

**TESTIMONY OF
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**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER, MARITIME, AND GLOBAL
COUNTERTERRORISM**

***“IMPLEMENTING THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE TRAVEL INITIATIVE
AT LAND AND SEA PORTS: ARE WE READY?”***

Thursday, May 7, 2009

10:00 a.m.

311 Cannon House Office Building

Chairwoman Sanchez, Ranking Member Souder, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) and the role of the State Department in providing American citizens with reliable, secure passports and passport cards to prepare them for the final phase of WHTI implementation at land and sea ports on June 1.

The goals of WHTI are to strengthen border security and facilitate entry into the United States for U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign travelers. We have worked closely with the Department of Homeland Security, especially U.S. Customs and Border Protection, to ensure that we meet both these goals. On June 1, we will complete a four-year effort set in motion by the passage of the Intelligence Reform

and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. Under that legislation, the Departments of Homeland Security and State were charged with developing and implementing a plan to require travelers, U.S. citizens and foreign nationals alike, to present a passport or other secure document denoting identity and citizenship when entering the United States.

Since the WHTI program was announced in 2005, eligible U.S. citizens have been issued passports in record numbers. In July 2008, we began issuing passport cards, which are specifically designed to work with the new systems U.S. Customs and Border Protection has installed at the land borders to facilitate identification and inspection of travelers. We issued the millionth card in April and demand for the passport card is rising. In April, we received more than 40,000 applications each week, more than double the numbers seen in October. Our workload indicates that Americans are aware of the new document requirements under WHTI and are coming into compliance with them. In FY 2007, the Department issued 18.4 million passports – a 50 percent increase over FY 2006 and an 80 percent increase over FY 2005. In FY 2008, we issued 16.2 million passports, slightly down from the 2007 high. In FY 2009, we believe we are on track to issue slightly fewer than in the previous year.

Despite a drop in demand in the current fiscal year, the percentage of Americans holding passports continues to rise. New passports are being issued in greater numbers than old passports are expiring. More than 92 million Americans, 30 percent of the total U.S. population, now hold a passport or passport card. When this figure is adjusted to reflect an estimate of the U.S. citizen population as opposed to general population, we believe the figure would be closer to 33 percent. WHTI has stimulated a fundamental shift in the number of Americans who are

documented with passports. We are firmly on track to issue more passports this decade than in the two previous decades combined.

Increasing Passport Production Capacity

In response to the unprecedented demand seen in FY 2007 and the elevated baseline for demand established in the past few years, the Department has increased its passport issuing capacity by 95 percent since FY 2007. As a result of this substantial increase in processing and production capacity, we are maintaining the service levels listed on our website; we are currently processing routine passport applications within four-to-six weeks and expedited applications within two weeks. We are prepared to meet demand greater than the 18.4 million passports issued in FY 2007. Despite the recent economic downturn, which we believe has been a significant factor in lowering current year demand, we remain prepared to handle an increase if circumstances change.

The Department has implemented a long-term strategy to increase staffing levels and infrastructure necessary to meet the higher demand for passports stimulated by WHTI. We hired hundreds of additional passport adjudicators and support staff. The Department maintains a reserve corps of passport adjudicators to supplement our full-time Passport Services staff. This gives us the ability to react quickly to demand surges. We have systems in place to quickly augment the adjudication workforce and to distribute passport processing workload among our facilities.

The Arkansas Passport Center (APC) opened in Hot Springs in 2007 and was a key addition to our passport facilities. APC is a departure from our other passport

centers, which have production and adjudication resources, in that it focuses solely on printing and mailing passports. It has the capacity to print 10 million travel documents per year. The centralization of passport printing and mailing frees up space and personnel at our existing passport agencies, allowing them to focus on the critical areas of customer service and adjudication. Using the Arkansas Passport Center as a model, we opened a second printing and mailing facility in Tucson in May of 2008. This facility, like the one in Arkansas, will have the capacity to print more than 10 million travel documents per year. The Tucson center gives us redundant capabilities that substantially improve our passport production systems.

Expanding Passport Acceptance Facilities

One of the Department's key objectives is to ensure that passport services are provided in a secure, efficient, and courteous manner. Our services need to be easily accessible in order to make our application process as convenient as possible for citizens. Currently, citizens can apply for a passport at more than 9,400 passport acceptance facilities at post offices, clerks of court, and other government offices nationwide. The vast majority of passport applications are submitted via a designated acceptance facility or mailed directly to us.

We have heard the concerns of border residents, and maintain an extensive network of acceptance facilities along the northern and southern border regions. There are currently 301 acceptance facilities located within 25 miles of the U.S.-Canada border and 128 acceptance facilities located within 25 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border. Since the end of calendar year 2006, we increased the total

number of facilities within 25 miles of the Northern border by five percent and the total number of facilities within 25 miles of the Southern border by 15 percent.

Our largest acceptance agent partner, the United States Postal Service (USPS), has held several successful passport acceptance events in border regions around the country. These “Passport Fairs” help meet high customer demand for passports in underserved areas. The USPS plans more of these passport acceptance events leading up to the June 1, 2009, implementation date.

