INTERVIEWEE: A. ROSS ECKLER

INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER

October 25, 1968

B: This is the interview with Dr. A. Ross Eckler, the Director of the Bureau of the Census. Dr. Eckler, to start with, do you recall when you first met Mr. Johnson?

E: I believe that my first contact with him; but this was quite distant really--was a time when he talked to some of the officials of the Department of Commerce while he was Vice President, to express his interest and support of the Equal Employment Opportunity program. I believe at that time he had with him Mr. Hobart Taylor [Jr.]. The Vice President, I think, impressed all of us with his sincere devotion to the cause of equal opportunity and civil rights. I was impressed with his directness and support of that program which was to receive so much attention in the next few years.

B: Was this talk he made to the people in the Department of Commerce--was it a policy he was conducting at the time of talking to people in all of the departments?

E: I believe it was a part of a general program of trying to see various department people and to indicate this importance of this program and to ask for support and cooperation.

B: In your long career in government here, you had had no previous fairly direct contacts with Mr. Johnson?

E: Not that I recall. There might have been, but I don't recall any previous contact with him during the period that he was Representative or Senator.

B: Then, sir, during the sixties there in Mr. Johnson's Vice Presidential years, did you have any other dealings with him of any kind?

E: No, sir, I believe there were no other dealings during the period prior to the assassination of President Kennedy.

B: And then afterwards during President Johnson's presidency--after late '63 into '64--any contact then?

E: The first contact after that came at the time of the passage and signing of one of the bills with which he was very much concerned. It was the Civil Rights Act of 1965. This had certain provisions with regard to duties imposed upon the Director of the Census to collect certain information. I had appeared before the Judiciary Committee of the House, and then of the Senate, in support of this bill to indicate what we would do under the bill and answered a number of questions.

B: May I interject, sir, this would have been while you were deputy director of the Census?

E: No, sir, I was at that time--

B: Or had you become acting director?

E: At that time I was Acting Director. After Mr. Johnson was reelected, Mr. Richard Scammon, my predecessor, decided he wanted to resign. He submitted his name and there was a period of about six months during the first half of 1965 when I was acting director. It was in that capacity that I appeared before the Judiciary Committee of the House and Senate. [I had just become Director] when I attended the ceremony at which the President signed the bill, made a brief statement, and then I received one of the pens which were issued on that occasion.

B: May I ask, sir, how do you get invited to a ceremony like that? Is

it sort of just cut and dry? Or do you get a special invitation?

E: You get a special invitation, and it indicates that you are entitled to be at a certain place and you have a seat presumably in the audience. We were going to listen to the talk on that occasion, and this gets you into the room where the signing takes place, also.

B: I think I phrased that badly. What I meant was, is there anything unusual about your being invited in the first place--someone deciding to invite you?

E: I think it reflected the fact that the Census Bureau was directly involved in this bill, and I believe that was the reason for it. We are not very often invited in connection with the signing of bills because most bills do not affect us very directly. This was different from the usual one, and that was why I was invited. I felt very honored at having a chance to be present.

B: Did you have a chance to actually talk with President Johnson at that time?

E: Just a moment. I just identified my self as the successor to Dick Scammon, whom he had had quite a lot of contact with. Dick Scammon, as an expert in election behavior, had a number of contacts with Mr. Johnson. So his name was very well known. I know that Dick Scammon had recommended me as a successor [and I had just been appointed as Director.]

B: Could you recall for us the circumstances of your appointment as Director?

E: Yes, I could note that it was a period of time when the question came up as to whether they would seek a younger man. At that time I was in the early sixties--a little older than the usual person

being appointed to a presidential appointment post in the administration. I believe they could see some very real advantage in a younger man who would be able to have the benefit of my services as deputy, presumably, and to get experience to be ready for the 1970 census.

At the same time the President, as you know, has had a good deal of interest in the civil servants of the administration and has repeatedly recognized them and moved them into the presidential appointment posts. At some stage, I suppose after they reviewed various possibilities, they decided that they would go with a civil servant and move me up into that post. I was [appointed in] July. Of course, I was very pleased with that indication of confidence despite my age and lack of any connection with the political side or having been identified as a party worker, anything of that sort.

B: Did you have in this time, while your appointment was being considered, any personal talks with Mr. Johnson or any of his staff about the matter?

E: No, sir, I did not.

B: How did he notify you of your appointment?

