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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6075

September 23, 2026

Russell Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St NW
Washington, DC 20503

Stuart Levenbach
Chief Statistician of the United States
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Vought and Dr. Levenbach:

I write today to request information about how the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) plans to protect the integrity of the Federal Statistical System amid ongoing concerns about the Department of Commerce (Commerce) politicizing and misusing data, statistics and reports on the nation's demographics and its economy.

Commerce's decision to remove the ban on political interference in its scientific integrity policy¹ threatens the accuracy and reliability of statistics collected and produced by its agencies, including the Census Bureau and Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), which produce data upon which policymakers—including the Federal Reserve—and businesses rely to analyze the economy and make critical decisions impacting households. OMB, which coordinates the Federal Statistical System that includes the Census Bureau and BEA, owes the public a clear explanation of its role in Commerce's decision to remove this language and its impacts on the other Federal statistical agencies.

On August 19, 2026, Commerce's Office of Privacy and Open Government (OPOG) quietly issued a directive that opens the door for political interference in its scientific reports and activities.² Specifically, the updated policy eliminated commitments to protect against data "suppres[sion] [delay], or alter[ation]" and it omits "independent review of facilities, methodologies, and other scientific activities as appropriate to ensure scientific integrity."³ Just as previous versions did, the revised policy applies to Commerce and its agencies, including the Census Bureaus and the BEA, both of which produce key data used by the Fed for economic analyses.⁴ BEA produces GDP and the Personal Consumption Expenditures price index, the

¹ NPR, "Trump officials cut political interference ban after unusual Census Bureau report," Hansi Lo Wang, August 31, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/08/31/nx-s1-5948057/department-commerce-census-bureau-scientific-integrity>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*; U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Privacy and Open Government, Policy Directive on Scientific Integrity, January 15, 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20260117134635/https://www.commerce.gov/opog/directives/DAO_216-23.

⁴ NPR, "Trump officials cut political interference ban after unusual Census Bureau report," Hansi Lo Wang, August 31, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/08/31/nx-s1-5948057/department-commerce-census-bureau-scientific-integrity>.

Fed's preferred inflation gauge, while Census data provides data on population and demographics used to assess and contextualize economic trends.⁵

The revised policy was issued only one day after the Census Bureau published a “highly unusual”⁶ report making unsubstantiated claims about noncitizen voting in the 2020 election and a few weeks before the Trump Administration proposed to “stop using the census to ask about people’s race and ethnicity, a topic that the national tally has included since the first count in 1790.”⁷ The proposed changes trace back to the think tank The Center for Renewing America, which was founded by Director Vought.⁸ Together with other proposed changes, they would have sweeping implications for the quality of our economic data, the redistricting process that determines congressional representation, the Federal Reserve’s monetary policy decisions that rely upon key BEA inflation data, and our ability to enforce civil rights and other laws.⁹

These developments follow a string of attacks against the United States’ statistical system: In March 2025, the Administration terminated key advisory committees at BEA and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) that employed external experts who were tasked with recommending ways to improve and modernize economic data.¹⁰

- In August 2025, President Trump fired BLS Commissioner, Dr. Erika McEntarfer, based on false claims that she “rigged” employment data “in order to make the Republicans, and [Trump], look bad.”¹¹
- By October 2025, amid Trump’s government shutdown, the BLS canceled the release of its full monthly jobs report for the first time in the agency’s history.¹²
- On June 24, 2026, BEA announced changes to how several components of the PCE price index are calculated, which economists predict will likely lower recent inflation readings.¹³ The “opacity regarding [the changes] has raised some eyebrows” and came as

⁵ Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, “What Is PCE? Explaining the Fed's Preferred Inflation Measure,” David Pendered, May 20, 2026, <https://www.atlantafed.org/what-we-study/inflation/2026/05/20/what-is-pce-explaining-the-feds-preferred-inflation-measure>; U.S. Census Bureau, “Our Censuses,” <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/censuses.html>.

⁶ CNN, “Experts slam Trump’s unusual new census report as a ‘hijack by the White House’,” Gabe Cohen and Fredreka Schouten, August 20, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/08/20/politics/flawed-census-report-alleged-noncitizen-voting>.

⁷ NPR, “Trump officials propose sweeping changes to the census that would reshape voting maps,” Hansi Lo Wang, September 10, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/09/09/nx-s1-5845147/trump-us-census-citizenship-question-race-categories>.

⁸ Peterson Institute for International Economics, “Political meddling at the Census Bureau damages the entire US statistical system,” Jed Kolko, September 1, 2026, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/2026/political-meddling-census-bureau-damages-entire-us-statistical-system>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Politico, “‘Bad sign’: Purge of data experts raises alarms over economic reports,” Sam Sutton, March 21, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/21/labor-commerce-department-economy-data-doge-00241559>.

¹¹ AP News, “Trump removes official overseeing jobs data after dismal employment report,” Christopher Rugaber and Josh Boak, August 1, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-jobs-firing-f00e9bf96d0110519be9bf4f3ec89195>; Truth Social Post by President Donald J. Trump, @realDonaldTrump, August 1, 2025, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114954846612623858>.

