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YEAR 2000 COMPUTING CHALLENGE

Federal Government Making Progress But Critical Issues Must Still Be Addressed to Minimize Disruptions

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GAO/T-AIMD-99-144

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to appear today to discuss efforts to address the Year 2000 computing challenge and to outline remaining actions needed to ensure a smooth conversion to the next century. The federal government--with its widespread dependence on large-scale, complex computer systems to deliver vital public services and carry out its massive operations--faces a large and difficult task. Unless adequately corrected, Year 2000 computing problems could lead to serious disruptions in key federal operations, ranging from national defense to benefits payments to air traffic management.

Consequently, in February 1997, we designated the Year 2000 computing problem as a high-risk area. Our purpose was to stimulate greater attention to assessing the government's exposure to Year 2000 risks and to strengthen planning for achieving Year 2000 compliance for mission-critical systems. Since that time, to help agencies mitigate their Year 2000 risks, we produced a series of Year 2000 guides on enterprise readiness, business continuity and contingency planning, and testing.[1] In addition, we have issued over 90 reports and testimony statements detailing specific findings and made dozens of recommendations related to the Year 2000 readiness of the government as a whole and of a wide range of individual agencies.

My testimony today

- outlines the actions that the federal government has taken to improve its Year 2000 approach;
- summarizes the status of the federal government's remediation of its mission-critical systems, with a particular focus on those that are not yet compliant;
- discusses the reported status of state-administered federal programs; and
- describes the main remaining challenges facing the government in ensuring the continuity of business operations, namely end-to-end testing and contingency planning.

[1] Year 2000 Computing Crisis: An Assessment Guide (GAO/AIMD-10.1.14, issued as an exposure draft in February 1997 and in final form in September 1997), Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Business Continuity and Contingency Planning (GAO/AIMD-10.1.19, issued as an exposure draft in March 1998 and in final form in August 1998) and Year 2000 Computing Crisis: A Testing Guide (GAO/AIMD-10.1.21, issued as an exposure draft in June 1998 and in final form in November 1998).

Actions Taken to Increase Attention

Since February 1997, action to address the Year 2000 threat has intensified. In response to a growing recognition of the challenge and urging from congressional leaders and others, the administration strengthened the government's Year 2000 preparation. In February 1998, the President took a major step in establishing the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion. The President also (1) established the goal that no system critical to the federal government's mission experience disruption because of the Year 2000 problem and (2) charged agency heads with ensuring that this issue receives the highest priority attention. Among the initiatives the Chair of the Council has implemented in carrying out these responsibilities are attending monthly meetings with senior managers of agencies that are not making sufficient progress, establishing numerous working groups to increase awareness of and gain cooperation in addressing the Year 2000 problem in various economic sectors, and emphasizing the importance of federal/state data exchanges.

