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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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January 7, 2008

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The Honorable Henry A. Waxman  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight and  
Government Reform Committee  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable William "Lacy" Clay, Jr.  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Information Policy, the Census  
and National Archives  
B-349 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Waxman and Chairman Clay:

We are writing to voice our concern over a January 2, 2008 GovExec.com report that a key Census Bureau program, the Field Data Collection Automation (FDCA) program, is in serious trouble, and if not addressed will have a profound negative impact on the upcoming 2010 Decennial Census.<sup>1</sup>

As the Bureau continues its preparation for a short-form-only Census, it is undertaking two major contracts, the FDCA program and the Decennial Response Integration System (DRIS). These two technology contracts have a combined cost of over \$1 billion. These major contracts signal the first truly "high-tech" Census, and their successful implementation is critical to the 2010 Decennial Census overall.

The FDCA program replaces the traditional paper-driven decennial Census with one which relies on handheld computers to collect response information, including the systems and support equipment for field office data collection activities. After encountering technical problems during the 2004 Census test, the Bureau realized it lacked the resources and expertise to manage the project in-house. Bureau officials decided to use an integration contractor to help develop and manage the FDCA project. The program

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<sup>1</sup> "Census program to use handheld computers said to be in serious trouble," Allan Holmes.

is expected to provide handheld computers, office automation, and IT infrastructure to support the collection of Census data in local and regional offices. The handheld computers will be used to update the Bureau's address list, perform follow up at addresses for which no questionnaire was returned, and oversee activities to measure Census coverage. Automating field data collection activities is expected to help reduce overall 2010 Census costs and improve data quality and operational efficiency.

The FDCA program and its progress, or lack thereof, was highlighted at a December 11, 2007 Information Policy, Census and the National Archives Subcommittee hearing titled "*A Review of the Census Bureau's Risk Management Activities for IT Acquisitions.*" At this hearing the Director of the Census Bureau testified as to the progress of the FDCA program, and although he acknowledged some challenges, he indicated they were minor and easy to overcome.

Now it has come to our attention that there was a meeting between the Deputy Director of the Census Bureau and officials from the MITRE Corporation, where FDCA was discussed. MITRE was asked in the summer of 2007 to conduct an independent assessment of the FDCA program<sup>2</sup>. According to the GovExec.com article, MITRE was highly critical of the FDCA program, saying it is in "serious trouble" and that the final costs for the program are "unpredictable." Furthermore, MITRE pointed out the risks to the program are so large, the Bureau should consider a contingency plan to revert to using paper instead of the handheld computers.

Further complicating the situation is the Bureau's previous testimony before Congress. According to the GovExec report, Jay Waite, the Bureau's Deputy Director, met with MITRE on November 29, 2007, at which time he presumably learned of MITRE's concerns. Yet, at the December 11, 2007 Subcommittee hearing, the Bureau Director Louis Kincannon never mentioned any meeting with MITRE, nor did he mention MITRE's FDCA concerns. Instead, Mr. Kincannon, in his written statement, offered a brief picture of the FDCA program, acknowledged some "challenges," but in general gave the impression that nothing was wrong. Specifically, Mr. Kincannon said:

The Census Bureau structured the FDCA acquisition strategy to provide for a technical solution for the 2010 Census that mitigates risks in the development of the system, and the results to date indicate that improvements to the hand held computer design provide a sound platform for delivering 'production' automation solution for the 2010 Census field operations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Recently received documents provided by the Bureau show that at the request of the Census Bureau Deputy Director, MITRE assembled a "Red Team" whose purpose was to study the FDCA program and then report back on their results.

<sup>3</sup> *Hearing on A Review of the Census Bureau's Risk Management Activities for IT Acquisitions, before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Dec. 11, 2007* (written statement of Charles Louis Kincannon, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Director),

FDCA Letter to Mr. Waxman and Mr. Clay  
January 7, 2008

Given what we have learned about MITRE's FDCA concerns, we ask that you schedule a Committee hearing on the status of the Census Bureau's plans for the 2010 Decennial Census. This hearing should address the following:

1. What is the true status of the FDCA program?
2. Given that the Information Policy, Census and the National Archives Subcommittee held a hearing on FDCA a full 12 days after Senior Bureau staff were reportedly briefed on MITRE's conclusions, why did the Bureau not divulge the FDCA information at that hearing?
3. Did the Bureau intentionally withhold information about MITRE's concerns?
4. Are there other technology programs, such as the Decennial Response Integration System (DRIS), about which the Bureau has received troubling reports?

The 2010 Decennial Census and its constitutionally mandated enumeration of residents is of great public importance. It directly affects the reapportionment of Representatives in Congress, the redistribution of billions of tax dollars for programs and services, and public policy and business decisions. Considering that, we must ensure that every effort is being made to achieve the most accurate enumeration. Therefore, we urge you to turn your attention to this matter and use the power of this Committee to get to the bottom of the issues described in this letter before it's too late.

Sincerely,



Tom Davis  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and  
Government Reform Committee



Mike Turner  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Information  
Policy, the Census and  
National Archives