



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Assessing the State of America's Seaports

January 19, 2022

Our seaports are vitally important to trade and commerce, not only here in the United States but around the globe. Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have come to rely increasingly on our seaports. Critical medical equipment and personal protective gear passed through these ports, while consumers have shifted towards buying more goods and fewer services. These trends, coupled with the threat of COVID-19 – especially for frontline workers who are unable to work from home – pose serious challenges for our seaports.

Some of these challenges exacerbate longstanding issues – like chronic understaffing. This staffing shortage hurts workforce morale, while slowing trade and commerce and affecting seaport operations. Some ports have attempted to mitigate staffing shortages, including through the use of CBP's Reimbursable Services Program, or RSP. Through RSP, ports can reimburse CBP for additional customs, immigration, or agricultural services at ports of entry. However, this program is meant to be a temporary solution for short-term needs — it should not become a band-aid for systematic issues.

CBP also offers the voluntary Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) program to the trade community. This program helps expedite trade while securing the supply chain, benefiting CBP and participants. However, there may be a need to expand and improve this program. I am also concerned about the cybersecurity of our seaports.

Ports around the world have been the victim of cyber-attacks during the pandemic – including Houston last summer. While the Port of Houston was able to defend against that attack, attacks on the maritime and logistics industry are increasing. A successful cyber-attack on a major seaport could have devastating implications. I understand that witnesses here today have taken action to protect against this threat, and I look forward to hearing their perspectives on how the federal government can support these efforts.

I am also eager to hear from our witness today on their suggestion for addressing the staffing, security, and congestion challenges facing our seaports today amidst the pandemic, as well as into the future.

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