E: The notification, I think, came through the Department. As a matter of fact, the first I knew that it had been decided was that there was a release from the White House which came over the ticker tape. I happened to be over in my boss's office, the Assistant Secretary of Commerce, Andrew Brimmer. He had been very strongly urging to the White House people my suitability for the post, and I know he had given me strong support. The news came while I was over there, and he was very happy and congratulated me on the fact that it had come through.

B: Sir, you brought up an area that I think is of interest. If I may

repeat this for the record here, and please correct me if I'm wrong, you are a career civil servant. If I am correct, you have been in government since the thirties, and with the Census Bureau since 1939.

E: That's right.

B: And have worked up through the ranks through a number of different positions to, as you say now, the Directorship. You mentioned that Mr. Johnson has generally been trying to make a policy of this, of moving up deserving career civil servants into what are his positions to dispose of politically. Does this have a pretty large effect on the morale of the Civil Service?

E: I think this is very important for the morale of Civil Service. I may have overstated it, if I was understood as saying he made a policy of this. I think he has done it more than previous Presidents. But, of course, there have been a great many civil servants who haven't moved up. But there was greater reason for a civil servant in the Johnson Administration to expect this than in preceding ones. I think this is stimulating to the civil servants, to know that they are recognized and that they have a chance in some cases--if they want--to move to the policy positions.

B: May I ask, is the Census Bureau traditionally one of the areas in which a career man within the Bureau is likely to move into the Directorship?

E: It's not very likely. There was a time thirty years ago when that took place quite often, but I believe it was as a result of very considerable action on his part in soliciting political support and backing. In my own case, I did not do that. I left it to be decided.

If they wanted to ask me, I was willing to serve, but I did not make any campaign. In some early cases, I know that people came into the Bureau at quite an early age and moved right up through administrative channels and then became Director. But for some thirty years that hasn't been the case.

B: Are those the thirty years immediately preceding these, have they generally been more politically appointees?

E: Yes. They have been brought in from the outside in most cases.

B: One would think that a Bureau as complicated as the Census Bureau must be would be a place in which a man who has moved up through the area would be better in the job.

E: Well, there is a good deal to be said for looking to a career person for this. I think the chief reason for the other policy is that at the time of the big censuses, there are a very large number of field appointments that are made on the basis of the referral system, that are based on recommendations made by the majority party. The Director, as a member of that party, is perhaps regarded as being more responsive to this kind of situation than a career person who is brought up through the ranks.

B: These appointments you are speaking of, these are of the part-time people going on for the ten-year census?

E: That's right. I would note that a number of quite important people would be inclined to agree with your estimate of the situation, and I think statistical work is so important that sometime this job might be shifted over to the other basis.

B: I know you are already beginning the planning for the 1970 census. Have you as Director run into any difficulties with the referral

system of appointees for that?

E: Oh, no. It's too soon to worry about the referrals for the 1970 census. We are using that system on other surveys, and we have specialists in handling that. I haven't run into any problems in carrying it out.

B: These specialists--are they generally men who are in that position because of some political knowledge or connection?

E: At the time of the big census, someone would be brought into that position for that purpose because we have so many jobs to be filled. So it would be a person with specialized knowledge of the administration.

B: Does the majority party get all those positions?

E: The majority party has the first chance of making nominations, but in actual practice in many places these jobs are not attractive enough to be filled fully by those referral sources.

B: How many people are we talking about, incidentally?

E: At the time of the big census, there might be something like 150,000 to 200,000 people to be recruited in a short time. I must say that the use of the political system does enable us to move ahead rapidly and to get a lot of people whom we would not attract otherwise, so it by no means is a clear-cut matter as to what you might gain by a different system.

B: Do you, incidentally, as--or does the Census Bureau still retain sort of a veto on the basis of qualification?

E: Oh, yes. Everyone who is taken must pass the test. If they can't pass the test which indicates their ability to comprehend instructions and to read maps and things of that sort, they are not acceptable.

B: Regardless of the political power behind them?

E: Regardless of the political party. So we go back to the source and ask for more names. Sometimes they throw up their hands and say, "Well, we can't find anybody else; we've done everything we can; you go ahead and do anything you can to fill these jobs." And it's a big job to do.

B: I don't want to belabor this, but it is something I think is probably not general knowledge. From where exactly do these referrals come from? From Congress only, or from Congress and the White House or just everywhere?

