

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4804

COMMITTEES
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

January 17, 2018

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

I am writing to express my concerns about the preparations that the Department of Commerce (the Department) and the Census Bureau (the Bureau) are taking in advance of the 2020 Decennial Census for populations in remote rural and hard-to-count areas based on reports in a December 9, 2017 *New York Times* article entitled *With 2020 Census Looming, Worries About Fairness and Accuracy*¹. I am worried that based on this article and other news reports that rural and geographically challenged areas, such as West Virginia and the Appalachian region, will not be appropriately and accurately enumerated.

According to the *New York Times* article, due to budget cuts, the Department cancelled testing in Bluefield, West Virginia that would have better informed how to develop accurate population counts in hard-to-count and remote rural areas. The article also goes on to state that the Bureau plans to use information from the United States Postal Service, satellite imagery and online surveys to make up for the labor-intensive work of going from door-to-door to gather data and ensure the Bureau is using an accurate list of addresses for the 2020 Census. I was alarmed to learn that only 30% of the country would be visited by enumerators in order to gather this information and it is unclear which areas are included in this 30% or the threshold that was used to come to this percentage.

I also understand that the Census is largely intended to be completed online and only certain areas will receive paper questionnaires during the first round of the Census data collection. Given the remoteness of my state's rural population, the lack of broadband access across the state, and the prevailing concern by some of my constituents that the government is asking intrusive questions, I am apprehensive about these alternate more hands-off methodologies and their ability to work for my constituents. Moreover, the Department and the Bureau's emphasis and reliance on the internet for collecting most of their Census data is troubling and seems to ignore the Digital Divide in this country. Nearly 30 percent of West Virginians are without access to broadband which means over 500,000 West Virginians would be at risk for not being counted accurately in the Census.

While I recognize that relying on technology and the internet is a more cost effective way to gather as much information as possible, I fear that in an attempt to save money, the Bureau may

¹<https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/12/09/us/census-2020-redistricting.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

miss out counting segments of the population by not deploying more trusted local enumerators to areas to collect data. I understand how vital of a role the Census plays in the United States and which is why I am requesting that the Bureau reconsider its proposed approach to collecting the data in order to make the 2020 Decennial Census a meaningful one for the entire country, including West Virginia. I also request your response to the following questions:

- Which areas are included in the 30% of the country that will be visited by enumerators to determine accurate addresses and how are these areas chosen?
- With the Administration's recent request for additional funds, does the Department intend to reinstate rural testing in West Virginia before the 2020 Census?
- What assurances can you provide that the counts in West Virginia will be accurate?

I share your desire for a cost-effective Census but I believe it is imperative that we ensure all populations, especially remote rural ones, are accurately counted. I look forward to your response to my questions and stand ready to assist you and the Department in order to make sure rural America is fully included in the 2020 Decennial Census.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

Joe Manchin III
United States Senator