out and return their census forms. It's certainly a win-win situation for everybody.

Now, I would like to take the opportunity to introduce Dr. Kenneth Prewitt. Dr. Prewitt has been the director of the U.S. Census Bureau since October 1998. He was nominated by the president and confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Prior to joining the Census Bureau, he served as the president of the Social Science Research Council. Previously, he was the senior vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation. Also, he taught for 15 years at the University of Chicago.

Currently, at the Census Bureau, Dr. Prewitt's main attention is focused on the operations of Census 2000. The issues are not limited to counting the approximately 275 million residents in about 120 million housing units, but also the impact this particular census will have on the American communities. Dr. Prewitt utilizes his social science training to provide expertise in

grappling with the many complex and often difficult issues at the Census Bureau.

During the last several months, Dr. Prewitt has traveled throughout the country speaking to communities about the bureau's *How America Knows What America Needs* program, which is designed to help motivate the communities to participate in the Census 2000 and renew America's sense of civil engagement.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Prewitt.

(Applause.)

DR. PREWITT:

DR. PREWITT: Thank you very much, Chief.

This is a really remarkable opportunity -- the hospitality and the opening up of the facilities. I do want to, of course, bring to all of our attention that this is a serious functioning fire department, and you can't predict emergencies. So if the bell rings, they're out of here; we will understand that, and we'll wish you well. We'll know that you'll go to the right destinations, in part because you're drawing upon TIGER maps from the Census Bureau and census data to know where you need to go, and what kind of services you need to provide.

Let me just quickly introduce Sue Hardy, who is our regional director based in Charlotte, but is responsible for the census in this part of the country, also Tina Hone, who is a neighbor of the Fire Department 18, but is also with the Commerce Department and has responsibilities there for the census, and the delegate from Virginia, Mr. Hall. Thank you very much for joining us.

And then I do want to introduce for a few comments Carol Burley Brown, who is the United States fire administrator. She has served as an advocate for the kinds of activities that we see witnessed here today -- to use our emergency services and our fire departments around the country to reduce the loss of life and property due to fire. And she does understand, of course, the importance of the census. She will speak to that herself. It's a great pleasure that she's going to join us out here today and kick off this event.

(Applause.)

MS. BROWN: Good morning. It gives me great pleasure to join Fire Chief Ed Stinnet, Dr. Ken Prewitt, Battalion Chief Dewey, all of the platform guests and especially the men and women of Fire Station 18. Really this is a perfect place to showcase America's heroes. Every day in this county, these men and women respond to almost 80,000 fire events, fire and rescue events in this county -- all sorts of emergencies. They are the 911 responders. To me, they are our heroes. As we search around America for heroes, some of us look to professional basketball and football teams, but you don't have to look any farther than stations such as 18, the Jefferson Station. These are men and women who put their lives on the line daily to protect this county, but also they are representative of the 1.2 million men and women -- career, volunteer and combined departments that put their lives on the line to protect Americans.

But there is something very special, as well, about this fire department in Fairfax County. Along with protecting and responding to almost 80,000 fire and rescue events, they are also called upon nationally and internationally to respond to events because of their specialized expertise. In fact, I understand that they're getting ready to go back to the fifth year anniversary of one of our worst tragedies in this country, the Oklahoma City event. These men and women from Station 18 responded to that event. So, it shows you the wide spectrum of events and disasters and emergencies that they have to and are called upon to respond to.

The census is very important for these heroes, because based on our counting, county executives and officials can make determinations as to how, where and what they will utilize, and how much funding for fire stations, for how many firefighters they need, but it also helps in planning locally. If a fire station knows how many folks are in an area, what their ages are, whether they're young, whether they're older citizens, that helps them to better respond to those events. But you can also kick it up to another level. The Federal Emergency Management Agency and other federal agencies that are called upon to respond and support local jurisdictions such as Fairfax County can also better respond to events and support the efforts of state and local governments in responding to fires, earthquakes and other sorts of emergencies.