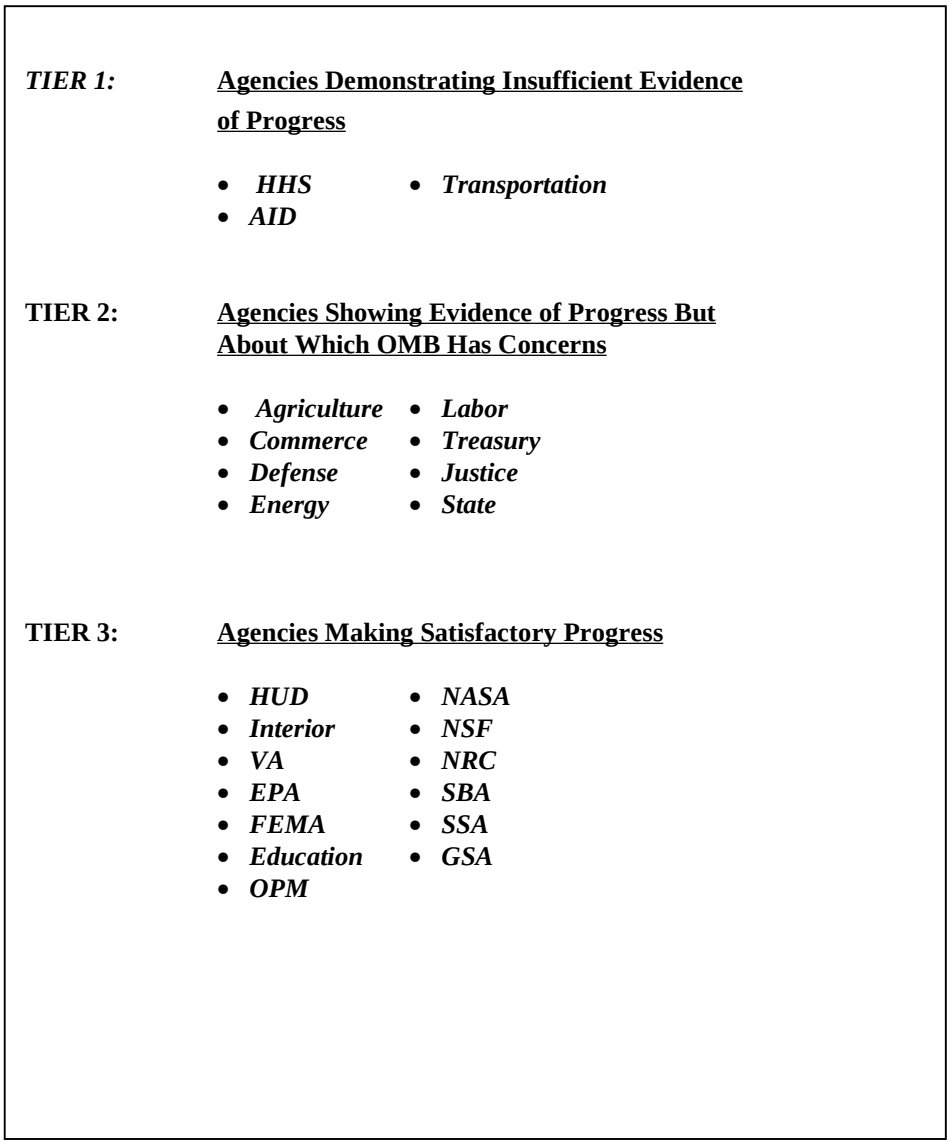
Many congressional committees have been extremely diligent in addressing the Year 2000 challenge by holding agencies accountable for demonstrating progress and by heightening public appreciation of the problem. Work done by this Committee in holding over 10 hearings on important topics such as the food sector, electric power, and financial services and issuing a major report[2] on the impact of the Year 2000 problem has fostered a greater understanding of the problem and focused attention on actions needed.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), for its part, has taken more aggressive action on Year 2000 matters over the past year and half and has been responsive to our recommendations. For example, in its quarterly report issued in December 1997, OMB accelerated its milestone for agencies to complete the implementation phase from November 1999 to March 1999. OMB also has tightened requirements on agency reporting of Year 2000 progress. It now requires that beyond the original 24 major departments and agencies that have been reporting, 9 additional agencies (such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Postal Service) report quarterly on their Year 2000 progress, and that additional information be reported from all agencies. OMB also has clarified instructions for agencies relative to preparing business continuity and contingency plans.

[2] Investigating the Impact of the Year 2000 Problem (United States Senate, Special Committee on the Year 2000 Technology Problem, February 24, 1999).

OMB also places each of the 24 major agencies into one of three tiers after receiving its quarterly progress report, determined by OMB's assessment of the agency's reported progress. Figure 1 shows OMB's assessment of agencies' Year 2000 progress on the basis of their latest quarterly report issued on March 18, 1999.

Figure 1: OMB's Assessment of Agencies' Year 2000 Progress



Source: Progress on Year 2000 Conversion, (OMB, data received February 12, 1999, issued on March 18, 1999).