E: Most likely to be the majority congressmen or people they designate. They may sometimes ask local people that handle these matters for them. If the congressman is not the majority party, the senator would get a chance or someone else. It is worked out in advance of each census, and it is not a strictly uniform system.

B: Has this always been this way so far as you know, sir?

E: As far as I know, it has been for a long time, yes, sir.

B: Sir, to move into more directly the operation of the census, again I would appreciate it if you would correct me if I make a misstatement, but I am aware that in addition to the big census, the ten-year census, your Bureau does an almost continual series of special censuses of all kinds. And the question arises, how is it decided or who decides that your Bureau will take a special census of any particular time?

E: The legislation which is passed by the Congress prescribes the whole series of censuses and the cycle according to which they are taken.

B: That's this series of the agricultural census--

E: Yes. There is a census of agriculture every five years; housing is

every ten years; manufacturing, mineral industries, wholesale trade, service trades, retail trades, construction, state and local governments--all those are on a five-year basis, and they are taken in years which are prescribed by law. We have discretion regarding the inquiries. The Secretary of Commerce, who in turn delegates to the Director of the Census, has discretion to develop the inquiries and the questions and so on.

B: Now, is it possible for say the President to direct the Census Bureau by executive order or any other means other than statutory law to conduct a certain kind of survey?

E: He hasn't actually done so. The Secretary of Commerce has quite broad powers to conduct surveys, so if the President told the Secretary that information of a certain type is needed, I believe that the powers are probably broad enough to enable the Secretary to go ahead with that.

B: Have there been any cases like that in the Johnson Administration to your knowledge?

E: I'm not aware of anything that would--

B: I know of in addition to surveys you just outlined, I know that you have also conducted in recent years--again please correct me if I have this wrong--but you have conducted surveys in the Watts area after the rioting there. You have conducted surveys on social and economic conditions of Negroes, surveys in connection with the Appalachian Poverty Program. I was wondering if those were all authorized by Congressional law or if they originated elsewhere.

E: Some of these would be done on the basis of our ability to do service jobs for other agencies. The Watts survey, specifically, was financed

by the Office of Economic Opportunity which made available funds enabling us to conduct a census of selected areas there. I believe this same kind of general arrangement would be true of anything we have done in the Appalachian area.

We do special censuses from time to time which are paid for by the localities which are getting a new count. Many places want to know how their population has changed since 1960, and they can make a contract with us to do the job. We carry out the task on the same basis as we do at the time of the decennial census, the same standards. We certify the results and they pay the cost.

B: "They", you mean a state--

E: It could be a state, in some cases. We have done it for the State of Delaware in the last year or two--and Rhode Island. Or it might be a county, it might be a large city, it might be a township, it might be just a few blocks that are being annexed to a city--a lot of different sizes.

B: And they pay you simply your costs?

E: They pay the full cost of it, yes.

B: Do you make a profit?

E: No, we are not allowed to make a profit. We can charge them the costs of doing the job and the overhead and so on, but not for a profit.

B: Incidentally, does such a survey--again outside the big ten-year survey--is such a survey effective for reapportioning the United States Representatives?

E: No, it couldn't be used for that because you have to have information for all areas at the same time.

B: Of course.

E: The only time you have that is at the time of the ten-year census.

B: Now, can you refuse a special survey of this kind on the grounds that you simply do not have the time, facilities, men to do it?

E: Yes, in theory you could refuse it for that reason.

B: Perhaps I should rephrase the question. Does the Census Bureau ever get simply burdened down with this kind of special activity?

E: We get burdened down. I think it would be very difficult for us to refuse to take a special census for a state because they count on us under their laws, in some cases, to get up-to-date figures for reapportionment of their funds. No one else can do it for them. They can't do it themselves and no one else. So we are in a monopolistic position, and I think that we cannot afford to say to them, "We are so busy that we can't do it this year; come back next year." I believe we've got to be able to do that, and we have.

Now, there are some kinds of survey that we might be asked to do by another agency of government which we think we are not qualified to do either because it requires a kind of interviewing talent that is not a part of our regular operation or because it would have such an impact on the public that it would make it difficult for us to do our periodic censuses. Suppose someone wanted a survey on sexual practices or something like that which would put us in a light of asking improper questions, invading privacy and so forth. That, I believe, would be something which would damage our ability to take the census. They would say, "Well, that outfit, you know what they asked last year?" So, there are some limits. But in general we try to be ready to meet the needs of other agencies

on a timely basis.

