

## NEWS ALERT



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

# Homeland Security Committee

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson**

### ***Full Committee Markup***

June 6, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee markup:

"I am pleased that the Committee is meeting today to mark up H.R. 4251, the "SMART Port Security Act" and the Committee's 3rd Quarter Activity Report. The "SMART Port Security Act" was favorably reported by the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security by voice vote in March and is the product of bipartisan negotiations.

I am especially pleased that the bill includes language based on legislation that I authored to relieve port and transportation workers from having to undertake the expense and hassle of renewing their Transportation Worker Identification Credentials (TWIC) starting this fall.

Over the past five years, roughly 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. During the same period, DHS has made little progress in establishing nationwide standards for biometric readers to match the biometrics of each TWIC-holder with the TWIC they present.

Unless we act, under current law, starting in October of this year, workers would be required to go through the time and expense of renewing their TWICs, even though DHS has yet to hold up its end of the bargain by deploying the companion readers. Unless readers are deployed in our ports, TWICs will essentially remain expensive flash-passes.

Section 206 of the "SMART Port Security Act"-- like my bill, H.R. 1105, the "TWIC Program Act"-- would relieve American workers from renewing their valid TWICs until the Department of Homeland Security fully-implements a final TWIC reader rule or June 30, 2014, whichever comes first.

If enacted, in all likelihood, workers would be able to continue to use their TWICs for the next two years and significant pressure would be placed on DHS to deploy the readers as soon as possible.

While I am pleased with this and the other TWIC program reforms in this bill, I am disappointed that the bill's provision authorizing the Port Security Grant Program (PSGP) through fiscal year 2014, which was included in the Subcommittee-reported version of the bill, is not in the version before us today.

I understand there is some concern on the other side of the aisle that if this language was included in the final bill, it would not be a candidate for consideration by the Full House.

As authorizers, it is both appropriate and proper for this Committee to advance measures to establish new authorizations and renew existing ones, where warranted.

Certainly, with the program's authorization ending in Fiscal Year 2013, I urge the Majority to advance legislation in a timely fashion to ensure that funding authorization for this critical program does not lapse.

However, I want to state for the record that Democrats strongly support the PSGP and will continue to advocate its reauthorization. I thank the Chairman for the bipartisan manner in which the bill has been handled and I urge my colleagues to give it their support.

We are also considering the Committee's activity report. While the consideration of some of our suggestions by the Majority is appreciated, the final product is deficient in a number of key areas. The deficiencies in this document fall into two categories.

First, it characterizes ordinary staff activities as "Committee activities." It reports often extraneous staff work-product in the same manner as officially-noticed, Member-attended Committee hearings, briefing, markups, and events. It even spotlights staff trips to DHS-sponsored expos and forums, thereby giving the impression that these outings are as important as hearings or mark-ups.

Second, the activity report characterizes certain letters, meetings, and activities as "Committee actions" when, in many cases were unknown to the Democratic Members of this Committee until the draft activity report was circulated. In reviewing the descriptions of these Majority-only activities, I am certain that had outreach been conducted to Committee Democrats, there were places where bipartisan action could have been taken.

These concerns with the activity report are not new. As you may recall, Democrats have previously raised them with respect to prior activity reports in the 112th Congress.

I am disappointed to see these deficiencies persist. The Committee Activity Report is the official record of this Committee's activities to Americans today and in future generations about the work that this Committee has taken in furtherance of its oversight plan and legislative agenda.

Yet, the report gives an accounting of how Committee resources were expended on activities squarely outside of the Committee's oversight plan and jurisdiction.

Specifically, it discusses, at length, how the Committee has addressed "secure sensitive information" by injecting itself into the WikiLeaks controversy, lawyers' activities at GITMO, and the development of a screenplay based on the killing of Osama bin Laden. There is no jurisdictional nexus between these actions and this Committee's jurisdiction.

Further, when measured against the Majority's stated legislative agenda for the 112th Congress, the activity report reflects a paucity of accomplishment. By any measure, the four major legislative goals for the 112th Congress— in no particular order — are getting legislation through the House that authorizes the Department of Homeland Security, DHS' chemical security program, DHS' cybersecurity activities, and WMD prevention and preparedness activities.

To date, comprehensive legislation in these areas have not seen action in the Full House and, with roughly 40 legislative days remaining, the prospect of progress seems to grow dimmer."

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