

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“The SAFE Port Act: Status of Implementation One Year Later”

October 30, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee hearing entitled “The SAFE Port Act: Status of Implementation One Year Later”:

“It has been a year since the SAFE Port Act was signed into law, and we are here today to learn about the Department of Homeland Security’s implementation of this important Act.

Maritime security is of paramount importance to the United States. Ninety-five percent of the goods destined for the United States arrive at our nation’s seaports. These seaports and the men and women who work on these ports must be protected.

Unfortunately, the Department of Homeland Security is not protecting these men and women to the extent it should. The Department of Homeland Security, plagued with a lack of leadership, is allowing these men and women to remain at risk.

We owe the American people security. We owe them accountability. And most importantly, we owe them freedom from fear. We are here today to find out why the Department of Homeland Security has failed in its mission to improve the maritime security.

The Department of Homeland Security’s failure to implement the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) is a perfect example of this failure. The Department began rolling out the TWIC program, which was mandated five years ago, just two weeks ago.

Already there are glaring problems. The Department significantly underestimated the number of workers who are required to get a TWIC. The Department estimated that 30,000 workers would need to get a TWIC in the Port of Houston. According to the Port of Houston, the real number is closer to 350,000. At the Port of New York and New Jersey, the Department again underestimated the number. The Department’s estimate was 60,256. The REAL number is closer to 125,000.

The Department’s inability to successfully project the correct number of workers is compounded by the fact that the TWIC readers are years away from installation. Without the readers, a TWIC is merely a flash pass that can be fraudulently duplicated and misused. This misuse has already begun. Last week, the Coast Guard released an advisory stating that criminal elements were trying to obtain information about the TWIC program at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Five years and millions of dollars later, this program may already be compromised.

The potential compromise is shocking considering the fact that the Department has only rolled out the TWIC at one port. The Department provided a list today of its tentative rollout schedule for the rest of the ports.

As in the past, this list does not contain concrete information – it contains vague dates.

Vague dates are not good enough – our ports should be given specific information to enable them to successfully roll out the TWIC at their ports.

Unfortunately, TWIC is not the Department's only troubled program. The Department has failed to develop the container security device regulation required by the SAFE Port Act. The Department claims that the technology does not exist. It does and I have one that I would like to show to Customs and Border Protection today. This device is made by General Electric and other companies have developed their own versions. The Department's failure to develop the regulation is just another example of the Department's unwillingness or inability to follow the mandates clearly laid out by Congress.

We established these mandated because we are committed to improving our nation's maritime security. We specifically told the Department to develop a Strategic Plan to Enhance the Security of the International Supply Chain. The Department did not develop a plan; it developed yet another document that will sit on the shelf collecting dust.

Philip Spayd in an August 27, 2007 article in the Journal of Commerce sums it up best the "128-page plan would receive a high grade as a research project for a graduate school class in international logistics, but which lacks any operational grounding."

It is time for the Department to develop this operational grounding and it time for the Department to meet the mandate set by the American public – freedom from fear."

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