B: Does the same sort of reasoning apply to requests for surveys which would be only strictly political in nature?

E: Yes, if someone had a request to find out, "What do you think about the policy of the surtax; should we have increased the surtax," or, "What do you think about the steps taken in connection with the civil rights field? Do you think that the country has gone too fast with that?" I think that we ought not to get into inquiry which leads to a criticism of government programs.

B: In this area, do you have statutory protection in that case? Again, to be purely hypothetical about it, suppose that a President of the United States, through the Secretary of Commerce or by whatever means, put considerable pressure on you to take what in your opinion was a largely political survey. Would you just sort of be standing there alone before the President, or do you have some sort of statutory provision to protect you?

E: You'd not be very strongly protected by statutory provision. I think you would have to base it on administrative policy or a judgment regarding what's appropriate. I don't think your administrative protection would be clear cut enough to say, "We can't do that under the law."

B: I suppose your protection in that case is the hue and cry that would arise if any given president started using the Census Bureau for political purposes.

E: Right. I think that's the kind of thing you would have. But I don't think there is anything that prevents you from construing questions as having some pertinence to the public interest, and if you wanted to

strain in that direction, you probably might do it legally. But practically you would be up against very serious problems.

B: Now, this gets into what I suppose is one of the really difficult areas of judgment in your work. I gather from what you said that once a census of any kind from the big census down to the special one is authorized, you, the Census Bureau, has pretty wide discretion in the questions to be asked.

E: Well, on paper there is quite wide discretion, yes, because there is no specification of types--presumably as pertinent to population. In the case of housing there is a little specification that you shall ask information about utilities and equipment but leaves a quite wide open field with regard to choice.

At one time the Congress used to specify the questions quite definitely, and then it rather wisely decided that this is something that is very hard to determine in the legislature and left it to the Executive Branch to work out with provision for periodic review in the Congress.

Now, actually, the guidelines that you have are that you are expected by the Appropriations Committee to carry out successive censuses at much the same cost as the preceding one, allowing for price changes and work loads, so this gives you a kind of overall total as a benchmark. Then, the questions which were included in the preceding census, having stood the test of all of the discussions at that time, are prime candidates for inclusion. A large number of those usually remain--with certain things having to do with occupation, industry, education, employment, hours of work, and so on that one can see are basic for population censuses time after time.

B: If I may insert, you are talking really specifically about the big census here?

E: About the big census, population, yes. But the same thing would be true of the other censuses as well. There is a tendency to have a considerable carryover from one to the next.

Now, there are some items that become a little less important. In the case of agriculture, horses, for farm work for example, obviously become less important over time and now we don't ask about those. In the case of population, you have less concern with immigrants than you used to have, and matters of that sort. So you don't have as much emphasis on that. You don't have much worry about illiteracy as a problem, whereas it used to be included.

So you do get some questions that phase out and some new ones that come in. This is a very considerable task, to work with advisory committees, with public meetings in various cities to find out what they want, and to get the broadest judgment we can among the government agencies here in Washington of what the needs are. On the basis of all that, we come up with a proposal.

B: These advisory committees, would they be from within the government or without or a combination?

E: It would include both. It would include people in the government, and outside both.

B: Is this kind of consultation in the process of making up the question, is it formalized in any way? Do you definitely go to certain departments to check with them on their preferences?

E: Well, there is a very definite formalization within the government. The Bureau of the Budget has an office of statistical standards which

attempts to bring the statisticians from the various agencies together on a number of different occasions during the planning to get their views. This is carried out with a good deal of consistency and formality.

B: Then the Bureau of the Budget occupies a major position in formulating the outline of the questions chosen?

E: In helping us check out the recommendations and in bringing them to us in an organized fashion. They have the responsibility for reviewing, finally, all forms which go out to the public.

B: The Bureau of the Budget does?

E: Yes, the Bureau of the Budget, under the Federal Reports Act.

B: You have anticipated my next question. I was going to ask, once you had gathered all of this and you had drawn up a list of questions from the Census Bureau here, I was going to ask where it went then for approval.

E: Well, the Secretary of Commerce, of course, is in on this, and his office has a chance to review our conclusions. The Bureau of the Budget has to consider this and finally give what is called an approval number which goes on the printed form. We review from time to time with the appropriate committees of Congress the plans for the census.

B: I was going to ask, again, if you ever found congressional interest in this stage of preparing to take the census?

