



COMMITTEE ON  
**HOMELAND  
SECURITY**  
DEMOCRATS

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, *Ranking member*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

***Immigration Benefits Vetting: Examining Critical Weaknesses in  
USCIS Systems***

**Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency**

**March 16, 2017**

Too often, this Subcommittee convenes to discuss failures in IT modernization at the Department of Homeland Security.

At some point, the Department must hold itself to a higher standard of performance and fix its inability to accurately deliver a program as promised, on time and on budget.

Even today, the Department feels the need to not hold itself accountable.

The Department chose not to send the USCIS Chief Information Officer, the exact individual responsible for IT functions at the component, to answer important questions on the status of IT at USCIS.

It is my understanding that the Subcommittee just learned of this decision this past Friday.

Instead, representing USCIS today is Acting Director Lori Scialabba, who has provided her resignation to the Department.

For over a decade, DHS has made attempts to modernize its paper-based immigration process by developing an online tool that allows applicants to apply and track their status online, known as the Transformation Program.

Unfortunately, the Program has experienced a range of issues, including increased costs, system outages, and application processing errors.

As such, the Transformation Program has been the subject of countless GAO reports, Inspector General investigations, and even most recently, an Inspector General management alert.

The Transformation Program's main component, ELIS, has been suspended due to system deficiencies, including an error that resulted in 175 cases moving forward for processing despite incomplete background and security checks.

These are major errors that cannot be overlooked or avoided, especially at a time when this Administration is forcing a range of changes in policies and priorities for USCIS.

For instance, the President wants to shift our Nation's immigration system from family reunification and admitting skilled workers and protecting refugees to a merit based approach.

The President has suspended premium processing of H-1B visas, which offers a shorter wait time for foreign workers in a range of industries.

The President, through his proposed "Muslim Ban," looks to prohibit individuals from six majority Muslim nations from receiving visas to travel to the United States.

Also, the President's "Muslim Ban" would suspend refugee processing, causing America to turn its back on the most vulnerable.

Thankfully, yesterday evening and this morning two Federal judges ruled to freeze the Executive Order, stating the new order failed to pass legal muster at this stage.

Interestingly, while the President tries to suspend visas to entire populations and attempts to stifle our economy by prohibiting foreign workers from getting visas quickly, companies that bear his name still seek visas for seasonal, low skilled workers.

Moreover, this Administration's misplaced budgetary priorities focus on building a wall along the Southwest Border and heightened immigration enforcement and detention.

Prioritizing a wall, which does not keep us more safe and secure, will undoubtedly divert resources away from IT at the Department.

I am concerned that this Administration's policies will result in reduced fees that are essential to funding USCIS operations. Therefore, keeping the Transformation Program on a lifeline.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on how this Administration's ill-advised policies will ultimately affect USCIS.

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