



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

Visa Overstays: A Gap in the Nation's Border Security

Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security

May 23, 2017

This Committee has long conducted oversight of DHS's activities aimed at addressing overstays and deploying a biometric entry-exit system to identify those who do not depart this country at the appropriate time.

Deploying such a system was a key recommendation of the 9/11 Commission and has been mandated repeatedly on a bi-partisan basis by Congress.

The previous Administration's commitment to deploying a biometric exit system at our Nation's busiest airports starting in 2018, coupled with Congress authorizing up to \$1 billion over the next decade to pay for such a system, was an essential step towards this goal.

I look forward to hearing from our Customs and Border Protection and DHS Office of Policy witnesses today about their progress toward deploying biometric exit and whether they remain committed to the 2018 timeline. As part of the effort to address overstays, the Department released its first Entry/Exit Overstay Report in January 2016.

The 2016 report concluded that over 527,000 individuals, or approximately 1 percent visitors entering the U.S. by air, overstayed in fiscal year 2015.

While only a small fraction of these visitors pose a security or safety concern, it is worth noting this overstay figure far exceeds the approximately 331,000 individuals apprehended entering the U.S. along the southern border over the same time period.

President Trump is so busy trying to build his "big, beautiful wall" in a misguided attempt to curb illegal immigration, I am concerned his Administration will lose focus on dealing with those who come into the U.S. on a visa, through the proverbial front door, and remain in this country.

This Committee is very interested in the fiscal year 2016 overstay report, released just yesterday, and what lessons can be learned about how to address overstays who may pose a security concern.

Though the scope of this most recent report was broader in that it included several more nonimmigrant visas categories, it would appear that the result is not significantly different from last year's analysis.

Of the 50.4 million air and sea nonimmigrant visitors who were expected to depart in fiscal year 2016, 739,478 individuals were suspected to have overstayed, which amounts to a 1.47 percent overstay rate.

I hope to hear more about a recent DHS Office of Inspector General report that concluded DHS IT systems do not effectively support ICE visa tracking operations, requiring ICE personnel responsible for investigating overstays to manually piece together information from over a dozen systems and databases throughout the Department.

Identifying and responding to overstays who may pose a security concern is a difficult enough task without technology being an impediment.

Moreover, the OIG argues that the information used by DHS to produce its annual report to Congress may underestimate the total number and rate of visa overstays in the country.

I want to thank the Inspector General for participating in today's hearing to speak to this technology concern, which is pervasive across the Department, and to share recommendations on how DHS can improve its overstay estimates.

I also hope to hear from our Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) witness about their ongoing efforts, using existing systems, to identify and address overstays who pose a national security or public safety concern.

The Department, with support from Congress, has taken unprecedented measures in recent years to secure the borders between the ports of entry.

Rather than spend billions on a border wall boondoggle, DHS must redouble its efforts to address those who enter America legally and overstay, particularly when they pose a security concern.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

