Washington Insider

President Obama Revokes Bush Presidential Records Executive Order

President Obama revoked the Bush administration's Executive Order 13233 that severely limited access by the public to presidential records. The issuance of the Obama presidential records executive order ends a nearly eight-year effort by historians, archivists, political scientists, and other stakeholders in federal courts and on Capitol Hill to have the Bush EO revoked on legal grounds or by statute. The Obama executive order restores the presumption that the incumbent president, not former presidents, their heirs, or designees, should be the one asserting claims of executive privilege. The executive order states that only "living" former presidents can make claims of executive privilege. This removed the section of the Bush EO that allowed heirs or designees to make claims of executive privilege for an indefinite period after the death of a former president. In addition, the provisions in the Bush EO allowing former vice presidents to assert executive privilege are gone. The Obama EO makes it clear that vice presidential records are to be included under the definition of "presidential records."

Census Gets the Funding it Needs for 2010

The Obama administration allotted the Census Bureau the additional $4 billion it needs to complete the 2010 count, despite lacking a confirmed director. The FY 2009 Omnibus emphasizes the importance of the bureau's communications, partnership, and language-assistance efforts, and the need for accurate information on small population groups. On March 5, the House Information Policy, Census and National Archives Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. William Clay, convened to hear the current status of 2010 census operations. Rep. Edolphus Towns, chairman of the Full House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, emphasized that a fair and accurate census is the only way to ensure fair apportionment of members of the House and distribution of vital services to those who need them most. During Address Canvassing, the first major operation in the census, 140,000 bureau employees will walk almost every street in America, checking 145 million addresses and updating the 2010 address list. Rep. Patrick McHenry reminded everyone that the "Census is constitutionally mandated to count all people residing in the U.S., not just citizens." McHenry questioned what steps were in place to reassure participants that their privacy would be protected. Prior to his resignation, former Census Bureau director Steve Murdock also expressed concerns to the Rural Sociology Society about the impact of immigrants' fears on the 2010 count. The subcommittee also revisited the rising cost of the decennial over the years. Current estimates suggest that it will cost $100 to count each household in 2010, compared to $56 in 2000 and $13 in 1970.

NIH Projects

As part of a wider effort by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to enhance public accessibility to reports, data, and analyses of its research activities, the agency recently launched its new Web site called RePORT (the Research Portfolio Online Reporting Tool, http://report.nih.gov/rcdc). RePORT is designed to give the public a single access point to quickly and easily find data, including information on NIH expenditures and the results of NIH-supported research. In January, the agency added the new Research, Condition, and Disease Categorization (RCDC) reports to the RePORT site. RCDC is a computerized process the NIH uses at the end of each fiscal year to sort and report the amount it funded in each of 215 historically reported categories of disease, condition, or research area, including social and behavioral science research, and basic behavioral and social science research. RCDC results will show the amount NIH funded in each of the same 215 categories it has historically reported to Congress and the public.

Sources were the Consortium of Social Science Associations' Washington Update and the National Coalition for History's Washington Update.

Lyndon Johnson And Me: My Years as a Congressional Fellow

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In August 1963, I drove from Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to Washington, to begin the year-long Congressional Fellowship Program. In the orientations that followed, the fellows met with journalists, House and Senate members, lobbyists, and bureaucrats, among other Washington notables. But the most memorable person who talked to us was Theodore Sorenson, counselor to President Kennedy, and reputedly his most influential staff advisor.

On Thursday, November 21, 1963, 15 of us were escorted into the White House and, after a short delay, were led into Mr. Sorenson's office. He greeted us impassively, but spent the next 90 minutes responding to our questions with what seemed to me to be remarkable candor. He articulated administration aspirations in flat, midwestern tones, his voice rising and falling in increments almost too small to measure. When we rose to leave, he apologized for having kept us waiting, explaining he had been mulling over remarks President Kennedy would be

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