E: In this stage, you mean--

B: In the stage of preparing the questions.

E: Oh, yes, a great deal. We have a committee in the House which has been quite active. We have met before them two or three times.

B: To phrase it more bluntly, do you ever find congressional interference?

E: Yes, sometimes there has been intervening in behalf of particular questions. For example, a radio question on one occasion, and a television question had enough support in the Congress so that it has very definitely been reflected in our decision.

B: Could you clarify that a little? What is the radio or television question and exactly how does it get involved in the congressional interest?

E: The way it gets involved in the Congressional interest is that the radio and television people have representatives in every district in every state. Some of them are very much concerned that the census include a question on the possession of a radio or on the possession of a television set. Now, in 1950, we felt that television was a little bit too new to justify being on the census form, and a campaign developed to change our views on that. Finally, I believe that letters were received by perhaps a majority of the Congress as a result of publicity which appeared in one or two of the broadcasting magazines, and we had sufficient pressure of that sort so we concluded that this ought to be put on even though we had some doubts as to whether there were enough TV sets to justify it at that stage. In the case of radio--I believe this was in the '60 census--we thought that radio might no longer be necessary because it is so widely available in every home. The radio people disagreed with that and they used congressional pressure to get us to change our view.

B: Sir, considering the number of large industries that make consumer goods used in the home, the possibilities for that kind of thing would seem to me to be simply enormous.

E: Well, none of them has undertaken to do that on any significant scale.

There is quite a broad public interest in means of communication. They can make a very strong case that we want to know to what extent a particular county can be reached by radio and what parts of it can't be, what degree of saturation. In the case of television, the only difference between us and the industry at that time was just it was a little bit too early. But we have been using the question right along since then.

These are quite different kinds of issues from the interest, in say knowing to what extent people have an outboard motor or some particular type of automobile. Now, the possession of an automobile, I think, is a pretty basic item of information--the possession of an air conditioner and certain other things. So we've taken the position that if an item is of very great significance as a matter of public policy, as an indication of level of living, or as a barometer of demand for utility services--for example, dishwashers create quite a demand for water. Disposals might be argued the same way, but I believe there is a problem on account of the fact that in some areas they are prohibited, and asking a question about something contrary to law would be troublesome. But air conditioners and freezers and some of those things are indicative of standards of living.

B: Then you don't get an unwarranted amount of political pressure to start taking surveys of electric toasters and things like that?

E: No, we don't get that at all. Now, you do get some interesting ones, for example, when the pet people put some pressure on us to include a count of pets. This comes at us from two or three directions. One, the manufacturers of pet food say this is a very important market for

them so they want to know how many pets there are--and the breeders of the various kinds of pets support this view. Then the health people get into this because of the question of the impact on health. But we've taken the position that that is not an appropriate subject for inclusion in the census--but it might be covered in a sample survey.

B: Sir, exactly how do you defend yourself in a case like that? Say you are receiving a certain amount of pressure from any given area to include in the census some question which you as professional statisticans feel is unwarranted. Say the pressure is fairly strong from influential congressmen. Granted you can defend yourself by citing the rational reasons why it should not be, but you also probably need some kind of political defense. From where does it come?

E: It's very difficult to come by, actually. I think that as far as I know, we have done this on the basis of the rational aspects of it. The most important political consideration, perhaps, is the cost. If you find out that there are other questions that are more important which must be included and that you cannot include this within the framework of what is feasible to count on, usually it is accepted. We have had some quite persistent campaigns and letters sent to congressmen from a whole lot of people. But they usually don't get very interested in this because these are usually things which the congressman himself can see are a little doubtful for inclusion in the census.

B: Do you have much trouble with the right of privacy issue?

E: Yes, sir. We have a great deal of trouble with that, and that's been a very serious problem during the past Congress. I'm not sure how

aware you may be of the bills which have been introduced by a number of members of Congress to make most of the census voluntary and to cut down the number of questions. It is our judgment that this would very seriously reduce the value of the census. We would get less complete responses. There would be wide spread gaps in our data, and it would add to our costs.

B: What sort of questions does the right of privacy criticism usually center on?

E: The questions about the housing unit are often mentioned for reasons I don't understand. I don't think people ordinarily object to answering questions about their housing unit, but what they say is "This involves information about our home which is nobody's business."

B: These are the questions about the number of rooms in the house?

