



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Evaluating High-Risk Security Vulnerabilities at our Nation's Ports

May 10, 2023

Seaports are key drivers of the U.S. economy and keeping them secure is vital to the American way of life. We must ensure that the Department of Homeland Security and its component agencies continue to secure U.S. ports against evolving threats, in coordination with port owners and operators and other stakeholders.

In 2018, activities at U.S. ports supported more than 31 million U.S. jobs and generated \$5.4 trillion of total economic value, representing 26 percent of the Nation's economy. As we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic, any disruptions or delays in operations at ports are felt throughout society. Successful attacks against ports and the maritime transportation system can have ripple effects throughout our economy and drastic impacts to our national security. Indeed, we have seen the impact of such attacks in the past.

In 2018, for example, a cyber attack against Danish shipping company A.P. Moller-Maersk led to a shutdown of the Port of Los Angeles' largest cargo terminal along with several others around the world. The attack affected global shipping operations for weeks and cost Maersk as much as \$300 million. Cyber threat actors continue to grow more sophisticated, and our security agencies must continue to work to stay a step ahead.

We must ensure the U.S. Coast Guard and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency are appropriately resourced and develop the necessary expertise to counter the latest cyber threats, including by issuing timely, actionable guidance and information to port owners and operators. The Coast Guard and CISA's efforts must be guided by a clear-eyed evaluation of the most pressing threats to the maritime industry based on the latest intelligence — not politics.

Additionally, DHS security programs must continue to prioritize the ability of ports to operate efficiently day in and day out. For example, the Transportation Security Administration must continue to evolve its processes for workers to obtain Transportation Worker Identification Credentials in a timely manner. Workers rely on obtaining TWIC cards for their livelihood, and delays in vetting and processing applications can have drastic impacts on not just individual workers but on ports that need to hire staff quickly in response to market demands. TSA's rollout last August of an option for TWIC holders to renew their cards online is a major step in the right direction.

The Department must continue to prioritize its efforts to protect the free flow of commerce through our Nation's ports given their significance to our national interest. I look forward to continuing this Committee's oversight of DHS's port security efforts.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978