



NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. Department of Justice Documents Show Commerce Secretary Ignored Concerns From Scientific Community Over Addition of Citizenship Question to Census 2020

U.S. Census Bureau Chief Scientist raised alarm over the decision, stating citizenship question addition would be "very costly" and "harm the quality of the census count"

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This weekend, the U.S. Department of Justice released [1,320 pages of internal memos, emails and other documents](#) related to U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross' decision to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census.

The documents were made public late Friday night in response to a federal lawsuit from the attorneys general of 18 states aimed at blocking the inclusion of the question, which was added to the census questionnaire in March.

"The release of these documents confirms what advocates have known for some time—that politics, not science, drove the decision to add a citizenship question to the 2020 Census," stated Arturo Vargas, National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund executive director.

In the newly released documents, exchanges via a series of email and internal memo show that large numbers of advocates, lawmakers and scientists expressed serious concerns over the addition of the citizenship question to the 2020 Census, including the U.S. Census Bureau's Chief Scientist and Associate Director for Research and Methodology John Abowd. Notable findings on opposition to the citizenship question include:

- **Census Bureau Chief Scientist raised concerns that citizenship question addition would harm data quality:** Chief Scientist John Abowd wrote that adding a citizenship question to the 2020 census "is very costly, harms the quality of the census count, and would use substantially less accurate citizenship status data than are available" from existing government records at other federal agencies.
- **Reservations over cost implications of including a question on citizenship were also expressed by Abowd:** Abowd stated that the impact of asking about citizenship would be "major potential quality and cost disruptions" in 2020, with the research showing that the cost of adding this question would be at least an additional \$27.5 million. This would cover Census Bureau personnel having to track down households that did not respond. He went on to say in a Jan. 19 memo that, "We believe that \$27.5 million is a conservative estimate because the other evidence cited in

this report suggests that the differences between citizen and noncitizen response rates and data quality will be amplified during the 2020 census compared to historical levels.”

- **The Census Scientific Advisory Committee also strongly disagreed with the inclusion of the question:** The group of academics and scientists mandated to advise the Census Bureau on its policies, research and methodology wrote, “We hold the strong opinion that including citizenship in the 2020 census would be a serious mistake which would result in a substantial lowering of the response rate.”
- **Concerns over the integrity of the Census being compromised were voiced by the American Sociological Association:** Representing more than 12,000 teachers, scholars and practitioners of sociology, the group expressed concern that the addition of a citizenship question would result in the integrity of the 2020 Census data being “fundamentally compromised”.
- **Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, an anti-immigrant hardliner and former head of the President’s Voter Fraud Commission, reached out to Secretary Ross on the issue last year:** At the urging of then White House Chief of Staff and fellow anti-immigration hardliner Steve Bannon, Kobach reached out to Secretary Ross and his Chief of Staff to lobby on behalf of adding a citizenship question via email in July 2017. Kobach, who is known for leading anti-immigrant measures in his state and nationwide, pushed for the addition of a citizenship question to ensure that non-citizens who do not actually ‘reside’ in the United States are not “counted for congressional apportionment purposes.”

Vargas went on to say, “Choosing to let partisan games win out despite the grave concerns expressed by the scientific community over the addition of a citizenship question is unconscionable. This decision will have catastrophic consequences for Latinos and all Americans for years to come.

“Depressing the response rates of the nation’s second largest population group by adding a citizenship question during a time of heightened fear and distrust of the government will result in a less accurate census that costs taxpayers millions more. If we don’t reverse course now and stop the addition of a citizenship question, we seriously risk a failed Census 2020,” concluded Vargas.

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About NALEO Educational Fund

NALEO Educational Fund is the nation’s leading non-partisan, non-profit organization that facilitates the full participation of Latinos in the American political process, from citizenship to public service.