But now, getting back to the Oklahoma City event: On behalf of President Clinton and Vice President Gore, Chief Stinnet, I want to thank you and your department for what you did in response to a very tragic event, which vividly emphasized the risk that you have to take, and all of the myriad disasters and events that our emergency fire and rescue personnel have to face. I know that they have been to Taiwan; they have been to Greece; they have been to Turkey. They have been around the world. They have been called because of their unique expertise as well. But it's made very clear on a daily basis that their primary responsibility is with their location here in Fairfax County. The almost 80,000 calls that they have to respond to, that's their primary mission. But to do a better job of it, they need a better count of the residents of the households that they have to respond to.

Now, let me take it to a national perspective. As the nation's top fire official, I want to talk from that perspective. While fire deaths have been declining, in this country we have the largest

[number of] fire death[s] in the industrialized world. In other words, 4,000 people die every year as a result of fires. And if you look at that, if you really look at that, you're talking about populations of the very young, the very old. You're talking about rural America; you're talking about urban America. You're talking about ethnic minorities, such as African Americans, and Latinos. The very populations that are undercounted -- those that are hardest hit. So it has a very direct correlation to the fire service in this country, in Fairfax County, providing efficient and effective services to the households that live here. It is an honor for me to be here with America's heroes: the fire and rescue service. I urge every household in Fairfax County and throughout the nation to support our heroes by filling out the census forms.

Thank you very, very much.

(Applause.)

DR. PREWITT: Thank you very, very much, Carol.

And if I can now bring to the podium Battalion Chief Dewey Parks, who is the battalion chief for the fire and rescue. I thought you introduced yourself earlier and you called yourself the program manager. I want to make sure I get it right, the program manager. He's a 28-year-old veteran of the department. As has just been mentioned, he and his team have served in some of our toughest spots: Oklahoma City, and also, I believe, served in Nairobi, the bombing there of the embassy and the Olympic Games in Atlanta. This is one of the places in the United States where, when there is an emergency, they go out and start working on it. Their task is to try to save as many lives as possible. They're pulling live people out of damaged buildings, bombed buildings. They really are our heroes. They are courageous people. I was just told before we started that 400 of them are volunteers, and it's really just a remarkable thing the kind of service they do for this country. As has already been said, and I will say it again, we owe them something. The least we can give them is good information so they can do their job right.

So, if you would, Mr. Parks, join us.

(Applause.)

CHIEF PARKS: You're about to see why we're better at rescue than we are at public speaking. Throughout the course of our nation's history, Americans have always known that in times of need we can count on each other. As a representative of the public safety community of Fairfax County, we stand ready to respond to any emergency that might arise. And, in essence, that's what our task force is all about.

But in a larger sense, we also stand ready to travel anywhere in our great country with three simple goals: to try to save lives, lend a hand and make a difference in someone's life.

Resources save lives, and in our business, time is always our enemy. We know that if we can reach our citizens that happen to have succumbed to cardiac arrest, that if we can get there within four to six minutes, we've got a great chance of resuscitating them and returning them to their families. That's about the same amount of time that it takes to be counted in this year's census.

We're more than used to being counted on in pressure situations. But now we need your help. Often we are referred to as heroes, but our fellow Americans are really the true heroes. Our citizens have always been there when it counts. All we're simply requesting is that everyone take the time to again make a difference in the way we and all of America can do business. It's now your turn to lend a hand, and make a difference and be counted on as an American.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

DR. PREWITT: Well, I think you can be a public speaker if you change careers.

Let me just say a few more words then. I would like to first make sure that we all do recognize all of the members of Fire Department 18 up here. I'm tempted to ask them -- in fact, I'll take a chance and find out from them how many of them have completed their form. And might I say, how does that compare with the audience? Not bad that we still have a response rate in the audience; we don't have a response rate among our heroes. And so we've simply got to take our cue from this kind of commitment to American society that you witness here today.

Just pause for a moment and make sure that we get some of the facts down about the census and the long form, the kinds of data that are collected and how they are used. Obviously, a place like the Fire Department 18 here in Fairfax County is fundamentally a local operation. It gets most of its resources from the local community. Station 18 is a special one, of course, because it does do international and national work as well, and when it does that it obviously draws from federal resources. But fundamentally it is a local initiative, as is true of our fire departments across the country.

And so, you ask yourself, why do they need the national attention that this census is trying to bring to this cause. I just want to emphasize once again the role of data, the role of information in

trying to make certain that these kind of services function effectively.

