The start of the new year brings the 2020 decennial census just one year away. The count is scheduled to begin on January 21st of 2020 in Toksook Bay, a Yupik Native village on the Bering Sea in western Alaska.

All the major tests leading up to next year's headcount of the US population are over and done. The last one was a dress rehearsal that recently concluded in Providence County, Rhode Island. Final results from that test have yet to be released, but Census Bureau officials consider it to have been a success. However, one private nonprofit agency that tracked the process closely has expressed doubts, based largely on the prospect that including a question on citizenship on the 2020 form will substantially reduce the count.

Several of the field tests planned for the run-up to 2020 were cancelled due to lack of funding. Two were part of the dress rehearsal, one on the West Coast and another in a rural area of West Virginia.

Two field tests that were to have been conducted in 2017 on Indian reservations, one at Standing Rock and one at Colville, were also cancelled, leaving the 2020 Census the first to be conducted in three decades without a field test on tribal land.

The schedule may suffer further because of the current partial shutdown of many federal agencies, including the Census Bureau.

These are the highlights of the schedule as it stood as of the last major Bureau review of the status of preparations for 2020 that occurred this past October.

- On January 7th, two days ago, the Bureau was to open and staff 40 Area Census Offices. These are the local Bureau offices in charge of the on-the-ground canvassing. The remainder of the planned total of 248 Area Census Offices are scheduled to open in the June to September time frame. The total number represents a significant reduction from the 2010 Census, with the automation of much enumerator activity expected to require fewer offices and save money.

- This August in-field address canvassing is slated to begin, an operation intended to make a final check of the Bureau's address list, critical to insuring that every occupied housing unit receives the 2020 questionnaire. This operation will involve hiring staff to walk the streets to pinpoint the
physical location of housing units whose location cannot be verified on the basis of an in-office review of maps and address lists.

- In November the advertising campaign intended to motivate every household to complete and return a Census questionnaire is to begin. The advertising campaign is part of an overall integrated communications program that also involves Bureau Partnership Specialists hired to work with tribal and other governments and with community groups, including Native-controlled off-reservation nonprofits, to encourage everyone to participate in the Census.

- Census Day itself is April 1st of 2020, although responses to the Census questionnaire can be submitted starting in mid-March. The "update leave" and "update enumerate" operations are also slated to begin in mid-March. The "update leave" operation involves a Bureau enumerator leaving a questionnaire at the door of housing units primarily in areas where people get their mail at P.O. boxes. In the "update enumerate" areas Bureau enumerators are to try to actually collect the questionnaire information on the spot, keying it into cell phones that automatically transmit it to Census computers in encrypted form.

- In April and May 2020 the Bureau is to conduct its Non-Response Follow-Up (NRFU) operation, calling or visiting the households that did not return their questionnaires either on line using a desktop, laptop or tablet computer or smart phone, by voice phone or by regular postal mail.

- The bulk of the temporary hiring for 2020 Census jobs will take place in the late winter or early spring of next year to fill jobs created in the address canvassing and Non-Response Follow-Up operations.

These are the main highlights of the schedule as it stood before the current federal government shutdown. Other operations, such as the enumeration of "group quarters," like nursing homes, college dormitories and prisons, are also part of the process.

**Indian Country Must Get Involved Now**

At this point, with the count just one year away, all tribes and Native organizations, including those serving Native people in off-reservation areas, must become fully engaged in promoting the 2020 Census to their own members/citizens or constituents. There are a number of ways to do this.
**The designation of a Census liaison is key.** This is a person selected to work with Census Bureau Partnership Specialists to collect all the relevant information on what happens and when. Many tribes have already designated their Tribal Liaisons. Training was scheduled to begin this month. The 2020 version of the Bureau's Tribal Liaison Handbook is expected to become available for that training. It is a major collection of ideas on how to get involved in promoting the 2020 headcount.

Amplifying the work of the tribe's or community's liaison is the "**Complete Count Committee.**" This is a group of respected community leaders providing the person-power to reach all segments of the community to encourage every household to complete and return the 2020 questionnaire. The Census Bureau has a set of suggestions for what these Committees can do in promoting the 2020 Census. It is available for download at: https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/2020-census/complete_count.html.

**Getting the message across at community events,** tribal festivals, urban Indian center gatherings, pow-wows, school happenings and on similar occasions is a major way of communicating the importance of the Census to tribal members who might not otherwise be aware of why getting a full count of the Native population is so crucial.

**New Census Bureau Director Takes Over**

Dr. Steven Dillingham has just taken over as the new Director of the Census Bureau. He was confirmed by the US Senate with relatively little controversy.

Dillingham previously served as the Director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics in the Justice Department and the Director of the Bureau of Transportation Statistics in the Transportation Department, both much smaller statistical agencies but sharing a focus on producing basic federal data for the use of those Departments, the public and the industries involved. Most recently he was the Director of the Office of Strategic Information, Research, and Planning for the Peace Corps.

He arrives at the Census Bureau during the partial shutdown of many federal departments and agencies. The Bureau has been able to continue its work on the 2020 decennial as a result of partial advance FY 2019 funding, but that money is likely to run out soon. Among the other Bureau operations that have been affected is the updating of the Bureau's Web site and various survey operations.

**Norm DeWeaver** norm_deweaver@rocketmail.com

January 9, 2019

Redistribution of this information is encouraged