In April 1998, we recommended that the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion establish governmentwide priorities, based on such criteria as the potential for adverse health and safety effects, adverse financial effects

on American citizens, detrimental effects on national security, and adverse economic consequences. On March 26, 1999, OMB implemented our recommendation by issuing a memorandum to federal agencies designating lead agencies for the government's 42 high-impact programs, including those delivering critical benefits such as social security, food stamps, and Medicare; ensuring adequate weather forecasting capabilities; and providing federal electric power generation and delivery. The attachment contains a list of these 42 high-impact programs and the lead agencies.

In the memorandum, the lead agency for each high-impact program was charged with identifying the partners integral to program delivery; taking a leadership role in convening those partners; assuring that each partner has an adequate Year 2000 plan and, if not, helping each partner without one; and developing a plan to ensure that the program will operate effectively. According to OMB, such a plan might include testing data exchanges across partners, developing complementary business continuity and contingency plans, sharing key information on readiness with other partners and the public, and taking other steps necessary to ensure that the program will work. OMB directed the lead agencies to provide a schedule and milestones of key activities in the plan by April 15. OMB also asked agencies to provide monthly progress reports.

Reported Percentage of Compliant Federal Systems Increased, But Critical Issues Remain

OMB's most recent reports show improvement in addressing the Year 2000 problem. In particular, the federal government has reported significantly increased percentages of mission-critical systems that are Year 2000 compliant (from 21 percent compliant in May 1997 to a reported 92 percent on March 31, 1999). Many key tasks, however, remain to be completed to ensure the continuity of critical services. End-to-end testing and business continuity and contingency planning are not yet complete and, in some cases, are in the beginning stages. Further, not all of the systems reported as compliant have yet completed an independent verification and validation process. For example, 57 Environmental Protection Agency mission-critical systems and 3 Department of the Interior mission-critical systems reported as compliant were still undergoing independent verification and validation.

In some cases, independent verification and validation of compliant systems have found serious problems. For example, as we testified in

February 1999,[3] none of the Health Care Financing Administration's (HCFA) 54 external mission-critical systems reported by the Department of Health and Human Services as compliant as of December 31, 1998, were Year 2000 ready, based on serious qualifications identified by the independent verification and validation contractor.

Some Agencies Did Not Meet Governmentwide Goal

As table 1 shows, 11 major departments and agencies reported that some of their mission-critical systems did not meet OMB's governmentwide March 31, 1999, implementation goal.

Table 1: Agencies Reporting That They Did Not Complete Implementation of Year 2000 Compliant Systems by the Government's March 1999 Goal[a]

Agency	Total mission-critical systems	Number compliant	Percentage compliant
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	157	155	99%
Department of Commerce	473	462	98%
Department of Energy	420	408	97%
Department of Agriculture	350	335	96%
Department of Health and Human Services	287	262[b]	91%
Department of Justice	220	201	91%
Department of Treasury	322	293	91%
Department of Transportation	608	541	89%
Department of State	59	52	88%
Department of Defense	2038	1793	88%
U.S. Agency for International Development	7	0	-

[a]The Department of Energy's data are as of April 8, 1999. The Departments of Agriculture, State, and the Treasury data are as of April 7, 1999. The Department of Justice data are as of April 6, 1999. The Department of Transportation data are as of April 5, 1999. The Departments of Commerce, Defense, and Health and Human Services and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the U.S. Agency for International Development data are as of March 31, 1999.

[b]The Department of Health and Human Services reported 55 of HCFA's 78 external mission-critical systems as compliant. We testified in February (GAO/T-AIMD-99-89, February 24, 1999), that none of HCFA's 54 external mission-critical systems reported by the Department of Health and Human

(Table notes continued on next page)

[3]Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Medicare and the Delivery of Health Services Are at Risk (GAO/T-AIMD-99-89, February 24, 1999).

Services as compliant as of December 31, 1998, was Year 2000 ready, based on serious qualifications identified by the independent verification and validation contractor.

Source: Agencies.