When Hurricane Andrew hit south Florida, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Red Cross, and other emergency personnel had already in their possession, in their files, in their systems, the Census Bureau TIGER line digital map files. And they married those maps with the address ranges and demographic data in order to know where to put the emergency teams, where to locate shelters, where to distribute foods and medicines and how to rapidly evacuate. The maps enabled them to find where obliterated streets once ran, and how many housing units were on them. That story is repeated time and time and time again. This is real technical information, technical maps, well drawn, spotting the houses, spotting the communities, telling us where people have phones and don't have phones, what their age structure is, are they elderly.

And if you want to really save lives, you want that piece of information. People ask me, for example, why in the world on the census form do you ask how old is this structure? Well, you know, the fire department wants to know how old that structure is. It tells them something about the risks that they may take when they go into that burning building. Buildings built in 1920 are differently constructed than buildings built in 1960. So the structure of the housing units in a neighborhood tell them something that they need to know when they're doing their task.

So, across the census form there are dozens of items that, put together, give you a picture of a community, that allow you to do the kind of tasks that you want to do. I just simply have to repeat that you take a simple little question: "Why in the world," I'm asked, "do you want to ask if people have telephones? In this day and age, doesn't everyone have a telephone?" Well, no, everyone doesn't have a telephone. And if you're planning a 911 service, you want to know what the telephone density is in a community, in rural areas.

You use that 911 information, then, in combination with other census information to decide how to dispatch emergency services, where the ambulance routes need to be, what the estimated driving time is. These are sophisticated operations and they rest upon intelligent data.

You know, I'm tempted to say that if you go back to the beginning of the 18th century, and you begin to ask yourself, well, how in the world did this country build its strong economy, its industrial economy? We built an industrial economy with a certain kind of infrastructure. That infrastructure includes railroads, canals and ports. The country has turned a corner. It's now building a knowledge economy. And what is the infrastructure for a knowledge economy? Information is the infrastructure for a knowledge economy. And the information that this country needs, this economy needs, including emergency services, but way beyond emergency services, the information that this country needs comes from the basic decennial census data. It's the platform on which all kinds of other information is generated.

So, if we're going to have a kind of an economy that we can call the knowledge economy, we're going to have to have a new kind of infrastructure, and that is going to be very information dense. And in the absence of good information from the decennial census, this country cripples itself economically. It cripples itself in many, many ways. I really urge the American people to understand that when they fill out that census form, they are actually making a contribution to the economic well-being of their country -- to the educational well-being of their country, and also, of course, to emergency services.

The main purpose of the census, as we know, is to redistribute houses, seats in the House of Representatives. That's what it was put in the Constitution for. But I remind us that what the Constitution says is that the Census Bureau shall conduct the census as by law Congress shall declare. And since 1790, the United States Congress has been asking the Census Bureau to ask other kinds of questions beyond the elementary head count.

In 1820, we did a census of manufacturing. Actually, it wasn't a very good census, and it wasn't very good data, but we keep improving it. They wanted us to keep working on it, and we kept working on it, and by the 1860s and '70s, we had a good census of manufacturing. It took some time to get it right. That's just one example of how the country, over the last 200 years, has constantly put the task to the Census Bureau to give us better and better information about our society and about our economy. And so when we ask questions today in 2000, we are building upon a tradition that goes all the way back to the early 1800s.

So, right from the beginning, the task, yes, was reapportionment, and, yes, was a head count. But it was always also: Could you govern the country more intelligently? Could the business community, the commercial sector of the country use these data in order to make a stronger economy?

Let's give you one other example. People say to me, "Why in the world do you ask about veteran status?" Well, we put that question on the census form in 1840 because the veterans, just like the fire department, have made a sacrifice for our country. Now we have veterans who fought in World War II, who fought in the Korean War who are now 70 or 80 years old, who are elderly, who perhaps live alone, who perhaps can't bathe themselves, that is, who perhaps have disabilities. We want to put a veterans hospital and nursing care where they are, and how do we know where they are if we don't have information on veteran status, on age, on living alone, and on disability? So that's why the questions are there: to make sure that this country can pay back the people who have sacrificed to build this country and to defend this country.

