

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Visa Security and Overstays: How Secure is America?***

May 21, 2013 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border and Maritime Security subcommittee hearing entitled “Visa Security and Overstays: How Secure is America?”:

“Much of the focus in the current immigration reform and border security debate is on America’s southwest border, but an estimated 40 percent of individuals unlawfully present in the U.S. entered this country legally and overstayed.

To spend billions on shoring up security along our southwest border without addressing visa overstays would be somewhat like putting an expensive alarm system in your home but leaving the front door wide open.

Among those millions of people who have overstayed may be a handful who seek to do us harm, making this not only an immigration control matter, but a homeland security concern as well.

Yet more than a decade after September 11, 2001, DHS is still without a biometric entry-exit system to positively identify those who failed to depart this country as they were supposed to.

I held hearings on the overstay issue as Chairman of the Committee, and participated in Subcommittee hearings on the topic last Congress.

I hope to hear from our witnesses today about what progress has been made since that time.

One development I believe should be a step in the right direction is the recent transfer of certain overstay-related functions from US-VISIT, now known as the Office of Biometric Identity Management (OBIM), to ICE and CBP.

I have long supported moving US-VISIT’s overstay analysis and entry-exit functions to the components within DHS most closely aligned with those operations. The transfer of responsibilities to ICE and CBP should bring efficiencies, and hopefully more progress toward implementing the mandated biometric exit system.

I look forward to hearing about how this transition is going, what plans ICE and CBP have to make progress on their new responsibilities, and what functions OBIM will serve going forward.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to express my concern about a recent incident related to the overstay issue.

Recently, three friends of the younger brother in the Boston bombings were arrested for their actions in the wake of the Boston incident.

One of the friends, a national of Kazhakstan, was able to re-enter the U.S. earlier this year despite not having a valid Form I-20.

This is a form a school sends foreign students showing they have been admitted for a course of study and must be provided to the State Department when the student applies for his or her student visa.

These students and their Form I-20s are tracked in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) database known as the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

In this case, the individual's I-20 was apparently terminated by his university for academic reasons, but he was subsequently able to re-enter the U.S. on January 20, 2013, on his still-valid student visa and the terminated Form I-20.

The primary system CBP uses at ports of entry, TECS, does not automatically interact with SEVIS, so when the individual arrived in the U.S., the CBP officer was unaware his I-20 was terminated and admitted him to the country.

It is my understanding that CBP had put stopgap measures in place to prevent a repeat of this incident, and that a work-around was being implemented to address the lack of database interoperability between SEVIS and TECS going forward.

However, this incident underscores that more than a decade after the creation of DHS, and despite multiple terrorist travel-related incidents in that time, we still face serious challenges regarding information sharing between and among relevant databases operated by DHS, the State Department, and the Justice Department.

I hope our witnesses can discuss whether their efforts to address these gaps have been completed, and what other efforts are ongoing to ensure that DHS databases are modernized."

# # #

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Please contact Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

**United States House of Representatives**  
Committee on Homeland Security  
H2-117, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515  
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499  
<http://chsdemocrats.house.gov>