Many Mission-Critical Systems That Missed March Goal Support Critical Business Processes

Many of the mission-critical systems that were not implemented by the March target date support critical business processes, and some are not scheduled to be Year 2000 compliant for several months. For example, 120 systems are scheduled to be Year 2000 compliant in July 1999 or later. Of these 120 systems, 23 are not expected to be compliant until after September 1999. For these systems, given the limited amount of time available, agencies will be challenged to complete the remaining tasks and respond to unexpected problems.

Table 2 shows the schedule for remediating currently noncompliant mission-critical systems.

Table 2: Schedule for Implementing Noncompliant Mission-Critical Systems[a]

Agency	April-June 1999	July-September 1999	October-December 1999	January 2000	Unknown
Department of Agriculture	7	6	2	0	0
Department of Commerce	9	2	0	0	0
Department of Defense	168	65	12	0	0
Department of Energy	6	4	1	0	1[b]
Department of Health and Human Services	2	0	0	0	23[c]
Department of Justice	11	5	3	0	0
Department of State	7	0	0	0	0
Department of the Treasury	16	9	2	2[d]	0
Department of Transportation	55	4	1	0	7[e]
National Aeronautics and Space Administration	1	1	0	0	0
U.S. Agency for International Development	6	1	0	0	0
Total	**288**	**97**	**21**	**2**	**31**

(Table notes on next page)

[a]The Department of Energy's data are as of April 8, 1999. The Departments of Agriculture, State, and the Treasury data are as of April 7, 1999. The Department of Justice data are as of April 6, 1999. The Department of Transportation data are as of April 5, 1999. The Departments of Commerce, Defense, and Health and Human Services and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the U.S. Agency for International Development data are as of March 31, 1999.

[b]One noncompliant system was reported with an estimated completion date of March 1, 1999.

[c]According to the Department of Health and Human Services, HCFA was in the process of receiving and reviewing certifications from their contractors and expected to know the actual status of these systems by April 21, 1999.

[d]A Department of the Treasury official stated that two systems will be retired in January 2000.

[e]The Department of Transportation reported five noncompliant systems with estimated completion dates of March 1999 or earlier and did not provide the dates for two systems to be retired.

Source: Agencies.

Several of the noncompliant mission-critical systems summarized above support the 42 high-impact federal programs designated by OMB. These systems should be given particular attention by agency management, the administration, and the Congress because of the potential serious consequences of disruptions in critical services and operations. Examples include the following.

Air Traffic Control System: The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has identified 26 of its mission-critical systems as posing the greatest risk to the National Airspace System–the network of equipment, facilities, and information that supports U.S. aviation operations–should their Year 2000 repairs experience schedule delays or should the systems not be operational on January 1, 2000. FAA ranked mission-critical air traffic control systems based on their impact and criticality to the National Airspace System, their overall functionality, and an evaluation of the risk associated with solving the Year 2000 problem. Ten of FAA's 52 noncompliant mission-critical systems are among the systems that meet this criteria and, therefore, pose the greatest risk. Examples of the 10 systems include (1) the Automated Radar Terminal System IIIE, not expected to be compliant until June 1, 1999, which provides critical radar data processing to air traffic controllers in selected terminal radar approach facilities, and (2) the Host environment, which consists of several systems and is used to control air traffic at 20 en route centers, is not expected to be compliant until June 30, 1999. Because of the risks associated with FAA's Year 2000 program, we have advocated that the

agency develop business continuity and contingency plans.[4] FAA agreed and has activities underway, which we are currently reviewing.

Medicare: HCFA relies on 78 external mission-critical systems operated by contractors throughout the country to process Medicare claims. The Department of Health and Human Services reported that 23 of these external mission-critical systems were not deemed Year 2000 compliant as of March 31, 1999. According to the department, it is in the process of receiving and reviewing certifications from these external contractors and expects to know the status of these systems by April 21, 1999. Reviews of contractors reports of Year 2000 compliance have disclosed serious problems in the past. We testified in February that none of HCFA's 54 external mission-critical systems reported by the Department of Health and Human Services as compliant as of December 31, 1998, was Year 2000 ready, based on serious qualifications identified by the independent verification and validation contractor.[5] Among the many recommendations that we have made to HCFA in September 1998 is that it define the scope of an end-to-end test of the claims process and develop plans and a schedule for conducting such a test.[6] HCFA agreed and we continue to review its efforts in this area.