There are many, many examples of this. We use today as a marvelous symbolic moment about how Census information, this simple task, 10-minute task, long form 40-45 minute task, across

the households of America can actually make this a stronger country. Census data, Census Day is now only two days away. April 1st, Census Day, is when we want the forms back. As many of you know, about 50 percent of the American households have now returned their form -- not quite, but close to 50 percent. We hope to be at 50 percent by April 1st. We have a long way to go to make this a successful census.

The heroes up here have said time and again, every one of them, one way or the other, that they cannot do their job unless the American people play their role, unless they step up and perform as heroes to do this elementary task. This information is going to sustain our country and our economy for a decade. If it is deeply flawed, if it's incomplete, if we have a bad response rate, the country will suffer accordingly. So that's what we want to say this morning.

We want to say, again, "Thank you," to the chief, and his team for hosting this event, for allowing us to come into their services, for the opportunity to hear about their work and to celebrate with them this marvelous civic moment, which is what a census should be. It's a moment where this kind of commitment that you see up on the platform is made across this country. So I say again as I've said before, it is a civic moment, it is a civic responsibility to mail in the census form as soon as possible, so we can provide the kind of information that the country needs for the kinds of tasks it has in front of it.

So with that we'll open up to your questions.

MR. ROCHELLE: The conservative members of Congress are telling the public not to answer questions, they don't have to answer the questions, and in fact --

DR. PREWITT: Can you identify yourself?

MR. ROCHELLE: It's Carl Rochelle with CNN, and I'll repeat the question for you. Some conservative members of Congress are saying that it's not necessary to answer the questions on the test, on the census form. They're actually going to the extent of telling them they don't need to answer the questions and they shouldn't. What's your response to that?

DR. PREWITT: My response is actually fairly simple. I think that when the members of Congress pause and take a look at the long form, at the questions, at the law of the land, and they understand how the information is being used, my guess is that they will realize that it actually is needed, this information. There is no question on the long form which has not been put there, because it's either in the law, or it's required by a law. That is, the law cannot be executed in the absence of this information. My hope is, of course, that across the country, as indeed millions and millions and millions of people are now doing, that people will recognize how this

information is both legally important, but it's also socially and economically important. So I'm only hopeful that our leadership will stand up and urge the American people to complete this census form.

MR. ROCHELLE: One would believe that the members of Congress have read the census form and know what is on it. Are they counseling their constituents, the citizens of this country, to break the law by not filling it out?

DR. PREWITT: It is a law to complete the census form. It's a law the U.S. Congress passed, not the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau is not an enforcement agency, it is a statistical agency, and we simply leave it to others to both write the laws and to administer the laws. Our job is to simply count as best we can. So I will have to leave your question about whether they're actually counseling the breaking of a law to members of the enforcement agencies, not members of a statistical agency.

MR. POWELL: I'm Stuart Powell with the Hearst Newspapers. I just wanted to ask whether you detected any evidence that this effort by members of Congress, and I guess this is an issue on talk shows, whether this has depressed the response rate that you had hoped to see.

DR. PREWITT: It's an important question to which I don't yet have an answer. We will obviously be looking into it very closely, because my concern, quite honestly, is that though I've heard no member of Congress urge someone not to send in a form, they only said you may choose the way in which you wish to answer the questions, but you may not not send in your form. So no member of Congress to my knowledge is suggesting not sending in the form. Certain talk show hosts have made that as part of their message. I would only say that the American public, of course, is attentive to the census up to a certain level. They have other things on their mind than the census. And I'm concerned that the message is not completely understood -- that it might get translated as, "Oh well, this information isn't very important after all," and that would concern me a lot. We do not today have any evidence that response rate has been affected by this widespread accusation, if you would, that the long form is intrusive, and none of government's business.

It's very hard to do that as the forms are flowing in by the millions, of course. I was in our national processing center in Jeffersonville, Indiana, just yesterday, and we were looking very hard to see if we could detect anything in the pattern of the long and the short form. But it's such a mammoth operation, it's extremely difficult at this stage to know. We will be working on that very quickly, because we really feel a constitutional obligation to count everyone in this country. And if we think that any set of activities is going to keep us from doing that, then we will do whatever we can do by way of corrective action.

