

Opening Statement of  
Senator Susan M. Collins

**Census in Peril:  
Getting the 2010 Decennial Back on Track, Part II**

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
April 15, 2008

★ ★ ★

**The announcement by the Department of Commerce that plans for the 2010 Census are undergoing drastic revision at this late stage and that its costs are expected to increase by as much as \$3 billion is alarming. It is also at odds with previous assessments provided to this Committee.**

**The fact that our best option is returning to a paper-based Census after working for years and obligating more than \$200 million on a largely failed hand-held computer option indicates, at best,**

**woefully inadequate procurement practices, and, at worst, gross mismanagement.**

**The Census is too important – not only for its Constitutionally mandated use in apportioning the House of Representatives, but also for the role its data plays in a myriad of program and policy operations – for lax management practices to imperil its success.**

**For now, the top priority for Congress must be a careful examination of the resources the Census Bureau needs – including adequate staff and robust project-management protocols – to execute an accurate enumeration two years from now.**

**But I also believe that Congress must carefully reexamine this and other troubled federal technology projects to identify the flaws, to ensure**

**accountability, and to make better use of taxpayers' money.**

**As the GAO has stated,**

**“Again and again, projects have run into serious trouble, despite hard work by dedicated staff.**

**They are developed late, fail to work as planned, and cost millions – even hundreds of millions – more than expected. The results, in missed benefits and misspent money, can be found throughout government.”**

**That observation was delivered more than 15 years ago. It appeared in a December 1992 GAO report to Congress on information-management and technology issues. The GAO's judgment reminds us that these technology problems are neither isolated**

**nor novel, but that does not in any way excuse the failures in the Census project.**

**Unfortunately, the record indicates that the Census Bureau has not fully implemented GAO recommendations in vital areas like acquisition management, operational planning, cost estimation, and performance measurement.**

**One troubling indicator of inadequate development practices appeared in Secretary Gutierrez’s testimony last week. Nearly two years after the initial contract award and a mere four months away from a full-blown test of the handhelds, and despite repeated third-party observations about the problems of “requirements creep,” the Secretary noted that “more than 400 new or clarified technical requirements” were delivered**

**to contractor Harris Corporation on January 16, 2008. That was a remarkable load to pile on the back of a project already teetering at the precipice.**

**Perhaps the most accurate comment on the recent disturbing news on the 2010 Census may be a short sentence by Dr. George T. Ligler, a technology consultant who has participated in the 2010 Decennial Census Expert Panel. In a March 18 letter to Secretary Gutierrez, Dr. Ligler said, “It didn’t need to be this way.”**

**Prominent among any list of lessons learned is the imperative to establish concrete requirements early in the development process, to take note of caution flags such as cost overruns and major requirement modifications, and to adopt effective risk-management strategies.**

**I appreciate the difficulty of the task that Dr. Murdock assumed when he took the helm at the Census Bureau, and look forward to hearing his plans to put the Census back on track and keep it there.**

**# # #**