Maritime Search and Rescue: According to an official at the U.S. Coast Guard, three mission-critical systems used in maritime search and rescue missions did not meet the March 1999 implementation goal: (1) the Command and Control Personal Computer, scheduled to be compliant in September 1999, is used to map search areas, (2) the Digital Global Positioning System, scheduled to be compliant in April 1999, provides greater search location accuracy, and (3) voice recorders, due to be compliant in May 1999, tape records conversations between rescue response dispatchers and the party requiring assistance.

Indian Health Service: The Department of Health and Human Services reported that the Indian Health Service's Resource and Patient

[4]FAA Computer Systems: Limited Progress on Year 2000 Issue Increases Risk Dramatically (GAO/AIMD-98-45, January 30, 1998), FAA Systems: Serious Challenges Remain in Resolving Year 2000 and Computer Security Problems (GAO/T-AIMD-98-251, August 6, 1998), and GAO/T-AIMD/RCED-99-118, March 15, 1999.

[5]GAO/T-AIMD-99-89, February 24, 1999.

[6]Medicare Computer Systems: Year 2000 Challenges Put Benefits and Services in Jeopardy (GAO/AIMD-98-284, September 28, 1998).

Management System is scheduled to be compliant by June 30, 1999. This system provides clinical and administrative information in the service's health care facilities and supports health care planning and delivery, management and research.

Defense: We testified in March that while Defense had recently made progress by providing the controls and guidance needed to fix and test systems, it was behind schedule.[7] The following are three examples of some of these systems. First, the Global Command and Control System (GCCS) system is deployed at more than 600 sites worldwide and is Defense's primary system for generating a common operating picture of the battlefield for planning, executing, and managing military operations. Completion of the component-level GCCS at some locations is currently scheduled for as late as September 30, 1999. Second, the Defense Switch Network (DSN), scheduled to be completed by September 30, 1999, is the primary long-distance voice communications service for Defense. DSN provides both dedicated and common-user voice communications services at all priority levels for command and control and special command and control users as well as routine service for administrative users throughout the department. Finally, the Theater Battle Management Core Systems (TBMCS) is being developed by the Air Force and is intended to replace three Year 2000 noncompliant legacy systems. TBMCS is to be a primary support tool used by theater commanders to provide information to the warfighter and for peacetime and humanitarian operations. Because of developmental problems that have resulted in schedule slippages, the Air Force does not expect to fully implement TBMCS until September 30, 1999, at the earliest. Schedule slippages have also caused Air Force to remediate a legacy system, the Contingency Theater Automation Planning System--scheduled to be completed in September 1999--in the event of further delays to TBMCS.

Status of State-Administered Federal Human Services Programs Not Clear

About 25 percent of the federal government's programs designated as high-impact by OMB are state-administered, such as Food Stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. One federal system that did not make the March implementation target is critical to the implementation of several of these programs. This system, the Department of Health and Human Service's Payment Management System, processes billions of

[7] Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Defense Has Made Progress, But Additional Controls Are Needed (GAO/T-AIMD-99-101, March 2, 1999).

dollars in grant payments to states and other recipient organizations for vital programs, such as Medicaid. As we testified in February 1999, the planned replacement system has encountered problems since its inception and, as a result, is still not operational.[8] Consequently, the Department of Health and Human Services decided to repair the existing system, which is not expected to be compliant until June 30, 1999.

As we reported in November 1998, many systems that support state-administered federal human services programs were at risk and much work remained to ensure continued services.[9] In February of this year, we testified that while some progress had been achieved, many states' systems were not scheduled to become compliant until the last half of 1999.[10] Accordingly, we concluded that, given these risks, business continuity and contingency planning was even more important in ensuring continuity of program operations and benefits in the event of systems failures.