MR. GUZMAN: Armando Guzman with Univision. How do you react to the fact that in spite of your campaign, many people are still not sending those forms. I remember you told us some time ago that you wanted to have at least 62 percent of responses by Census Day. Why do you think that is?

DR. PREWITT: Let me just get the numbers back in your mind again. In 1995, 65 percent mailed it back in, and then we went out and knocked on the doors of everyone else, and ended up counting about 98.5 percent of the population. Our own budgeted goal, not goal, but our budgeted number for 2000 is 61 percent. It's not what we wanted, but that's what we feared we might get. Therefore, we have to budget and staff at a certain level, and 61 percent is that. We did not necessarily say we had to have 61 percent by April 1st. We go out into the field in later April to start knocking on the doors. We close down the mail-back part of the census on April 11-12. Then we get prepared, gather our materials and go out to knock on the doors. So we're still a long way from knowing whether we're going to get to 61 percent or even 65 percent.

As you know, we've challenged the country to improve its mail-back response rate by 5 percent over 1990. That would take us to 70 percent across the country. We have a long way to go to get to that 70 percent. But I'm not saying here, today, that we won't get any given number. I just cannot predict what the American people are going to do. Census Day itself, Saturday, is a big day for us. We hope there is what we would call kind of an "April 1st effect"-- that a lot of people are still holding their forms and will be mailing it back in. At the end of the day not everybody will. So I'm simply not prepared yet. I will sort of be a week from now, but I'm not prepared yet to say that we will not get either 61 or 65 or 70 percent.

The reason that people don't mail them back in, you know as well as I do, that there is in this country a declining level of civic responsibility, of civic commitment, of civic obligation, not, for example, witnessed up here on this platform, but somehow in the broader country. What we hope is by having the heroes, and I want to use that again, and I mean that in a very kind of direct way, men and women who go in and save lives, and risk their lives to do it, have got to be called heroes, because that's what they are, and the fact that they will do this, and somehow the rest of the American population sits there and won't do a 10, or a 30 minute, or a 40 minute task can only concern us. And we've got to do something in this country about reversing that decline of civic responsibility.

MS. MARTRELL: Jane Martrell with NBC News. I went to a lot of your briefings prior to the release of the form, and you planned for everything. But, what was your reaction when you first heard the rumblings that people were being told they don't have to fill out questions they feel uncomfortable about?

DR. PREWITT: Well, it's extremely difficult for a census to plan for everything. We can plan for everything operationally, but you cannot easily plan for things that happen sort of out of your

system. And this is not the first time that there have been expressed concerns about the long-form questions and the intrusiveness. We worked very, very hard to reduce the long form, the number of questions. We worked with Congress to do that; this long form and this short form are the shortest ever, well not ever, ever. The very first census was a little shorter than this one, but not much shorter than today's short form. On the long form, which began in 1940, we reduced it in 2000. It is, in fact, the shortest long form in history. And we moved questions from the short form to the long form, so that most of the American public would get the least amount of burden possible. Every question on the short form is there because we need geographically refined data, particularly to administer the Civil Rights Acts and the Voting Rights Act of the 1964-65 period.

So we did what we could do to operationally reduce this burden. And to answer your question more directly, it's very difficult to plan for things that come from outside the system that are a threat to a quality census. It's just very, very difficult. We have tried to explain the long form, the need for these data, time and again in different forums, we have certainly tried to explain to the members of the U.S. Congress. Every one of the questions, of course, went to the U.S. Congress three years ago, and then again two years ago. Three years ago, we submitted to the Congress: "These are the topics that as best we understand the law of the land we have to ask. Do you agree with us?" And the answer is yes, or no. If no, fine. If it's yes, and it was yes for the most part, then a year later, that is two years ago today, we submitted to Congress the way we were going to ask the questions. "Do you have any trouble with the way in which we're asking them?" Two years ago that went to all 535 members of the United States Congress, and we got a few comments back, took those into account and tried to make modifications.

As some of you know, the Senate of the United States, a couple of months ago passed a sense of the Senate resolution saying, 94-0, as I recall that vote, that they were very upset that we had taken a question off of the short form and put it on the long form -- that is the question of marital status. So Congress is sending us more than one signal with respect to what kinds of questions they want us to be asking. We are only asking questions that are there, because there is a piece of legislation, there is a law, it's either mandated in the law or the law cannot be administered in the absence of this information.

