**Appendix E: Discussion Materials**

**U.S. Department of Commerce**

**U.S. Census Bureau**

**American Community Survey Media Analysis**

**December 23, 2013**

[**American Community Survey Information Guide**](https://www.census.gov/acs/www/about_the_survey/acs_information_guide/flipbook/)<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/ACS_Information_Guide.pdf>

The American Community Survey (ACS) Information Guide provides citizens with relevant information about the survey, detailing the history, purpose, and process of the ACS. The guide shows the scope and importance of the ACS, answers some frequently asked questions, and introduces the reader to a number of resources for using ACS data.

[**The American Community Survey is a count worth keeping**](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-05-15/opinions/35457464_1_american-community-survey-census-bureau-first-census)<http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-american-community-survey-is-a-count-worth-keeping/2012/05/15/gIQALTRISU_story.html>

**5/15/12 – Washington Post**

According to Rep. Daniel Webster (R-Fla.), it is “intrusive,” “an inappropriate use of taxpayer dollars,” “unconstitutional,” and “the very picture of what’s wrong in D.C.”

What manner of predatory government prompted Mr. Webster — supported by nearly all House Republicans — to issue such categorical condemnation? That intolerable federal boondoggle known as . . . the American Community Survey (ACS).

If you are confused, you are not alone. Every year, the Census Bureau asks 3 million American households to answer questions on age, race, housing and health to produce timely information about localities, states and the country at large. This arrangement began as a bipartisan improvement on the decennial census. Yet last week the Republican-led House voted to kill the ACS. This is among the most shortsighted measures we have seen in this Congress, which is saying a lot.

As James Madison argued around the time of the first census, collecting information on the socio-economic status of the population is one of those basic things that government is uniquely suited to do, and it benefits everyone. Businesses deciding whether to sell tractors or tricycles want to know how many people live in a given area, whether they mostly live in apartments or houses, with how many children, and how far they travel to work. Consumers then get access to goods and services they desire. Municipal planners determining whether to build a new senior center need to know where the elderly live in their town, and if they have family around to care for them. Government agencies targeting $400 billion in annual anti-poverty, health-care or highway spending require granular data on things such as local incomes. Lawmakers debating health-care policy should have up-to-date information on how many people are uninsured, and where they are concentrated. Even extreme fiscal conservatives should want the Census Bureau’s information, so they know what is most sensible to cut. Those submitting information into the census database, meanwhile, do not see identifying details released to any of these parties.

The Constitution explicitly allows Congress to collect demographic data on the American public “in such a manner as they shall by law direct.” As for the expense, eliminating the ACS is like declining to buy stethoscopes in order to reduce health-care expenses: The up-front savings would be relatively tiny in exchange for untold billions in costs to the economy down the line.

The inconvenience of being required to fill out some census forms is not a distressing infringement on personal liberty, and government spending to collect that information is easily defensible. The Senate should protect the Census Bureau against the House’s attacks.

[**Opposing view: Census survey intrusive and expensive**](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/story/2012-07-15/Census-American-Community-Survey/56241350/1)<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/story/2012-07-15/Census-American-Community-Survey/56241350/1>

**7/15/12 – USA Today**

How well do you speak English? Do you have difficulty dressing yourself? Or bathing? How many times have you been married? Does your house have a toilet that flushes? What is your emotional condition?

Most Americans would be offended if someone they did not know, or maybe even did know, approached them and demanded answers to questions like the ones above.

In fact, many Americans who are asked these questions do take offense, especially when the person asking is an agent of the federal government. Each and every month, the U.S. Census Bureau mails more than 250,000 households the American Community Survey, which pries into the lives of ordinary Americans with these types of questions.

The fines can be up to $5,000.

Is this freedom? Is this the proper role of government? The Census Bureau will spend at least $2.4 billion over the next decade on the American Community Survey. Not only is it intrusive, mandatory and expensive, it is also worth asking whether this is a proper use of taxpayer dollars. Higher spending results in higher debt, higher taxes or both. If we can't come up with savings as our $15 trillion debt mounts, then European-style austerity measures will loom or the government will be forced to take more from your hard-earned paycheck.

At a per unit cost of approximately $70 per questionnaire, and with more than 5,000 federal employees required to administer and implement the survey, surely this government intrusion should be considered a serious contender to eliminate for deficit savings.

As with so much of our enormous government, the American Community Survey is well intentioned. But for the sake of reducing government spending and limiting further government intrusion on our personal freedoms, I am left with a serious question: Isn't there a better way to run our government?