

October 31, 2017

**Opening Statement of Senator Heidi Heitkamp  
U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee**

**“2020 Census: Examining Cost Overruns, Information Security and Accuracy”**

Thank you, Chairman Johnson.

First, I would like to express my warmest wishes to Claire and Joseph. They are in our prayers and we hope for a swift recovery.

Secretary Ross, Comptroller General Dodaro, Thank you for joining us today.

This needs to be the first in a series of hearings concerning the Census Bureau and its plans for the 2020 Census. Simply put, the 2020 Census is in trouble. Budget uncertainty, cancelled tests, increasing cost projections and no Senate confirmed Director are all signs of an operation that is teetering. We can still get back on track, but we’re running out of time.

The lack of even a nominee for the Census Director position is very troubling. I hope that lack doesn’t indicate the priority the Administration places on the Census.

A critical concern to me and my constituents are the cancelled tests in Indian Country. Indian reservations provide unique challenges for the Census Bureau, such as historic distrust of the federal government, a lower likelihood of deliverable mail, and sparse population centers.

As the 2020 effort began to ramp up the effort looked good. Coupled with the goal of a Tribal enrollment question in 2020, the Census Bureau determined two tests were necessary to adequately prepare for potential road blocks enumeration on reservations may pose and how to have a successful Census in Indian Country.

However, both of those tests were cancelled and there are no plans that I am aware of to replace them with any sort of tests related to the challenges the Census will face in Indian Country. This is a mistake and risks the success of the 2020 Census. For too long, we have given Indian Country the leftovers. Members of these communities deserve to be counted where they reside, just like any other person. But because of the choices made in Washington, it will be much more difficult to make sure that happens.

These concerns go beyond just tribal issues. From what I have seen, I am not sure the Census Bureau is generally prepared to do an effective job in counting residents in rural areas nationwide. The planned tests focus on more urban and suburban regions. It is, of course, critical to get accurate counts there, but we have to make sure the Census is prepared to meet the needs of rural America.

There are also questions regarding contracting decisions and Information Technology security as we move towards more technologically driven enumeration techniques. The integration and modernization of the IT systems of the Bureau and mobile device bid protest are issues of particular interest and importance to Ranking Member McCaskill and I know she would talk about them if she were here today.

With that, I look forward to hearing from the witnesses how we are going to turn this around and get the 2020 Census back on track.