

# Blacks urge more efforts to improve census count



By HOPE YEN (AP) – Dec 16, 2009

WASHINGTON — Black groups on Wednesday urged the government to improve the count of African-Americans in next year's high-stakes census, saying they won't be satisfied with a tally that has historically overlooked millions in their community.

The National Urban League, the NAACP, Revs. Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson met with Commerce Secretary Gary Locke to voice their concerns the Census Bureau might not be doing enough to ensure an accurate tally. Roughly 3 million blacks were missed in 2000, while many whites were overcounted.

"The undercount of blacks in the last count and the overcount of whites by 1 percent is not just a Washington statistic," Sharpton said at a news briefing after the meeting. "It manifests itself in goods and services that cost us."

"We want what is ours," he said.

The groups called for the Census Bureau, an agency of the Commerce Department, to expand its paid advertising to cities such as Newark, N.J.; Oakland, Calif.; parts of Mississippi and other areas that have high percentages of hard-to-count blacks, many of whom are distrustful of government workers.

They also are pushing for more census funding specifically targeted at black communities. About \$23 million, or roughly 17 percent of the \$133 million allocated for media buys, is currently earmarked for black communities to promote the census.

The black leaders said they wanted to see a change in how the government tallies prisoners, so they are counted as residents of the cities in which they previously lived, not in the places where a prison is located.

"There are a lot more things that have to be done for us to say that we are confident that this plan can address the historic undercount in this nation," said Marc Morial, president of the National Urban League and chair of the 2010 Census Advisory Committee.

Commerce officials said the Census Bureau would take a second look at its \$300 million communications campaign to determine if there are ways to make it better. The bureau kicks off its ad campaign next month and will conduct its head count via mail and door-to-door canvassing next spring.

"African Americans and other minority communities have been consistently undercounted in past censuses so we're grateful to the respected leaders we met with for their commitment to achieving an accurate count," Locke said in a statement.

The population figures, gathered every 10 years, are used to apportion House seats and distribute nearly \$450 billion in federal aid.

On the Net:

- Commerce Department: <http://www.commerce.gov>
- Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov>

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