¹² CNBC, “White House says October jobs and inflation data may never be released because of the shutdown,” Jeff Cox, November 12, 2025, <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/11/12/white-house-october-data-release.html>.

¹³ Reuters, “Methodology changes could lower US May core PCE inflation, economists say,” June 29, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/business/methodology-changes-could-lower-us-may-core-pce-inflation-economists-say-2026-06-29/>.

“economists and investors are on high alert for any sign of political interference in economic data from President Trump or his appointees.”¹⁴

- Also in June 2026, Commerce announced changes to data confidentiality when it barred the use of “noise infusion,” a common method that statistical agencies use to publish local demographic and industry data that does not reveal the confidential information of individual persons or businesses.¹⁵ The decision to bar noise infusion data was seemingly made without the consultation of career staff or scientific experts, and experts have noted that the move may undermine the accuracy of certain data, and “spell the end of a wide swath of data from the Census Bureau, including key statistics used for redistricting, policymaking and research.”¹⁶ The decision also led Census to delay release of its annual American Community Survey—data critical to policymakers, nonprofits, and the private sector, and that underpin planning, investment decisions, and funding for public services.¹⁷

OMB coordinates the federal statistical agencies, including Census and BEA. Specifically, its Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs and Statistical and Science Policy Office—headed by the U.S. Chief Statistician—are responsible for “coordinat[ing] the activities of the Federal statistical system to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the system as well as the integrity, objectivity, impartiality, utility, and confidentiality of information collected for statistical purposes.”¹⁸ In October 2024, OMB finalized a rule intended to promote public trust in the statistical agencies and units that produce federal statistics.¹⁹ Known as the “Trust Regulation,” it is the first of three regulations required under the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018, which became law during President Trump’s first term.²⁰ Among other things, the rule codifies four fundamental responsibilities of federal statistical agencies, including the requirement that they “conduct objective statistical activities.”²¹

Commerce’s decision to remove the ban on political interference from its scientific integrity policy appears to run counter to OMB’s Trust Regulation. It raises questions about whether

¹⁴ Wall Street Journal, “A Statistical Revamp Is About to Lower Inflation, at a Critical Time,” Matt Grossman, July 19, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/economy/central-banking/pce-inflation-data-updates-ca7bfd61>.

¹⁵ Department of Commerce, Office of Privacy and Open Government, “Disclosure Avoidance for Statistical Products,” June 4, 2026, <https://www.commerce.gov/opog/disclosure-avoidance-statistical-products>.

¹⁶ Dataindex.us, “A New Commerce Policy Could Mean Less Public Data, Not Better Public Data,” Christopher Steven Marcum, Meghan Maury, and Beth Jarosz, June 11, 2026, <https://dataindex.us/newsletter/article/5ed3272e-9a35-4f38-881b-c62ad45d6a56>; NPR, “A Trump push to cut ‘statistical noise’ could mean less data from the Census Bureau,” Hansi Lo Wang, June 12, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/06/12/nx-s1-5855734/census-bureau-data-differential-privacy>.

¹⁷ Peterson Institute for International Economics, “Political meddling at the Census Bureau damages the entire US statistical system,” Jed Kolko, September 1, 2026, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/2026/political-meddling-census-bureau-damages-entire-us-statistical-system>; Letter from League of Women Voters to Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, September 4, 2026, <https://www.lwv.org/lwvus-joins-letter-urging-release-acs-data>.

¹⁸ White House, Office of Management and Budget, “The Structure of the Federal Statistical System,” https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/inforeg_statpolicy/bb-structure-federal-statistical-system.

¹⁹ U.S. Office of Management and Budget, Federal Register Notice, “Fundamental Responsibilities of Recognized Statistical Agencies and Units,” October 11, 2024, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/10/11/2024-23536/fundamental-responsibilities-of-recognized-statistical-agencies-and-units>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

OMB was involved in that decision and how it affects the other federal statistical agencies and their legally codified responsibilities. It is more important than ever that OMB is transparent with the public and Congress about the decisions affecting the federal statistical agencies, which produce data used to guide decisions that affect every American household. To better understand these policy changes, whether OMB was involved, and how they affect federal statistical agencies more broadly, I request detailed answers to the following questions by no later October 7, 2026:

1. How does OMB reconcile Commerce's decision to revise its scientific integrity policy with the finalized Trust Regulation? Please explain.
2. Was OMB aware of Commerce's August 19, 2026 revision to the scientific integrity policy before it was published? Please explain.
3. Was OMB involved in Commerce's decision to revise its scientific integrity policy? Please explain.
 - a. If so, please provide all written communication between OMB and Commerce with respect to the revisions.
4. Does this revision reflect a broader shift in how all federal statistical agencies will handle political interference, or is it specific to this incident?
5. How will OMB commit to protecting data produced by the federal statistical agencies — from political interference? Please explain.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
Ranking Member
Committee on Banking,
Housing, and Urban Affairs