E: The number of rooms--one they have made a particular point of is the one they have distorted to say, "With whom do you share your shower?" Actually the question is whether you have a bathroom for your own use or not; if you don't have a bathroom but share it with someone else, that is an indication of substandard housing. It is that simple, and it has been used in the '40 census, and '50 census, and '60 census, but now suddenly there is some excitement over this. And this is continuing. It is going to be a matter of controversy in the coming session of Congress.

B: I suppose, again, your practice in the big census is that you take a general census form of everybody and then--

E: A very short form for everybody.

B: A very short form--and then the larger sampling forms for a certain

percentage?

E: Twenty-five percent are asked an additional number of questions. And then five percent are asked a few more questions.

B: Is it these longer forms that receive the brunt of the right of privacy criticism?

E: Yes, they are the ones exactly.

B: And those questions, the questions that are receiving such criticism, they are in effect decided under the supervision of your Bureau by this general process of coordination with all the government agencies?

E: Right.

B: And, as you pointed out, many of them are practically traditional, I guess?

E: Yes. If you take a look at the questions asked in 1960 under a Republican administration and the questions we are proposing for 1970 they are very closely similar. There are very, very few new ones. The average burden on the household is about the same, and yet the publicity that has been put in the papers make it appear that it is a completely different approach this time.

B: Incidentally, I would like here to ask what I suppose is a layman's question you must get very tired of hearing. The twenty-five percent long-form sample is a random sample, is it not?

E: Yes. Every fourth household gets that.

B: And it is correct that a random sample is valid?

E: Extremely valid. For the national totals, of course, it is indistinguishable from the total, it's so close.

B: I suppose some of the criticism of random sampling is probably of random small samples, but twenty-five percent of the ten-year census

is not a small sample.

E: Oh, it is a tremendous sample. This will give figures down to what are called the census tracts, small parts of a city with three or four thousand people each, and it gives very valid results on the average.

B: Is the additional five percent who get an even longer form also a random sample?

E: Yes, sir. One family in twenty gets that. It is a random sample.

B: What's the reason for that--this second group?

E: The reason for that is there are some questions which you don't have to have for very small areas. The twenty-five percent sample will carry it down to census tracts, areas of three or four thousand. The five-percent sample will go down to places of twenty-five thousand, or more.

B: Could you give an example of a type of question that you would use in the five-percent sample and not in the twenty-five?

E: Most of the utility questions. Some of the questions on the five-percent basis are those which relate to equipment in housing; for example, the number of bedrooms, whether they have a second home, a clothes washing machine, clothes dryer, dishwasher, home food freezer, and the television and radio questions that I mentioned earlier. Those are examples of five-percent questions.

B: Those would be on the five-percent sample?

E: Yes, that is right. On the grounds that five-percent of the total population would give you an adequate nationwide--

B: Adequate nationwide, adequate for states, adequate for cities, and

even for smaller cities.

B: To take a slightly different area, are you not in the 1970 census planning to use less foot-pounding census takers and more mail?

E: Yes, sir, this is one of the more important changes in the 1970 census. Sixty-percent of our population will be covered by what we call a mailout-mailback approach. We will have a list of addresses. We buy it first of all from a commercial organization. Then we have it updated by the Post Office. Then we have it checked out finally before we use it. This gives us, we think, a complete list of the places at which mail is delivered. So we get these forms sent out, and we check in the ones that come back. Some won't come back, and then we use enumerators to follow up on those. Some of them that come back won't be complete and we may use enumerators to telephone to get the information, or we may have to have them go and visit.

B: This will be used primarily in the urban areas?

E: Urban areas primarily.

B: Do you suspect that will facilitate the census a good deal?

E: We think that is an improvement. It will facilitate the completion, reduce the costs also.

B: Are you still going to need about the same number of enumerators as you had in '60?

E: Well, the net will be probably much the same because, of course, we would need more than in '60--

B: A larger population.

E: Yes, but we will need a considerable number still.

B: It's not going to cut down on any problem with the referral system?

E: No, that's right.

B: There has also been some question about a possible lost population,

that is, that the census does not, perhaps cannot, really get everybody even in a ten-year census. Are you taking steps to try to avoid any lost folks?

E: We certainly are taking the steps to do something about it. We are asking for about ten million dollars in additional funds in order to do a better job of coverage. We think that this use of the mailing out, mailing back approach which gives us a list of addresses will give us a better coverage of structures. But we are going to work more intensively to try to get contacts with the people in the areas where the difficulties have been the greatest before. In some cases, this is due to suspicion on their part, often in the ghetto areas. The suspicion may arise because they do not know what the census is about. We want to get the information to them by every means we can.

