

***Statement of Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)
Ranking Member Committee on Homeland Security***

In support of H.R. 4251, the “SMART Port Security Act”

June 26, 2012

I am pleased that the House is meeting today to consider H.R. 4251, the “SMART Port Security Act.” This bill includes a number of Democratic sponsored provisions aimed at improving our Nation’s maritime security.

Representative Loretta Sanchez authored a provision to strengthen the integrity of the TWIC program, Representative Richardson authored language to allow port operators to use their grant funds for security provided by local law enforcement, and Representative Clarke of Michigan authored a provision relating to northern border security.

H.R. 4251 also includes language modeled after a bill I introduced—H.R. 1105—to relieve the Nation’s port and transportation workers from the hassle and expense of renewing their 5-year TWIC cards, given that DHS has not done its job and fully implemented this security program.

Specifically, Section 206 of this bill will relieve current TWIC holders, the men and women who work in our ports, from being required to secure new identification cards beginning in October 2012, given that DHS has not even issued a draft rule for biometric readers.

For the full security potential of the TWIC program to be realized—there must be readers installed at the ports to match the biometric cards with the individuals presenting them.

Since 2007, over 2.1 million longshoremen, truckers, merchant mariners, and rail and vessel crew members have undergone extensive homeland security and criminal background checks and paid a \$132.50 fee to secure TWICs.

Since H.R. 4251 was considered by the Full Committee, DHS has taken positive steps to address the upcoming TWIC renewals predicament.

Specifically, DHS recently announced that starting this August, workers will be eligible for a 3-year TWIC renewal card at a discounted rate and with fewer visits to the enrollment center. While this is a positive development, more must be done.

The bill before us today allows workers to continue to use their TWICs for the next two years, while also providing an incentive for DHS to move forward on readers as soon as possible. I urge my colleagues to give it their support.

Before I yield back, I would note that my support for the “SMART Port Security Act” is rooted in not only the improvements to the TWIC program but also what it seeks to do to improve coordination and cooperation between DHS’ maritime components and strengthen procurement practices.

This bill is the result of bipartisan efforts to strengthen the security of America’s ports and waterways and ensure the Department of Homeland Security’s maritime security efforts are as effective and efficient as practicable.