

Opening Statement of Chairman Ron Johnson
“2020 Census: Conducting a Secure and Accurate Count”

Tuesday, July 16, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

Today’s hearing is a chance to examine the Census Bureau’s preparations for the 2020 decennial census. We are less than a year away from Census Day, on April 1, 2020. Some essential operations for the decennial census are already underway, and it is important that the Bureau is adequately prepared to accomplish its constitutional mandate.

Hopefully, cost of the 2010 census will help inform improvements to the Bureau’s efforts for 2020. At \$12.3 billion, the 2010 census was the most expensive in our nation’s history. The Bureau incurred much of that cost when it tried and ultimately failed to develop a handheld device for enumerators to use. That boondoggle cost taxpayers \$3 billion. We’re here today, in part, to help make sure something like that does not happen again. Currently, the Bureau estimates that the 2020 census will cost \$14.1 billion, with an additional \$1.5 billion set aside for contingency. That amount represents a cost of \$87 per housing unit, which would be lower than the 2010 per housing cost adjusted for inflation.

The Bureau is undertaking several information technology initiatives for the 2020 census. This will be the first decennial census with an Internet response option. Hopefully, this option will increase self-response rates and reduce overall costs. More field operations will be automated and streamlined to reduce the number of employees on the ground, knocking door-to-door for survey responses. However, these innovations also come with increased cybersecurity challenges, especially related to the need to protect individuals’ private information.

I would like to thank both the Census Bureau and the Government Accountability Office for their regular and ongoing oversight briefings to the Committee on the Bureau’s preparations. It is important for the Bureau, the Government Accountability Office, and this Committee continue to work together to help ensure that the 2020 census is not only cost effective, but also as secure and accurate as possible.

Thank you to the witnesses for speaking with us today, and I look forward to your testimony.