

## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member J. Luis Correa (D-CA)**

### **Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency**

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

Thursday, March 16, 2017

President Trump is engaged in an active campaign to flip the paradigm for our Nation's immigration system from family reunification, admitting skilled workers, protecting refugees, and promoting diversity to a merit-based approach where only individuals deemed as having potential to contribute to our economy would be admitted.

Given where this President wants to take immigration, I was surprised and disappointed by the announcement earlier this month by the Trump Administration that it was suspending premium processing of H-1B visas.

I look forward to engaging with Ms. Scialabba about this decision to no longer offer applicants the option of shorter wait times for a program that helps bring in skilled foreign workers in a range of industries, from technology to health care.

I also look forward to engaging the witnesses on the implementation of the proposed "Muslim Ban" Executive Order.

The "Muslim Ban," which was slated to begin today, was blocked by two Federal judges hours before its commencement.

Under the ban, not only are individuals from six majority Muslim nations prohibited from receiving visas to travel to the United States, but also all refugee processing is suspended.

Given the critical role that USCIS plays in refugee processing, which includes a vetting process that is arguably the most security forward in the world—I look forward to engaging with Ms. Scialabba on the prospect of a refugee moratorium.

It is not lost on me that even as the President looks to suspend visas to entire populations of people to keep his "Muslim Ban" campaign promise and promotes the idea that our immigration system should be merit-based only, the company that bears his name is seeking visas for seasonal low-skilled foreign workers from USCIS.

I am concerned that the President's forthcoming budget, which is expected to prioritize building a border wall on the Southwest border and covering immigration enforcement and detention costs for millions of undocumented immigrants will give USCIS—a largely fee based agency—a short shrift.

In 2006, USCIS initiated efforts to modernize its paper-based immigration processing system via the Transformation Program.

The Transformation Program has been plagued with issues, including implementation schedule delays, system user errors, and increased costs due to strategy changes.

A component of the Transformation Program, the Electronic Immigration System better known as ELIS, is the subject of much concern, after it was discovered by the DHS Inspector General that approximately 19,000 Green Cards had been issued in error, primarily due to technical and functional deficiencies.

As a result, Inspector General Roth has advised USCIS to use its legacy system, not ELIS, until certain improvements and requirements have been met.

In numerous reports, both the Government Accountability Office and the Inspector General have stated that USCIS needs better management, resources, and planning to get this Program on track.

Due to the nature and importance of this Program, it is imperative that the Department prioritizes and improves the Transformation Program.

I am concerned that policy changes advanced by this Administration will result in reduced fees—fees that are essential to funding USCIS operation and cover its critical IT modernization efforts.

The Department cannot achieve long needed IT enhancement without necessary resources. In fact, in its High Risk Update released last month, GAO acknowledged that DHS needs to “make additional progress in allocating resources in certain areas, such as staffing for acquisition and information technology positions.”

This progress GAO speaks of simply cannot be accomplished when personnel are unavailable due to hiring freezes and resources are diverted for building walls.

Further, USCIS uses carryover funds from premium processing fees to pay for the Transformation Program.

These resources will undoubtedly be less given the suspension of H-1B premium processing.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today an updated status on the Transformation Program and the improvements that are needed to remedy this Program, particularly as it relates to better management and necessary resources.