B: I've seen it suggested that in say in some of the ghetto tenement areas there may be people who are illegally by municipal ordinance living several to a room that don't want it recorded.

E: Right. That's one of the possibilities. Some may have debt problems, some may have welfare problems--man-in-the-house rule--some may just be uneasy about any identification. They have come into the area recently, and they just don't want to be listed.

B: Incidentally, are your records made available to housing, welfare people for possible punitive action?

E: No, sir.

B: Could they be subpoenaed?

E: They cannot be subpoenaed. They are absolutely unavailable to anybody. I thought awhile back you were going to ask me about the President.

I answered an interviewer a while back and I got quoted in the press that I would have to say, "No," if the President asked for a personal record. I said, "I might not last long, but at least I would have to say 'No.'" I don't think he would ask for it.

B: That applies even to investigative agencies like FBI?

E: It especially applies to investigative agencies, but it applies to everybody. There is no exception. It cannot be made available by subpoena or any other means. The only person who can get the record is the person himself at some later time, or a legal representative. This is for purpose of establishment of age or citizenship or something of that sort for legal purposes.

B: You mean I as an individual citizen or my attorney could write you and get a copy of an individual manuscript return from some year?

E: For you, yes.

B: But by statutory law no one else can do that?

E: That's right.

B: I gather also, sir, that you are using a good deal of automatic data processing equipment now in the census enumerations.

E: We are making tremendous use of automatic data processing. We had a pioneer role in this field going way back into the 1890's when Mr. Hollerith was an employeee here and also Mr. Powers. The first large-scale punch card equipment was used here. The first electronic data processing equipment was bought by us and applied on our jobs. Now it has become one of the nation's great industries.

B: I suppose it is almost necessary. You couldn't hardly count two hundred million heads.

E: Almost is an understatement. We couldn't possibly do the jobs we

have to do with the old punch-card equipment. This is of the greatest importance to us, and its contributions have been enormous. They will continue for a long way ahead because we are in maybe the intermediate stages of a real evolution in data processing, retrieving, handling, storage and so on.

B: Yes, it is totally beyond my comprehension, incidentally.

E: Well, I confess I don't comprehend it either, but I have some people who do.

B: I think all of us are going to be at the mercy of those people pretty soon.

E: Well, not in the same sense that--only in the sense that you depend upon them to do the job.

B: No, but they are going to know what is in those machines and we're not.

E: There are some other people that say that you and I are going to be in a data file and that we have no privacy.

B: The possible consolidation of all the several files, I gather from what you have said, it would be as things now stand, legally impossible for your census data to be put into such a thing.

E: Our data cannot be put into such a thing without different legislation and I don't believe that people are going to approve that action.

B: Sir, to get into sort of a general operation of government, you work most closely with the Secretary of Commerce, of course. If this question isn't an unfair one, does it make much difference to the operation of the Census Bureau when Secretaries of Commerce come and go?

E: The person who is most important to us is the Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs. That's one of the key members of the Secretary's staff. We do have quite a bit of contact with him. He reviews our

programs and has a significant impact. This is more true in the last seven or eight years than it used to be.

B: Why is that, sir?

E: I believe this began with President Kennedy's administration when we had for the first time an economist heading up the work of the Census Bureau. The first one was, as I recall, Dick Holton who was an economist. Since then we have had a series of economists who have been in the Assistant Secretary post. They don't have as broad a job as their predecessors did, but they do give attention to us and to the Office of Business Economics. I believe this has given a leadership and guidance that we didn't used to have.

B: Also, in this same area, sir, do you have much difficulty in finding, getting, and keeping good employees in your bureau?

E: We are able to recruit from the colleges quite effectively. We are working more intensively on that than we used to, and we have been able to get a pretty good supply of junior professionals. Now, the turnover is high. There is no question about that.

B: Say, a young man you recruit out of college, about how long will he be with you in just an approximate guess?

E: Well, my guess is we would probably lose half of them in three, four, or five years. But then we will hold onto the remainder very well. Once they get past the stage of getting adjusted and begin to get into the operation here, it becomes pretty fascinating to them.

B: How long does it take to train a new man--that is, to make him a really effective member of the Bureau?

