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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Rep. Carolyn Maloney

Hearing on “Census 2020: Examining the Readiness of Key Aspects of the Census Bureau’s 2020 Census Preparation”

June 9, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening today’s hearing to examine the Census Bureau’s readiness to conduct the 2020 Decennial Census.

I’m pleased to hear that Information Technology is playing such a key role in the upcoming Census and that the Bureau is taking advantage of the Internet, hand-held devices for enumerators, and other technologies that before now were not widely available.

The well-planned use of technology is critical to the success of the Decennial Census, the nation’s largest peacetime activity and a Constitutionally mandated foundation of our Democracy.

Census data is used to apportion seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, define state legislature districts, determine school district assignment and help the private sector make sound investments.

Decisions on how to fund special-education grants, adoption assistance, the creation of small business development centers, rural business enterprise grants and other programs are all dependent on an accurate census.

The Census Bureau and Department of Commerce have admitted that there have been challenges in preparing for the largest census to date, one that encompasses a population projected to reach more than 324 million people by 2020

According to GAO, chief among those challenges is the fact that the Bureau has gone without a permanent Chief Information Officer for nearly a year.

Since November’s joint Government Operations and Information Technology Subcommittee hearing on the Census, Harry Lee, the Bureau’s Acting CIO, and Steven Cooper, the Department of Commerce’s CIO, have done an admirable job filling the gap and responding to GAO’s IT-related recommendations.

As of today, only three out of 114 IT-related recommendations made by GAO remain unaddressed.

This week's announcement that Kevin Smith has been hired as the Bureau's Chief Information Officer is encouraging and will provide additional leadership to help guide the decision-making process.

However, there is still a lot of work to be done if the Bureau is going to meet its Census-modernization goals.

For example, while the decision to rely more heavily on technology makes sense, we must incorporate solutions that recognize that access to technology, like broadband Internet, is inconsistent across the country.

According to a January 2016 Federal Communication Commission report, 10% of Americans do not have broadband Internet access.

In rural areas, that number increases to nearly 40%.

For the first time on a nationwide scale, the Bureau will allow individuals and households to respond to the 2020 Census via the Internet.

The Bureau is projecting that more than 50% of households will provide their information using the internet. But I have to ask, without access to a broadband Internet connection, is that number realistic?

In an election year, we are reminded of how fundamental the Census is to our democracy and the sustained well-being of our communities.

There is a lot of work to be done, and the Bureau's plans are certainly ambitious. While I am encouraged by the progress being made, I think it is important that realistic contingency plans are also being considered.

I am looking forward to hearing specifics today on what those contingency plans are and at what point the judgement call would be made to adopt them.

Again, I'd like to thank the Chairman for calling this hearing and thank our witnesses for testifying here today.

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