In January 1999, OMB required that federal oversight agencies include the status of selected state human services systems in their quarterly reports. Specifically, OMB requested that the agencies describe actions to help ensure that federally supported, state-run programs will be able to provide services and benefits. OMB further asked that agencies report the date when each state's systems will be Year 2000 compliant. OMB's latest quarterly report, issued on March 18, 1999, summarized the information obtained by the Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Services, and Labor on how many state-level organizations reported that they were compliant or when in 1999 they planned to be compliant. According to OMB's report, for programs that had received responses from at least 80 percent of the state-level organizations, the percentage of states that reported that a program was compliant ranged from 14 percent for Medicaid Management Information Systems to 48 percent for the Women, Infants, and Children program. According to the OMB report, for five programs, the Department of Health and Human Services had not received responses from 44 percent or more of the state-level organizations.

[8] Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Readiness Status of the Department of Health and Human Services (GAO/T-AIMD-99-92, February 26, 1999).

[9] Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Readiness of State Automated Systems to Support Federal Welfare Programs (GAO/AIMD-99-28, November 6, 1998).

[10] Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Readiness of State Automated Systems That Support Federal Human Services Programs (GAO/T-AIMD-99-91, February 24, 1999).

Remaining Tasks Vital to Continuity of Federal Operations

While it is important to achieve compliance for individual mission-critical systems, realizing such compliance alone does not ensure that business functions will continue to operate through the change of century--the ultimate goal of Year 2000 efforts. Going forward, it is imperative that the focus be on the government's overall readiness to ensure continual services for the 42 high-impact programs. This can be accomplished by focusing on ensuring that related systems work together through end-to-end testing. Moreover, coordinated business continuity and contingency plans need to be developed and tested.

End-to-End Testing

The purpose of end-to-end testing is to verify that a defined set of interrelated systems, which collectively support an organizational core business area or function, will work as intended in an operational environment. In the case of the year 2000, many systems in the end-to-end chain will have been modified or replaced. As a result, the scope and complexity of testing--and its importance--are dramatically increased, as is the difficulty of isolating, identifying, and correcting problems. Our Year 2000 testing guide sets forth a structured approach to testing, including end-to-end testing.[11]

In January 1999, we testified that with the time available for end-to-end testing diminishing, OMB should consider, for the government's most critical functions, setting target dates for developing end-to-end test plans, establishing test schedules, and completing the tests.[12] This is even more critical today. On March 31, OMB and the Chair of the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion emphasized that one of the key priorities that federal agencies will be pursuing during the rest of 1999 will be cooperative end-to-end testing efforts to demonstrate the Year 2000 readiness of federal programs with states and other partners critical to the administration of those programs.

Business Continuity and Contingency Plans

Business continuity and contingency plans are essential. Without such plans, when unpredicted failures occur, agencies will not have well-defined responses and may not have enough time to develop and test alternatives.

[11]GAO/AIMD-10.1.21, November 1998.

[12]Year 2000 Computing Crisis: Readiness Improving, But Much Work Remains to Avoid Major Disruptions (GAO/T-AIMD-99-50, January 20, 1999).

Federal agencies depend on data provided by their business partners as well as on services provided by the public infrastructure (e.g., power, water, transportation, and voice and data telecommunications). One weak link anywhere in the chain of critical dependencies can cause major disruptions to business operations. Given these interdependencies, it is imperative that contingency plans be developed for all critical core business processes and supporting systems, regardless of whether these systems are owned by the agency. Accordingly, in April 1998, we recommended that the council require agencies to develop contingency plans for all critical core business processes.[13]

OMB has clarified its contingency plan instructions and, along with the Chief Information Officers Council, has adopted our business continuity and contingency planning guide.[14] In particular, on January 26, 1999, OMB called on federal agencies to identify and report on the high-level core business functions that are to be addressed in their business continuity and contingency plans, as well as to provide key milestones for development and testing of business continuity and contingency plans, in their February 1999 quarterly reports. Accordingly, in their February 1999 reports, almost all agencies listed their high-level core business functions.

