

July 17, 2008: Sanchez Opposes Mandate That Would Increase Costs to Airline Passengers

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SANCHEZ OPPOSES MANDATE THAT WOULD INCREASE COSTS TO AIRLINE PASSENGERS

Sanchez threatens to block DHS' proposed rule that would require airlines to collect biometric data to verify the identities of foreign passengers

Washington, D.C. - At a hearing of the Border, Maritime and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee, Representative Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), chairwoman of the subcommittee, argued against the Department of Homeland Security's proposed rule that essentially passes all costs for the collection of foreign travelers' digital fingerprints to airlines.

The biometric fingerprint system, part of the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology program, or US VISIT, was required by the 2001 USA Patriot Act and recommended by the 9/11 commission to better track when foreign visitors enter and exit the country, to ensure that visitors are who they say they are, that they are not suspected terrorists, and that they do not over stay their visas.

Sanchez underscored her strong opposition to DHS' Notice for Proposed Rulemaking that would require the airline industry to be in charge of collecting and maintaining travelers' sensitive biometric information.

"This rulemaking not only imposes an additional burden on an already stressed industry, but it will also cost the industry over 12 billion dollars to implement the program and train their employees, ultimately passing on the costs to passengers" said Sanchez.

"If you move forward with the rule, you may get blocked quickly by this body."

Last month Sanchez issued a letter to Michael Hardin, senior policy advisor for the US VISIT Program at the Department of Homeland Security, addressing four key concerns about the proposed rulemaking:

- Collecting biometric data on travelers leaving and entering this country is an inherently governmental responsibility. CBP collects the information for incoming travelers, so there is no reason to "hand off" this responsibility to the airline industry.

- This proposed rule offers no training for the 80 to 138 airlines that will be affected by this rule, so penalizing these airlines for not adequately transmitting the biometric data would be inappropriate.

- This proposed rule asks for airlines to collect and store fingerprints and digital images. DHS is asking the airline industry to store and transmit information that requires very high privacy safeguards.

- DHS should consider a combination of alternatives that adequately meets every performance standard, such as the alternative proposed by Sanchez and Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson. This alternative would require DHS, through the use of a kiosk, to collect travelers' biometrics at the TSA checkpoint and verify their departure with the airlines.

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