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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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February 20, 2014

The Honorable John Thompson
Director
U.S. Census Bureau
4600 Silver Hill Road
Washington, DC 20233

Dear Director Thompson,

The decennial census plays a critical role in determining our nation's path forward. Each census provides both the government and the public with important underlying data that determines how a wide variety of federal, state and local programs administer funds. As such, completing a cost-effective and accurate census is critical to ensure government programs are managed fairly and efficiently. We are writing to request guidance from you on the Census Bureau's plans to develop partnerships with private industry to assist the Bureau in building its address and mapping databases for the 2020 decennial census.

We read with great interest the Census report on its market research project on mapping. The report indicates that private sector mapping data meets the Bureau's need for high-quality, positionally accurate spatial data. The report found that a corporate stakeholder's quality assurance and quality control efforts can exceed those of the Census Bureau and that both databases were highly compatible. The findings of this report indicate that a greater partnership with private industry on mapping initiatives may be of use to the Bureau as it undertakes the task of updating its maps and address databases for the next decennial census.

During your confirmation hearing on July 9, 2013, you responded to a question from Ranking Member Coburn that you were interested in working more closely with private industry. In a response to a Question for the Record for Sen. Heitkamp from that hearing you stated, "If I am confirmed, I plan to examine the current status of the Census Bureau relationships with the private sector, and to ensure that the 2020 geographic products will build on this resource and not duplicate existing resources." We applaud that assessment.

As the Census Bureau continues the critical planning phase for the 2020 Census, we are interested to find out from you whether, through the research the Bureau has done, it believes that working with the private sector in updating its map and address databases will improve accuracy while controlling costs of the overall mapping operation. Specifically:

- To what extent can using private-sector information such as maps, address lists, and geographic databases help support the Bureau in planning for and executing the 2020 Census?
- What, if any, cost savings would the Bureau benefit from in using private sector geographic, address, and spatial data?
- If the Bureau were to use private sector data in this area, what additional fact checking would the Bureau need to undertake to ensure that the data is correct?
- What technological challenges could arise in the greater use of private sector data?
- What operations would the Bureau no longer need to perform if it purchased mapping data from the private sector?
- What internal actions has the Bureau taken since the completion of the market research reports to determine the best way to partner with the private sector on mapping needs?
- Can the Bureau quantify possible expected savings to taxpayers that could be achieved by leveraging off-the-shelf commercial mapping products?

The 2010 decennial census cost approximately \$13 billion, and some estimates predict the 2020 decennial could cost twice as much. In a time when technology and private sector resources are rapidly becoming more available, it would be a gross violation of good conscience for the Bureau to not seek every possible avenue to reduce the cost of the 2020 census.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, please contact Eric Bursch with Senator Heitkamp at (202) 224-2043, James Gelfand with Ranking Member Coburn at (202) 224-4751, Kristine Lam with Chairman Carper at (202) 224-8539, or Myles Matteson with Senator Ayotte at (202) 224-1149. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Senator Thomas R. Carper
Chairman



Senator Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
Ranking Member



Senator Heidi Heitkamp



Senator Kelly Ayotte