

**Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper**

*“2020 Census: Challenges Facing the Bureau  
for a Modern, Cost-Effective Survey”*

April 20, 2015

*As prepared for delivery:*

Before we begin, I would like to take a moment and honor Lawrence Buckner, who lost his life while ensuring the safety and security of his fellow Americans at the U.S. Census Bureau in Suitland, Maryland. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those whose lives have been impacted by this terrible incident, especially Mr. Buckner’s family, and we will continue to honor Mr. Buckner for his dedication and service to his mission and our nation.

I want to thank Chairman Johnson for holding this hearing today. I also want to thank our three witnesses, U.S. Census Bureau Director John Thompson and Robert Goldenkoff and Carol Cha of the Government Accountability Office. I’m pleased you could all be here today as we take a closer look at preparations for the 2020 Census.

We all know that the Census is fundamentally important to our nation. One of the few governmental activities required by the Constitution, it determines the apportionment of seats in Congress. The information it gathers is also used at the federal, state, and local level to determine how hundreds of billions of dollars in funds are distributed. And it is used by the private sector for important business decisions. A Census that is not thorough and accurate has real implications for our political system and our economy.

When I chaired this Committee’s Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, I held hearings with Senator Tom Coburn to take a closer look at preparations for the 2010 Census. Unfortunately, that year the Census Bureau had a costly IT project that went awry, throwing the whole operation into chaos. As a result, the 2010 Census cost taxpayers \$13 billion; roughly double the cost of the previous Census.

I’ve spoken at previous hearings about the need for us to look in every nook and cranny in the Federal Government and ask this question: ‘Is it possible to get better results for less money or better results for the same amount of money?’ I believe the answer is ‘yes.’ And the Census Bureau is no exception.

Today we are five years out from the 2020 Census and this Committee has an oversight responsibility to make sure planning is on track for 2020. More importantly, we need to make certain that the issues that led to the failures and cost overruns we saw in 2010 have been addressed and will not reoccur. Taxpayers should not have to pick up the tab for them again.

An important part of this oversight will involve both the Bureau and GAO laying out milestones that need to be met over the next five years. We will then need to gauge progress in meeting these milestones over the course of the next several years so problems that arise can be solved early on. We in Congress also have a responsibility to make sure the Bureau has the funding it needs during this crucial period of planning and testing.

As we will hear the Bureau describe today, the strategy the Bureau has put forth for modernizing the Census should save \$5 billion. Effective use of technology will be key to driving down costs in 2020. This should be the first Census during which all households have the option to respond online. I say 'should' because if the necessary planning and testing is not done now, and the necessary cybersecurity protections are not put in place, the Census will have to rely once again on old, largely paper-based methods of collecting information. That will drive up costs and frustrate Americans who are used to communicating and conducting business online every day.

We must also strive to conduct an equitable Census, recognizing the issues that sometimes lead to undercounts of certain populations such as ethnic and racial minorities, less advantaged groups, and renters. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today who will help us identify ways to achieve a comprehensive and cost-effective 2020 Census.