

Subcommittee on Executive Reorganization of the
Senate Committee on Government Operations

Afternoon session - November 29, 1966.

Witness: Richard M. Scammon, Vice-President, Governmental Affairs
Institute, Washington.

Mr. Scammon testified on the need for a mid-decade Census, or an intercensal urban Census. He said that although the 1960 Census is out-of-date, obviously the 1970 census count won't be available for five years.

A big factor in the obsolescence of data is the increased mobility of the population. According to Mr. Scammon, there is a great need for area data rather than figures from a city as a whole. In the questioning by Senator Ribicoff this point was elaborated upon and it was stated that if information had been available concerning the situation in the Watts area of Los Angeles, the riots could have been avoided. Senator Ribicoff said that when a census was taken of Los Angeles the bad figures from such areas as Watts were offset by the figures from more affluent areas.

Senator Ribicoff pointed out that Mr. Cohen from the Department of HEW had used figures which dated back to 1961 when he testified before the committee and that government agencies cannot cure social ills without up-to-date statistics which point definitively to the location of those ills.

Senator Ribicoff and Mr. Scammon both agreed that a mid-decade census is necessary. Senator Ribicoff mentioned that the Office of Economic Opportunity is planning to take a special census in 1968 in standard metropolitan areas to compile pertinent data on such statistics as the median family income.

Mr. Scammon laid the blame for the fact that a census is taken only every ten years on the Budget Bureau. He said that the costs involved are so tremendous that the Budget Bureau would not agree to a more frequent census.

Method of taking the census

Senator Ribicoff asked whether or not the method of taking the census is important. He pointed out that a census was conducted in Watts where questionnaires were mailed to the residents. He questioned whether or not people at these levels would be interested enough to return the completed forms.

Lack of data on adult male Negroes

Senator Ribicoff also pointed out that in the last census between 15% and 20% of adult male Negroes were missed entirely. Mr. Scammon replied that there was a slippage in less affluent areas of cities, but he did not know whether Senator Ribicoff's percentages were entirely correct.

Advantages of a five-year census

Senator Ribicoff said that almost all grant programs are based on the number of people and their needs. He claimed that we must weigh the advantages of a five-year survey in relation to these programs. He said that a five-year census would be better for decision making by such administrators as the Secretary of HUD.

Central location for statistics.

Senator Ribicoff also asked whether there should be a central place for the gathering and keeping of statistics, rather than allowing each Department to have operations of its own. Mr. Scammon said that a task force headed by Congressman Gallagher recommended setting up a central bank for statistics, but that a big concern of the Task Force was the right of privacy of individuals in responding to questionnaires. Senator Ribicoff contended that where the information was merged, the problem of confidentiality was lost.

Problems

Senator Ribicoff said that the problem of taking an urban census has been to get people to do the work. It was also pointed out that in problem or foreign areas of a city, the census takers must be familiar with the area in order to gain the confidence of the people who are interviewed.

Spending in cities

Senator Kennedy asked through the Chairman whether it is possible to determine how much the government is spending in each city to rebuild. He wants to know how we can get better figures. Mr. Scammon said that this information should be available from the Census Bureau or through the Subcommittee.

Senators present:

Ribicoff
Javits