

FACT CHECK: The truth about the readiness of the 2020 Census

Secretary Ross wrote in the [Houston Chronicle](#) that “we are ready” for the 2020 Census. That is simply not true. The Census Bureau does not yet have enough funding or budget certainty for full-throttled final preparations in 2019. And it is saddled with an untested citizenship question over the objections of its expert career staff. Congress can and must approve a significant funding ramp-up for the 2020 Census quickly. If Congress does not act, young children, rural residents, people of color, immigrants, and other hard-to-count communities will not be counted and will lose their fair share of public resources for schools, roads and transit systems, and health care. Here is the truth:

1. Secretary Ross said: *“We are on budget and on schedule to deliver every aspect of the 2020 Census.”*

The Truth: [Insufficient](#), [uncertain](#), and [frequently late](#) annual funding has already delayed and derailed important testing and preparations, including the [cancellation](#) of two census dress rehearsal sites. The Census Bureau needs timely and adequate funding to ensure robust preparations and a fair and accurate count in 2020. The activities designed to improve the count of historically hard-to-reach populations (like people of color, young children, and renters) are most at risk of being cut. The Census Bureau cannot pause final preparations when Congress and the administration delay passage of annual funding bills. The bureau needs sufficient resources now to get the count right in all communities. Congress should ensure that the bureau has the funding it needs to conduct a fair and accurate census.

2. Secretary Ross said: *“Our recent “dry run” of the 2020 Census, the “2018 End-to-End Census Test” held in Providence, Rhode Island, was a great success.”*

The Truth: The “dry run” in Rhode Island, as noted by [local leaders](#) and the [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\)](#), fell short. A new GAO report documented several serious concerns, including that the Census Bureau was not “fully prepared to face all of the enumeration challenges that arose during the test;” “lacked any standardized form of mid-operation training or guidance as new procedures were implemented”; and failed to effectively communicate critical data on fieldwork challenges to those who could analyze and use them.

3. Secretary Ross said: *“In addition, the Census Bureau is hiring more in-house partnership specialists than it has ever enlisted for a decennial census.”*

The Truth: The administration has not requested the funding needed to recruit and hire sufficient partnership staff. The partnership program aims to mobilize states, localities, and community organizations in support of the census. For the 2010 Census, the bureau hired 3,000 partnership staff – a mix of partnership specialists and partnership assistants – during peak operations. For 2020, the Census Bureau increased its partnership specialist hiring goal from 1,000 to 1,500, but it did not request additional funding and is not hiring and onboarding these staff quickly enough to be helpful to the network of partners the bureau will need to ensure a successful census. Congress should ensure that the bureau has the funding it needs to recruit and hire critical partnership staff now.

4. Secretary Ross said: *“For 2020, our goal is as accurate a count of every person living in the United States as possible.”*

The Truth: Notably, Ross’ op-ed fails to mention his decision to add an unwise, unnecessary, and untested citizenship question to the 2020 Census – a move that will drive up costs, depress participation, and reduce census accuracy. The inclusion of the [citizenship question](#) is creating historic mistrust in the census, particularly among communities that are historically the hardest to count. [Research](#) shows that the inclusion of the citizenship question compounded with a historic mistrust in government is likely to depress participation among the communities most at risk of not being counted. To meet the goal of a fair and accurate census, Congress must remove the citizenship question.