

*Opening Statement, as prepared  
Chairwoman Loretta Sanchez (D-CA)  
Subcommittee on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism  
Committee on Homeland Security  
“Implementing the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative  
at Land and Sea Ports: Are We Ready?”  
May 7, 2009*

Today the subcommittee will receive testimony on the current status of the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative or WHTI at our land and sea ports.

We have two great panels this morning that will allow us to hear from the government officials responsible for the implementation of WHTI as well as representatives from industry groups who will speak about how implementation will affect their respective industries.

I look forward to receiving your testimony and having an open dialogue as you answer Members' questions. The goal of WHTI is to strengthen border security while facilitating entry for U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign visitors.

Having an efficient and operable passport card program created by WHTI will help the United States ensure those who enter our country, are who they say they are.

With that said, residents of border communities, who for years have needed nothing more than an oral declaration of their citizenship to cross the border, will have to adapt to new procedures when they cross the border to see family and friends.

I have had concerns about whether the outreach to the local communities along the southern and northern borders has been adequate. During the implementation of the air travel portion of WHTI we saw how a lack of public outreach can create substantial confusion. For these reasons, a few years ago I supported the provision to delay the implementation of WHTI at land and sea ports until June 1<sup>st</sup> 2009.

I am looking forward to learning more about the outreach efforts that the Departments of Homeland Security and State are engaged in leading up to the June 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. Also, I would like to know if these departments are anticipating a large surge in passport or pass card applications before the deadline and what the contingency plans are for a potential application surge.

In addition, I would like to know if your departments have adequate staff and application centers along the border for continuing increases in applications after the deadline. Ensuring that the local communities on our borders simply know they need a card now is a positive step, but I believe that having continuing resources beyond the June 1<sup>st</sup> deadline is key to the successful implementation of WHTI.

Beyond the issue of public outreach to local communities, there are also concerns about what type of impact this program may have on travel and commerce. I clearly understand and support the security benefits of requiring travelers to have more secure identity documents.

However, particularly in this economy, it is imperative that DHS and State continue to work to ensure that undue delays do not disrupt the movement of goods and people to and from the United States.

Given that Canada is our number one trading partner and Mexico is number three, disruptions and delays at our borders will have a chilling effect on the movement of trade and commerce into the United States. I am hopeful that this implementation goes smoothly and without incident but as Chairwoman of this Subcommittee I would like an update on these and other concerns that I have seen raised throughout the implementation of WHTI.