

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“Frequent Traveler Programs: Balancing Security and Commerce at our Land Borders”

July 26, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee hearing entitled “Frequent Traveler Programs: Balancing Security and Commerce at our Land Borders”:

“Trusted traveler programs like NEXUS, SENTRI, and FAST offer expedited processing for frequent travelers willing to go undergo the required pre-screening process. Expediting low-risk individuals through our ports of entry facilitates legitimate cross-border trade and travel, which is the lifeblood of border communities and vital to our nation’s economy. By identifying low-risk travelers, trusted traveler programs also allow Customs and Border Protection personnel to give greater scrutiny to the general population of travelers at our borders. NEXUS, SENTRI, and FAST are an excellent example of how the Department of Homeland Security and the public can work in partnership for their mutual benefit.

These programs are not without potential concerns, however. Due to increased enrollment, there are often more trusted traveler program participants than Customs and Border Protection officers are able to process in an expedited way. At peak crossing times, dedicated commuter lanes may be just as long as regular lanes, which serves as a disincentive for people to apply for these programs. In some cases, backups are due to a lack of space or physical infrastructure necessary to add additional trusted traveler lanes to ports of entry.

In other instances, there is a shortage of personnel required to open or expand the operating hours of existing lanes. With the Department of Homeland Security’s recent announcement that trusted traveler program cards will be accepted for purposes of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, we can expect that enrollment in NEXUS, SENTRI, and FAST will only increase. The Department needs to be prepared for a possible surge in applications, and take appropriate measures to alleviate congestion in lanes dedicated to trusted traveler programs.

In addition to capacity issues, ensuring the security of these programs is an ongoing concern. Trusted traveler programs offer an attractive option for bad actors to use ports of entry as a means of smuggling illegal aliens, drugs, or dangerous materials into the country, due to the reduced scrutiny participants receive.

As we improve border security between the ports of entry by hiring more Border Patrol agents and constructing additional border security infrastructure, the incentive to use ports of entry for smuggling will only increase. It is imperative that the Department do everything possible to address these security concerns, while still ensuring that the programs function as intended.”

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