MS. : Did the Census Bureau receive any letter or phone calls from these conservative Republicans who find the questionnaire intrusive? Has there been any contact?

DR. PREWITT: No, we've not received any official word. I did talk to the majority leader myself a couple of days ago. And he expressed some of these concerns to me, and I expressed my own concern that we very much needed this information in order to carry out the law of the land. But, no, we don't have any official piece of paper from any member of Congress giving us any contrary instructions to what we already have.

MR. MEYERS: Meyers of the Tulsa World. Could you respond to the talk that some members of Congress would like to suspend or repeal the $100 fine for not filling out the census form, since you have not prosecuted anyone in the country. Could you respond to that?

DR. PREWITT: Right. Again, I say that the Census Bureau itself is, of course, not an enforcement agency. It wouldn't prosecute. The Department of Justice would have to do the prosecution, and we don't recommend that. As most of you know, not since 1960 has there been any attempt to prosecute someone who did not complete the census form. And I again have to turn it over to the enforcement agency to decide whether they consider any of the current behavior to merit that kind of attention. The magnitude of the fine, I suspect, is not what's at stake here. There are American people, by the way, who actually do send in the form because they do recognize it's mandatory.

Indeed, the census did a lot of studies on that. The census envelope used to say back in the 1950, '40, '60 period that this was mandated by law. I think starting in 1970 we took that off of the census envelope, and we have studies that suggest that's one of the reasons that mail-back response rate began to decline. So we put it back on 2000, in order to remind the American people that this is a legal obligation, and we're hopeful that will have some affect upon some people. Certainly, some of my private communication, that is e-mail and letters that I get from around the country, do refer to the fact that they do recognize, even though this is a nuisance, they do recognize that this is a legal obligation, as well as a civic obligation, and that does motivate behavior.

MR. : [Inaudible.]

DR. PREWITT: I must say I'm quite indifferent to the magnitude of the fine. I'm not even sure that the number that's being quoted, by the way, the $100 number is correct. There were some changes in the census law some years ago, and some people suggest the way in which it was changed implied that the fines were actually higher than they currently are. So I, myself, am indifferent as to the magnitude of the fine that would be imposed.

MS. FESSLER: Pam Fessler from NPR. I just want to go back to something you said before. You said that you were going to be looking at this really closely over the next few days, and if you see something happening you were going to take corrective action. I'm curious what kind of corrective action you could take. And my second question is, when you were in Jeffersonville, did you get any indication of a lot of people sending back forms in which they did only answer a few of the questions, and leaving the rest blank?

DR. PREWITT: What we're primarily doing now in our data capture centers is we are simply recording the fact that the envelope is there. We are opening them up, we are making sure that

they are completed. The number of things that come into the census during the census that even have nothing to do with the census, but are sometimes -- look, the American citizens, many, many, many, many of them want to do this right, and they are struggling to do it right. One of the things they've done -- I looked at dozens and dozens of envelopes of this sort the other day in Jeffersonville, they're only one person, so they fill in the single person and then they tear the rest of the form and throw it away, and only mail that single page back, which actually is for us a problem, because it's a bar-code problem. But there are people doing it.

There are people putting stamps on it. We have many, many envelopes that come in with $3 in it, and we're trying to figure out why. Well, if you look at the envelope, the top of the envelope, it says there's a $300 fine for misuse of this envelope for other reasons, it's a post office fine, not a Census Bureau fine. We can only imagine people see that $300 and read it as $3 and think that somehow they're supposed to send in $3; we don't know. We had one envelope which had seven $100 bills in it, and we concluded that must have been a serious mistake. We went to a lot of trouble to track that person down, and have now sent them a check for their money. So a lot of things are coming in.

Sorry, Pam, that's a long answer. All we're doing at this stage is making sure that it is a legitimate form. We're data scanning it, but we're not looking at the results of the data scan. Here's what we're going to do; in fact, I'm going to work on this later today. We're going to try to take a look at the long-form data and see if you're getting a drop-off in the 100 percent questions. That is, the long-form questionnaire also has the six key questions, the six-seven key questions, and if there's a lower rate of completing those, than in the short form, short form questions, that will be a very strong indicator to us that we have a serious drop-off in terms of data quality.

