

## Top 2 Census Officials Resign

Departures Could Delay Preparations for Count in 2010

By Elizabeth Williamson  
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Wednesday, November 15, 2006; A19

The two highest-ranking officials in the U.S. Census Bureau quit yesterday, putting management of the agency in flux as preparations for the next census enter a critical phase.

The departures of Census Bureau chief C. Louis Kincannon, a statistician appointed by President Bush to lead the agency in 2002, and Hermann Habermann, a career statistician who runs the census operation, could complicate a revision of the counting process in 2010 -- to produce a detailed picture of the U.S. population every year, rather than once a decade.

The census determines such key issues as congressional representation to highway expenditures, so it draws intense scrutiny from lawmakers.

"This will hurt the agency as it tries to roll out the planning process," said Columbia University professor Kenneth Prewitt, a former Census Bureau director. "The 2010 census is a very big operation that involves detailed planning spread over a number of years."

The open positions will likely take at least six months to fill, he said.

Kincannon officially cited family responsibilities for his departure. But in an interview he mentioned "different views perhaps about priorities" at the agency.

"My perception is that I don't have the same level of trust that I did a year or so ago," said Kincannon, who began his career at the agency in 1963. "The relationship has changed, and that relationship I regard as essential." There was no official reason given for Habermann's departure and no letter was released. Habermann could not be reached to comment.

Kincannon will stay on until his replacement is found and is confirmed by the Senate. Habermann will stay until early January. His successor will likely come from the bureau's career ranks, though a political appointment is possible.

In his resignation letter to Bush, Kincannon defends the Census Bureau's finding in 2003 that it used the best methods possible in counting Americans from communities -- including minorities, renters and immigrants -- that are the most difficult to tally and tend to vote Democratic. Because the census forms the basis for apportioning congressional districts, past efforts to adjust the numbers in undercounted areas ignited partisan battles that have raged on and off for decades.

Addressing the issue, Kincannon's resignation letter cites extensive scientific documentation, "should my successor have need of it."

One person with knowledge of the situation suggested that the two officials -- especially Habermann, a career employee -- were targeted by Republicans who would want to install an official who could better protect against Democratic congressional efforts to reinvigorate adjustment efforts -- a move some think could favor Democrats.

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"I think there persists among congressional Republicans a concern about that, but if they look at the facts they will see that's not a likely thing," Kincannon said.

One Hill staff member with knowledge of census operations said the resignations anticipated the release in coming weeks of a congressional report on lost laptop computers at the agency. The Census Bureau is part of the Commerce Department, which revealed several weeks ago that the Census Bureau has lost 672 laptop computers since 2001. One-third of the computers contained personal data, though no evidence has emerged that the information has been misused.

"I don't think the laptop situation was a determining factor" in the resignations, Kincannon said. "We've had some problems and we've taken steps to address that problem."

The Census Bureau has also repeatedly run into budget problems on the Hill.

Kincannon said the agency had \$50 million trimmed from its 2007 budget request of \$878 million. The budget is not final, but without the money, "We can wind up limited in our ability to achieve the automation required to carry out the census in 2010 at lower cost."

Neither Commerce nor the Census Bureau issued statements on the departures. While Kincannon's letter was released, neither agency would confirm that Habermann, who is not required to write a resignation letter, issued one.

Commerce spokesman Dan Nelson refused to comment on the unusual timing of the departures. "They've both done a great job," he said. "The 2010 census is on track and on schedule."

Some members of Congress weren't so sure. "Changing management at a time like this is very dangerous," said [Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney](#) (N.Y.), a member of the Government Reform Committee and former ranking Democrat on the census subcommittee, said in a statement. "It's disturbing that two world-class statisticians who have worked for years to make sure we will have an accurate count in 2010 left on the same day so soon before the beginning of the census."

"At this point, without knowing who's taking over, it fair to say that the accuracy of the 2010 census is absolutely in jeopardy."

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