Passport Agencies

The Department plans to officially open three new Passport Agencies in Detroit, Dallas, Minneapolis, in 2009 to serve border communities readying themselves for WHTI land and sea rule requirements. I am pleased to inform the Committee that the Detroit ribbon cutting is to be held next week, on May 11th, and the others will follow shortly. These new agencies will provide expedited service to citizens with imminent travel plans, and will have the capability to issue passport books and cards on-site to qualifying applicants. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provided the Department with funding to construct additional passport facilities, which will enable us to expand our operations further over the next two years to provide services in more locations.

The Department evaluates several criteria to determine the location of new passport agencies, including accessibility, distance from an existing passport agency/center, volume of current passport applicants, service and volume of international and domestic departures, and population trends.

We took action to expand our existing agencies along the northern border in Seattle and Chicago, and are doubling the size and adjudication capacity of the National Passport Center in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Along the southern border, we are expanding our facilities in Houston, Miami, and New Orleans.

Passport Card

We began full production of a wallet-sized passport card in July 2008, in response to the desire expressed by American citizens who live near the land borders for a more portable and less expensive document than the traditional passport book. The passport card is designed for the specific needs of border resident communities and is not a globally interoperable travel document like a traditional passport book.

The passport card will facilitate entry and expedite document processing at U.S. land and sea ports-of-entry when arriving from Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean region, and Bermuda. The card was designed and priced specifically as a limited-use passport that works with the radio frequency ID architecture for WHTI documents found only at the land borders of the United States. By regulation, it may not be used for international air travel. It does constitute primary proof of U.S. citizenship and is adjudicated to the same exacting standards as passport books.

The card has the same validity period as a passport book: 10 years for an adult, and five years for children 15 and younger. First-time adult applicants pay \$45 for

their cards, and cards for children cost \$35. Adults who already have a passport book may apply for the card as a passport renewal and pay only \$20 (no execution fee required). (Children 15 and younger are required to appear before an acceptance agent and therefore must always pay the execution fee.)

To meet the operational needs of the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and to facilitate document processing at U.S. ports-of-entry, the passport card uses vicinity-read radio frequency identification technology (RFID). The vicinity-read RFID chip in the passport card contains no personal information; it has only a reference number that points to a stored record in a secure DHS database. This reference number does not appear on the face of the card and is not used for any official record keeping purpose. RFID readers mounted at the side of the traffic lane at ports of entry allow Customs and Border Protection officers to pull up the database records of card holders as they roll up to the inspection booth, facilitating inspection and entry of legitimate travelers. The cards are issued with a protective "attenuation" sleeve for storage which prevents reading of the card when not in use; the signal from any RFID reader is blocked while the card is kept in its sleeve.

This card is the result of an inter-agency effort to produce a durable, secure, and tamper-resistant card for the American public, using state of the art laser engraving and security features. To ensure durability for the ten-year validity period, we chose to make the card of a sturdy polycarbonate composite material rather than the standard plastic used for ID and credit cards. The Department has benefited from the collaborative efforts of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Sandia National Labs, the DHS Forensics Document Lab (FDL), and, of course, colleagues at CBP. To ensure the durability and integrity of

the card, the Department subjected the test cards to a full battery of durability and chemical testing at Sandia National Labs in accordance with guidance from NIST. In consultation with the DHS/FDL, the card is designed with multiple layers of overt, covert and forensic security features to guard against tampering and counterfeiting and to provide easy visual verification to CBP officers.

Public Outreach

Public outreach is the key to successful implementation of WHTI. To better prepare American travelers for the June 1, 2009, implementation date, the Department has contracted with a marketing firm and launched an outreach campaign providing information to Americans about WHTI requirements, the new passport card, the differences between the card and the traditional book, and encouraging them to apply for their documents early.

We are in the final stages of full WHTI implementation. Working together, the Department of State and DHS are in the final phase of our concentrated public education efforts utilizing targeted advertising with local media in areas with high populations of persons who use the land borders. Over the past year there has been significant media coverage of WHTI across the country, at the national level and in the critical border states. The Department of State has reached out across the country at events ranging from travel shows to naturalization ceremonies. We have joined with CBP at events on the border as the new WHTI infrastructure has been rolled out. Our own paid advertising has complemented the DHS media campaign with billboards, radio spots, e-mail blasts and web banners aimed specifically at border communities. Our passport agencies, along with the

numerous passport acceptance facilities in every corner of the United States, have made a tremendous effort to be out in their regions, especially along our border. We will continue to reach out to our customers and neighbors with passport fairs, press releases, and visits to their post offices, town halls, and libraries.

Reaching Target Demographics

We have seen several trends that indicate our combined efforts in increasing production capacity, adding acceptance facilities and agencies, and outreach are reaching many of our key target demographics. Passport card applications are increasing. Passport and passport card applications tend to be higher in border states than in non-border states. This is true for both the northern and southern borders.

Conclusion

We understand that security and efficiency at our borders are essential to the national security and economic well being of the United States, and of our neighbors to the north and south. The economic well being and general welfare of border communities depend on the free flow of people and goods. As we have stated since announcing WHTI four years ago, we are committed to implementing WHTI in a thoughtful manner that facilitates trade, travel, and tourism while enhancing our national security. We believe we are well positioned to meet current passport demand, and we have substantially augmented our capacity in order to meet future growth. We have worked closely with the Department of

Homeland Security and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to inform the American public of the upcoming WHTI deadline and to give traveling U.S. citizens the documents they will need to comply with the new WHTI requirements.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.