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The Honorable Loretta Sanchez
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Border, Maritime and Global Counterterrorism
Hearing on "US-VISIT Exit: Closing Gaps in our Security"

Opening Statement

Good Afternoon.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today for this Subcommittee hearing on "US-VISIT Exit: Closing Gaps in our Security"

The United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology or US-VISIT program was created in 2003 to meet the multiple Congressional mandates dating back to 1996 that required an automated entry-exit data system to track foreign nationals entering the United States and to detect individuals that over stay their visas.

The 9/11 Commission stated that "completing a biometrics-based entry-exit system is an essential investment in our national security."

This point is illustrated by the fact that seven terrorists that committed crimes between 1993 and 2001, including four of the 9/11 terrorists, were illegally in the United States after overstaying their visas.

Unfortunately, four years after the creation of US-VISIT, the exit component has not been implemented.

I understand that the Department of Homeland Security is starting to talk about implementing the US-VISIT exit component for air travel.

However, Congress has yet to see detailed plans for this roll out, and there are significant concerns about the degree of consultation between the Department and the airlines in designing this critical exit component.

I would urge the Department to review the recent Committee on Homeland Security, Majority staff report, "America's Unfinished Welcome Mat: US-VISIT a Decade Later"

This report highlights the legislative mandates and ongoing challenges US-VISIT has faced in implementing a biometric entry-exit system.

In addition, this report and many reports by the Government Accountability Office make recommendations for improving the operation and implementation of US-VISIT's biometric entry-exit system at air, sea, and land ports.

We need to ensure that the exit component is implemented in an efficient manner that complies with the recommendations in these reports, and minimizes the negative impact on international travel and commerce.

I am looking forward to an interesting discussion about the future of US-VISIT's exit component.

I'd like to thank Ranking Member Souder for his interest in this critical security program, and I look forward to working with him on this important issue.