E: Well, they are performing a lot of very effective roles in two or three years. They keep on gaining after that, but I would say that

after two or three years the bright, young fellows are performing first rate jobs.

B: Do you find your salary scales adequate and competitive with private industry?

E: I think it is fairly close to being competitive. Certainly in the lower grades, I believe it is. I think we are able to recruit quite successfully against private industry. At the very top grades I don't believe it is. But we have been able to hold people, I believe, because they get rather sold on the challenge that exists here. It has been an agency which has grown in importance. The applications of statistics are extremely numerous and are growing, and the challenges in the way of technological advance and new applications and so forth are very great. So we are able to hold a lot of our people. We have a great many people who came here for the 1940 census and are the backbone of a lot of the planning for the 1970 census.

B: It's quite complimentary to the Bureau.

E: Well, I think it is.

B: May I ask, what is your Civil Service grade?

E: I am Executive Level 5.

B: And you still have that--that is your level as a presidential appointee?

E: As a presidential appointee. I was GS-18 when I went into this.

B: Sir, is there anything else that we have failed to cover that you think should be?

E: Well, I might just mention one contact with the President that we had at a time when there was a proposal for a combination of the Departments of Labor and Commerce. The President, I think, became convinced that there was a lot to be said for bringing those two

together. I think he recognized that there might be some doubts or hesitation on the part of some of the people in the Departments. So he brought a number of the key people from Commerce in to meet with him in the cabinet room. This must have been a couple of years ago.

I think I would like to note the very great effectiveness that he has in a meeting of that sort. He talked informally, in a friendly, effective fashion, almost some of the reasons lying behind this. I felt he had a real grasp of what it was all about and put it in a down-to-earth fashion. Then after that was done, he had a handshake with everyone there and just a word or two. I have a picture over there which he autographed later for me. I would like to note that one of the very great assets of the President is an ability to communicate in a small group and show his interest in people in government because I think he has a very real regard for the bureaucracy.

B: In a meeting of that sort, to take that one, for example, is it all Mr. Johnson, or did he ask for questions, comments, opinions from the people?

E: He talked a little while, and then, I think Mr. Califano said something and then he asked--at that time, I think Sandy [Alexander B.] Trowbridge was the--

B: Secretary of Commerce.

E: No, he was to be Secretary. I don't think he had as yet been designated. That was about the time when Mr. Connor decided to leave. And Sandy was sort of in a spot there and I think he wanted to reassure Sandy and he gave him a chance to talk a little,

and then two or three other people talked a little, He's--

B: Does he remember people's name, sir?

E: Well, he remembers some of them. I don't think it can go down very far because he just doesn't have enough opportunity for contacts.

B: What ever happened to that proposal to merge Labor and Commerce?

E: It got torpedoed by the labor unions, particularly. They didn't approve it. The business group probably had some mixed feelings, but probably was willing to go along. But the labor unions very definitely didn't want anything to do with it.

B: Is there anything else you can think of, sir?

E: Well, I guess the only other thing is I have had occasion to see the President on a couple of ceremonies when one of our people received one of the presidential awards for excellence--a man who was my Deputy Director at that time. This was a ceremony in the Rose Garden, and I think the President made clear, again, his interest in the performance of career servants and their contribution and then to everybody personally.

B: Incidentally, on this--what amounts to morale-building, do you and your people get invited to social occasions at the White House?

E: I don't think anybody has gotten to any social occasion in the sense of dances and such, which used to be the case. The Government has gotten rather too big for that. But they are invited from time to time to be present at some of these ceremonies when foreign dignitaries come in and a number of our people--these may be Negroes, they are clerks, they are lower-level people who never would get to a thing like that--and the President offers opportunities for some of them to come in and see that. It means a great deal to these people.

B: How does that work? Does he designate the individuals? Or does he call over to you and say, "Send X number of census workers.?"

E: It goes through channels and we get a chance to send some people. I think it probably is through the Department which has a chance perhaps to supply a certain number.

B: That is at the Department of Commerce level?

E: Right.

B: And again I suppose that is quite effective in morale.

E: I think it is. Yes, I know I have talked to the driver of the Director's car. He got a chance to go there with his wife. They wore their best clothes, and it meant a lot to them. He said he was close enough that he could have touched the President, and he saw some dignitaries from some foreign country. That's good stuff.

B: Well, thank you very much, sir. I certainly appreciate your time.

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By A. Ross Eckler

to the

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