

September 17, 2008: Sanchez Pushes Back on New TWIC Rollout Date

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SANCHEZ PUSHES BACK ON NEW TRANSPORTATION WORKER IDENTIFICATION CREDENTIAL (TWIC) ROLLOUT DATE

'Continued set backs by the Transportation Security Administration have comprised security at our nations' maritime facilities'

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), Chairwoman of the Subcommittee of Border, Maritime and Global Counterterrorism held a hearing entitled: "Transportation Worker Identification Credential: A Status Update."

Sanchez pushed back on the Department of Homeland Security's continued delays with the TWIC program underscoring comprised security at our nation's maritime facilities, almost six years after it was first mandated under the Bush Administration. Since then the TWIC has suffered several setbacks and delayed rollout dates. This has been attributed to a number of factors including: the length and detail of the card and card reader prototype testing; the development of the information security standards for storing the biometrics and personal data on the card; inadequate management of the contract; and leadership turnover at the TSA.

Below is her opening station as prepared.

House Committee on Homeland Security

Subcommittee on Border, Maritime and Global Counterterrorism

The Honorable Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez

Hearing Entitled "Transportation Worker Identification Credential: Status Update"

September 16, 2008

Opening Statement

Good Morning,

Thank you all for attending our hearing this morning to receive an update on the progress of the transportation worker identification credential (TWIC) program roll out, managed by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

We have two great panels today that will allow us to gain an in depth view of where we stand with TWIC, with both government and industry witnesses providing testimony here today.

However, I am disappointed that TSA Administrator Hawley did not make this hearing a priority; his perspective on the current status of the TWIC roll out would have been very useful.

It is imperative that all levels of leadership at the Department of Homeland Security make this program a priority.

TWIC is a key element in ensuring that our ports are secure and that the personnel operating on them have the access they need.

In a recent report conducted by the National Maritime Security Advisory Committee, they stated "TWIC is a user-funded program; users must not be penalized for working to help TSA meet its goals."

I AGREE.

For instance, throughout our nation's ports, there are TWIC enrollees that have been part of our program for more than a year and a half.

I applaud these working men and women for taking the initiative and making the effort to enroll knowing how difficult the process can be.

However, having had to obtain a TWIC card and never once needing to actively use it on a reader has made many workers feel foolish for signing up early, especially when the mandatory enrollment date keeps getting pushed back.

And for workers who haven't enrolled yet, the constant delays only give them more incentive to put off signing up.

To put this in perspective, this program was authorized in the Maritime Transportation Security Act that became law in November of 2002.

That was almost six years ago!

And the TWIC program is still not fully rolled out at ports, much less in any other transportation modes, and we continue to see delays in the mandatory enrollment date and in the reader rollout.

More over, there have been significant technical problems in the TWIC enrollment roll out.

For example:

- The TWIC website is frequently down for maintenance

- Workers often times have to make multiple trips to the TWIC enrollment facilities. This is not acceptable, especially when repeat trips are inefficient take up valuable time.

- The TWIC disclosure form that enrollees must sign is not in multiple languages, even though a large percentage of workers may have difficulty understanding English.

When there are multiple government forms in various languages, there is no excuse for this.

These workers have a right to know exactly what they are disclosing.

I could go on with just the customer service issues of this program, but for the sake of time, I won't.

A concern I have had not only with this program, but with many programs at the Department of Homeland Security, is what is the plan for the transition to the next administration?

Tomorrow, we will once again hear about the lack of progress in the virtual border fence and those problems that will be left for a new administration.

I hope this panel today can speak about solutions for the problems that plague TWIC, and the plans for moving this program forward beyond the end of December.

I look forward to receiving your testimony and to your responses to the concerns we are raising today.

I now yield to my ranking member, Mr. Souder.

Thank you.

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