



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

The MODERN Security Credentials Act

May 4, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security subcommittee hearing on the “The MODERN Security Credentials Act”:

“At a time when our economy is still recovering, unemployment remains stubbornly high, and public anxiety over TSA’s screening practices is at an all-time high, it is interesting to note that the bill we are considering today, at our first legislative hearing this Congress, addresses none of these concerns. Instead, the draft bill issues a sweeping authorization for TSA to change the transportation worker credentialing process.

Without question, TSA’s credentialing process deserves our attention, but in a way that provides enhanced security, fosters efficiency and lessens, not increases, the burden placed on workers.

That is why I recently introduced H.R. 1105, the “Transitioning With an Improved Credential Program Act.” Unlike the legislation before us today, my bill would provide certainty to transportation workers and stakeholders alike by tackling a well-documented challenge within the TWIC program.

I reviewed the bill and found myself asking what exactly is “modern” about the “MODERN Security Credentials Act”?

It would establish a two-tiered system that permits airports to deny a worker a SIDA badge, even after successfully going through the TSA waiver process. Is that modern?

It does nothing to move us closer to the adoption of biometric standards for credentials. Is that modern?

It alters the list of disqualifying crimes for transportation workers seeking security credentials without justification for the relevance of the crimes. Is that modern?

As a Committee, we frequently question DHS and its components on lessons learned from previous experiences and how they will be used to inform future actions. Apparently, we do not intend to heed our own advice.

As some of you will recall, it was not that long ago that TSA over-reached in a rulemaking for security in general aviation. Ultimately, Congress was compelled to intervene and reign in TSA.

None of us want a repeat of that experience. Further, even without the passage of this bill, TSA has the authority to issue a rulemaking on credentialing. In fact, we have learned that there is a proposal pending at OMB.

Would we not risk short-circuiting the OMB vetting process by interceding with this bill and granting TSA a blanket go-ahead?

Outreach to industry stakeholders and workers is critical to ensuring that the potential impact of consolidating fees or vetting processes or even credentialing programs are well understood.

Indeed, in prepared testimony, our witness representing the Airports Council International states that the bill includes “conflicting requirements that would cause unintended and unnecessary operational

challenges, and impose additional cost for airports.”

I think it is a safe bet that any additional cost incurred because of these new regulations will be passed on to transportation workers and their employers. What will they get for those additional fees? More security? More efficiency?

That said, I support the second half of the bill—the so-called Safe Trucker legislation—which the House approved as part of the 2009 TSA Authorization bill. It takes a commonsense approach to consolidation.

Let me close by expressing my concern about the process surrounding this hearing. I applaud the witnesses, or at least most of them, on their timely submission of prepared remarks. This was a serious feat, given that the Majority did not circulate draft text to all Subcommittee Members and witnesses in advance of the hearing.”

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