Our review of the 24 major departments and agencies February 1999 quarterly reports found that business continuity and contingency planning was generally reported as being underway. However, we also found cases in which agencies (1) were in the early stages of business continuity and contingency planning, (2) did not indicate when they planned to complete and/or test their plan, or (3) did not intend to finish testing the plans until after September 1999. In January 1999, we testified that OMB could consider setting a target date, such as April 30, 1999, for the completion of business continuity and contingency plans, and require agencies to report on their progress against this milestone, so OMB had more complete information on this critical issue.[15] To provide assurance that agencies' business continuity and contingency plans will work if they are needed, we also suggested that OMB consider requiring agencies to test their business continuity strategy and set a target date, such as September 30, 1999, for the completion of this validation.

[13]GAO/AIMD-98-85, April 30, 1998.

[14]GAO/AIMD-10.1.19, August 1998.

[15]GAO/T-AIMD-99-50, January 20, 1999.

On March 31, OMB and the Chair of the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion announced that completing and testing business continuity and contingency plans as insurance against disruptions to federal service delivery and operations from Year 2000-related failures will be one of the key priorities that federal agencies will be pursuing through the rest of 1999. OMB also announced that it planned to ask agencies to submit their business continuity and contingency plans in June. In addition to this action, we would encourage OMB to implement our previous suggestion and establish a target date for the validation of these business continuity and contingency plans.

In summary, progress has been made on the Year 2000 problem, yet a great deal remains to be accomplished. In particular, complete and thorough testing is essential to provide reasonable assurance that new or modified systems process dates correctly and will not jeopardize an agency's ability to perform core business operations. Moreover, adequate business continuity and contingency plans throughout government must be successfully completed. Further, the federal government, states, and its other partners must work diligently and cooperatively so that important services are not disrupted.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I will be pleased to respond to any questions that you or other members of the Committee may have at this time.

Listing of Federal High-Impact Programs and Lead Agencies

Agency	Program
Department of Agriculture	Child Nutrition Programs
Department of Agriculture	Food Safety Inspection
Department of Agriculture	Food Stamps
Department of Agriculture	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children
Department of Commerce	Patent and trademark processing
Department of Commerce	Weather Service
Department of Defense	Military Hospitals
Department of Defense	Military Retirement
Department of Education	Student Aid
Department of Energy	Federal electric power generation and delivery
Department of Health and Human Services	Child Care
Department of Health and Human Services	Child Support Enforcement
Department of Health and Human Services	Child Welfare
Department of Health and Human Services	Disease monitoring and the ability to issue warnings
Department of Health and Human Services	Indian Health Service
Department of Health and Human Services	Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
Department of Health and Human Services	Medicaid
Department of Health and Human Services	Medicare
Department of Health and Human Services	Organ Transplants
Department of Health and Human Services	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Housing loans (Government National Mortgage Association)
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Section 8 Rental Assistance
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Public Housing
Department of Housing and Urban Development	FHA Mortgage Insurance
Department of Housing and Urban Development	Community Development Block Grants
Department of the Interior	Bureau of Indians Affairs programs
Department of Justice	Federal Prisons
Department of Justice	Immigration
Department of Labor	Unemployment Insurance
Department of State	Passport Applications and Processing
Department of Transportation	Air Traffic Control system
Department of Transportation	Maritime Search and Rescue
Department of the Treasury	Cross-border Inspection Services
Department of Veterans Affairs	Veterans' Benefits
Department of Veterans Affairs	Veterans' Health Care
Federal Emergency Management Agency	Disaster relief
Office of Personnel Management	Federal Employee Health Benefits
Office of Personnel Management	Federal Employee Life Insurance

(continued)

Attachment
Listing of Federal High-Impact Programs and Lead Agencies

Agency	Program
Office of Personnel Management	Federal Employee Retirement Benefits
Railroad Retirement Board	Retired Rail Workers Benefits
Social Security Administration	Social Security Benefits
U.S. Postal Service	Mail Service

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