

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Threat, Risk and Vulnerability: The Future of the TWIC Program***

June 18, 2013 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Threat, Risk and Vulnerability: The Future of the TWIC Program”:

“This Committee has a long history of TWIC oversight, going back almost to its inception. Since that time, DHS has made progress in standing up the program, vetting and enrolling approximately 2.5 million maritime workers.

Certainly, workers have done their part by applying for TWICs, submitting to background investigations, paying for their credentials, filing for waivers and appeals as necessary, and making multiple trips to ultimately receive their cards.

Yet, the program has long been plagued by delays, security vulnerabilities, and other problems.

These problems now have many questioning whether TWIC will ever be the transportation security program Congress envisioned when it enacted the Maritime Transportation Security Act of 2002 and the SAFE Port Act of 2006.

Just last month, the Government Accountability Office issued its latest in a series of troubling reports related to TWIC – this time on the reader pilots.

GAO concluded that the pilots were so severely flawed that they cannot be used to inform DHS' long-delayed rulemaking process for the TWIC readers.

Despite being made aware of GAO's serious concerns about the reliability of the reader pilot data and the TWIC program as a whole, Coast Guard published its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) for the TWIC readers earlier this year.

The NPRM divides ports and facilities into three risk groups, requiring only those in the highest-risk group – Group A – to install biometric readers for admittance to secure areas.

Facilities in Groups B and C can continue to allow TWICs to be used as “flash passes” with only a visual inspection required to gain access.

This means that only 5% of TWIC holders would be using their biometric credentials as Congress intended – with a biometric reader.

The remainder of TWIC holders will continue to use their card as an expensive flash pass.

Let me be clear – I am not advocating for deployment of readers at additional facilities or vessels at this time.

Rather, I believe the limited deployment of readers proposed by the rule raises some hard questions that need to be answered.

For example, what does it say about the security value of the TWIC, and the TWIC program itself, if DHS does not believe the program needs to be fully deployed at all regulated facilities?

And how can we continue requiring workers to pay for a biometric credential when, in the vast majority of cases, the full capability of that card will not be used?

To get answers to these and other vital questions, I strongly support GAO's recommendation for an assessment of the TWIC program prior to its continued deployment.

My staff has done significant stakeholder outreach on the rule, and I plan to file comments based on this outreach and our oversight work outlining my thoughts and concerns.

I look forward to a discussion today about what needs to be done to address the persistent problems facing the TWIC program.

In particular, I hope to hear from GAO in detail about their recommendations for the path forward for the program.”

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