

NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson “Impact of Background and Security Clearances on the Transportation Workforce”

February 16, 2007 (WASHINGTON) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection Subcommittee Hearing entitled “Impact of Background and Security Clearances on the Transportation Workforce”:

“As you know, the situation before us started when the Department issued unclear voluntary guidance to transporters of hazardous materials. That guidance suggested that railroads should conduct background checks of all employees and remove those that failed the checks. This led to several firings of rail workers in the Chicago area, including Mr. Uccardi and Mr. Shead. When I learned of this situation, we sat down with Secretary Chertoff and Assistant Secretary Hawley to discuss the issue. After that meeting, the Secretary agreed with us that we are here today because of unclear guidelines.

The Secretary gave me his word that he would quickly clarify those guidelines. I want to thank Secretary Chertoff for his commitment and swift action to issue clarifying guidance that will hopefully remedy this situation.

In this post-9/11 world, I recognize the paramount importance of protecting our Nation’s critical infrastructure, such as railroads and transportation avenues. But I know we must approach homeland security with common sense. As Chairman of this Committee, I will not stand for compromising workers’ rights just because it’s convenient.

We must strike a careful balance between protecting this great Nation and protecting the civil rights of the citizens that make our Nation great. Together—meaning the Department, labor, industry, and the Committee--we must determine how to best strike this extremely important balance.

First, we must ensure due process for all workers terminated because of these newly implemented background checks. We must work to extend this protection to all transportation industries, not just rail and maritime workers. Second, we must develop clear and consistent standards for these types of checks. And, the Department must provide clear guidance for implementing background checks and security clearance standards, including protecting due process.”

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