In terms of taking corrective action, I think all we can do is more of what we're doing today. All we can do is, we will accelerate our campaign as best we can. You may say, "But it's too late." Well, it's not too late in the following sense: We do have non-response follow-up, and if questionnaires that come in that are very incomplete -- if a long-form question has not been completed, we will then make an effort to put that in the non-response follow-up pile. That, by the way, is going to drive up the cost of the census, because we're going to have a heavier non-response follow-up burden than we expected to have. But we will go back out in the field and try again, try to explain to people, try to convince them of the importance of this information. We will not stop. We will work this task until we have done the best we can, with the conditions under which we are operating.

[TAPE CHANGE.]

MR. : --variation on a question you've already been asked very early in your news conference. To what extent are you concerned that headlines that say, question, Census Bureau's too nosy, conservative talk show talk, and the public comments by public officials will add to what you've

described as this declining level of civic responsibility and that people are just going to trash the forms?

DR. PREWITT: Well, I have a personal concern of that sort. That is, I think the more that the census is described as an inappropriate activity, the more the American people are going to come to believe that it's an inappropriate activity, even though it's not an inappropriate activity. But, yes, I have to worry, obviously, about a characterization of the census as something which is either not needed or is inappropriate or is intrusive or could somehow be turned against you. Then, I have to worry about the fact that the American people will say, "Why should we do this?"

Now, it won't be all of them, because we are getting, after all, millions of forms. The American people have engaged this. We are, as I say, close to a 50-percent response rate. We do have, after the mail-back period, we have a major task ahead of us. We have to go out and try to convince people who did not take the time to do it, to go ahead and do it. And we will have to be on the streets with a half-million employees trying to make that task happen. We will know when we're knocking on the doors, as a matter of fact, if a lot of people answer the door and say, look, I understand that this information is not needed, it's not useful, it's intrusive. If the vocabulary that they feed back to us is the vocabulary that they've gotten from talk shows or other sources, then that will be for us a very important indicator, but at this stage it's hard to make that judgment.

I do think I want to stress that I think there's going to be, I hope, a serious bipartisan commitment to the long form. Indeed, many of you know that the Congressional Monitoring Board has not always been able to agree on the congressional and the presidential side about the census. But I just received a letter from Mr. Blackwell, the congressional co-chair, and Mr. Ehrlich, a presidential member, stressing their commitment to the long form, saying that every question is mandated by legislation in a federal court ruling, that the data are essential to providing government services and, if the American people don't complete this, that there will be unmet community needs. And it's very encouraging to have the Congressional Monitoring Board stand up and make this kind of bipartisan commitment to the importance of the long-form data.

MR. JAMES: Frank James with the Chicago Tribune. I just wanted to get you to clarify something. Earlier you said that it's up to the Justice Department to decide whether or not to enforce the law here. If they were to come to you with a request for a recommendation, what would you recommend at this point?

DR. PREWITT: As I say, I'm not an enforcement officer, I'm only a statistician. Quite honestly, I don't want to do anything. I don't want to do anything that will make this a less successful census. And, if in my judgment, prosecution could create a different kind of hero - that's the kind of hero that Eddie Rickenbacher tried to be in 1960 by refusing to fill out his form - then I would be very reluctant, because at this stage what we most care about is trying to get to the American

people, make them understand that this is important. So I actually don't have a good answer to that question, because I would have to weigh, at that stage, what the implications are for the response of the American people.

We're talking about millions and millions and millions of people who, over this weekend, will be sitting at their kitchen tables, at their desks, with their families saying, am I going to take the trouble to do this or not. And if the answer to that is "No," the country will suffer, communities will suffer, we will have a less effective database on which to govern this country and build our economy. That's the only thing I care about. The only thing I care about is giving this country the kind of information that the decennial census provides at the very best level, and most accurate level we can do. So that's the only criteria that I - my head would be full of -- that issue, not judicial issues or enforcement issues and so forth. And that's the way we would have to weigh it.

Thank you very much.

[END OF EVENT.]

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