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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

U.S. House of Representatives
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March 26, 2008

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Mr. Robert C. Tapella
Public Printer
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Washington, D.C. 20401-0001

Dear Mr. Tapella:

Under Rules X and XI of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on Energy and Commerce and its Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations are investigating the management, production, and distribution of our Nation's new e-Passports. Among other matters, this Committee has jurisdiction over interstate and foreign commerce generally and travel and tourism specifically.

The United States has begun production and implementation of a new form of passport called the e-Passport, which contains a number of new security measures not found in previous U.S. passports. For example, the new e-Passport contains a microchip embedded in the document, which holds information identical to that which is printed in the passport including the holder's full name, place of birth, passport number, expiration date, and a photo image of the traveler. These new features are designed to prevent passports from being easily altered or counterfeited. The Government Printing Office (GPO) produces the e-Passport and manages a complex production stream, which is based in the U.S. and overseas.

The Committee has received allegations that all steps of the e-Passport production chain have not been fully evaluated to ensure they are secure against known or potential threats of tampering or diversion. Because some of the most important parts for the new passports—including radio antennas, microchips, and cover stock—are apparently manufactured or assembled overseas, including production facilities in Europe, Taipei, and Thailand, questions have arisen as to whether the U.S. Government has sufficient security controls over all aspects of this supply chain.

Clearly, if any of these allegations are true, and any part of the production chain is susceptible to diversion or tampering, this would pose a significant national security threat and raise questions about the integrity of the entire e-Passport program. While the extent of the vulnerabilities to the production line is not yet clear—including vulnerabilities that relate to the assembly of component parts, printing, transport, or storage—we believe that it is critical that each of these functions be fully evaluated against all known or potential risks, particularly those related to diversion or tampering.

Accordingly, we are seeking your assistance in our review of several matters relating to the management and security of the e-Passport, including the following:

1. What components of the passport production chain are manufactured abroad, and what is the rationale for any foreign production of any components of the new e-Passport?
2. Have all interested U.S. Government parties been adequately consulted with and agreed to GPO's decision to utilize foreign production facilities, especially the U.S. State Department, the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security, and the Intelligence community?
3. Does the U.S. Government have full confidence that the production line, comprising all aspects of manufacturing of the e-Passport, is secure and free of diversion or tampering? If not, who is responsible for doing this evaluation, and what steps will be, or are being, undertaken to ensure that the evaluation is done?
4. Does the U.S. Government have a formal audit process where domestic and international production and assembly facilities are inspected to ensure they are secure and free from potential diversion or tampering? If so, who conducts this review, and are you satisfied with its scope and veracity?
5. Has GPO conducted a vulnerability assessment to understand whether certain newer components in the new e-passport, such as the embedded chips, are susceptible to tampering or counterfeiting, and if so, what steps should be undertaken to safeguard against such activities?
6. Have there been any reported cases of counterfeiting e-passports, and, if so, what are the facts relating to those cases?
7. Has GPO done adequate due diligence in vetting the various overseas contractors and if so, using what process?
8. Is GPO reaping an unwarranted profit with the production and sale of the e-Passport to the State Department, since its cost is alleged to be significantly lower than the price it

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charges the State Department? If GPO is profiting from this arrangement, how has it spent those funds, and is there an adequate accounting of said funds?

The e-Passport program is one of the most important weapons in the Administration's arsenal against terrorism, as well as in promoting the free flow of trade and commerce. It is integral to not only a number of important border security programs, but also serves as the key underpinning of our Nation's secure identity initiatives. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to working with you to ensure this program is being carried out in an effective and beneficial manner. If you have any questions about this request, please contact us or have your staff contact Christopher Knauer or John F. Sopko with the Committee staff at (202) 226-2424.

Sincerely,



John D. Dingell
Chairman



Bart Stupak
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

cc: The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable John Shimkus, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations