



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

**Transportation Worker Identification Credential:
A Status Update**

September 17, 2008 (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 “Transportation Worker Identification Credential: A Status Update”:

“It has been six years since the Transportation Worker Identification Credential was mandated into law.

The program is still far from being fully operational.

The first TWIC enrollment center opened last October and the latest enrollment center opened just this week in the Northern Mariana Islands.

In an eleven month period, DHS, through its contractor—Lockheed Martin—has enrolled 497,928 transportation workers.

They have only six more months to enroll one million additional applicants.

Like with other DHS programs, the TWIC enforcement deadline has repeatedly slipped – the first deadline for full implementation was September 24, 2008 and it is now April 15, 2009.

I would like assurances from the DHS representatives here that they intend to meet the current deadline.

From the very beginning, the Transportation Security Administration has had significant problems managing this critical homeland security program.

For instance, under the TWIC contract, the wait for applicants to reach a “real human being” on the TWIC Help-desk phone-line was supposed to be less than 3 minutes.

However, in May 2008, the Committee learned the average wait time was 20 minutes.

It took this Committee stepping in and inquiring about the Help-desk problems for this to change.

TSA also misjudged the number of people that would apply for TWICs. The new number is 1.5 million, twice the original estimate.

TSA has not deployed biometric readers to verify each TWIC card against the transportation worker who furnishes the card at our ports.

These readers are still being tested despite the fact that Congress mandated two years ago that the Department begin a reader pilot by April 13, 2007.

The Coast Guard was supposed to purchase hand-held readers while the fixed readers were tested.

To date, however, the Coast Guard has yet to purchase these readers.

As it stands now, come October 15th when workers on maritime facilities in Boston and New England become the first in the nation to be required to have TWICs, there will not be technology in place to check them.

The TWIC risks being little more than a “flash pass.” I would like to say that I am surprised, but I am not.

DHS has a history of mismanaging large programs and like with every other DHS initiative, ordinary citizens have to pay the price for bureaucratic mismanagement.

In fact, some workers are hiring lawyers to assist them in appealing initial disqualification letters. These letters are being sent out because the FBI databases that TSA relies upon are missing final disposition information about half of the time.

Other workers report traveling back and forth up to six or seven times to TWIC enrollment centers because of bureaucratic problems. Gas alone can cost them hundreds of dollars.

I do not know about you – but after the third time, I would have stopped going. Unfortunately, that is not an option as these workers need their TWICs to keep their jobs.

Clearly, the TWIC program has a long way to go until it becomes the security program that Congress envisioned and the American people deserve.”

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