

Statement of Senator Jon Kyl
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Terrorism and Homeland Security
The Passport Issuance Process: Closing the door to fraud, Part II
July 29, 2010

- I would like to thank Chairman Cardin for his work on this issue and for holding this hearing. Would also like to take a moment to thank Senator Feinstein, who couldn't be here because of scheduling conflicts, for her continued commitment to uncover the issues surrounding fraudulent passports.
- I agree wholeheartedly with Chairman Cardin, and GAO, that the State Department's continued inconsistent application of data verification and counterfeit/fraudulent detection techniques must be corrected. This information from GAO makes us all continue to wonder just how many individuals are fraudulently obtaining U.S. passports (which GAO accurately calls "the most sought after travel document in the world").
- Back in February of 2008, partially as a result of a 2007 Joint Homeland Security/FBI threat assessment (that reported that "The types of documents and identification most useful to terrorists and susceptible to fraud" include the U.S. passport), Senator Feinstein and I asked the GAO for a report on passport fraud.)
- In March of 2009, GAO reported on State's weaknesses surrounding passport issuance. Senators Cardin, Feinstein, Lieberman, and I asked in early 2010 for an update on this issue and that is what GAO will report on today.
- Mr. Chairman, there are myriad corrections State could make to correct some vulnerabilities in its passport process. Irrespective of whether State Department passport adjudicators have law enforcement authority (the lack of which the State Department describes as limiting its ability to confirm identity data), State could work more collaboratively with the Social Security Administration to ensure that accurate, appropriate, and near real-time, information about Social Security numbers is pursued by those approving passport applications.

- Additionally, the State Dept. could work more proactively (that is, collaboratively with DHS) to make sure that the Electronic Vital Events system project (project to digitize birth records) is completed and State should *always* work to confirm a birth certificate's authenticity. It is troubling that DHS was required to complete a spend plan in FY 2010 for the \$10 million in appropriations for this state consortium project and only yesterday (10 months into the fiscal year 2010) sent such a spend plan up.
- Mr. Chairman, I will follow up with more specific questions for our witnesses, but I want to make clear that the problems GAO so effectively highlights today are really indicative of overall identity theft issues we face as a nation. We need to continue to work to make sure that individuals cannot fraudulently obtain driver's licenses, passports, visas, border crossing cards, and other documents.
- I look forward to hearing the witnesses today.