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## Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

### Implementing the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative at Land and Sea Ports: Are We Ready?

May 7, 2008 (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 *Implementing the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative at Land and Sea Ports: Are We Ready?*:

“On June 1, 2009, just a few weeks from today, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative will take effect. For the first time in our history, every person entering the U.S. through a land or sea port of entry will need to show proper documentation.

This day has been a long time coming. Just a couple of years ago, Congress was forced to delay implementation of WHTI because, simply put, the Departments of Homeland Security and State were not prepared.

So, we are here today with one simple question: Are we ready? This Committee, and the nation as a whole, hopes you can answer with a resounding “YES” because much is at stake.

On a typical day, Customs and Border Protection processes more than 1.1 million international travelers into the United States at land, air and sea ports. Among the overwhelming majority of legitimate travelers, CBP is charged with identifying and interdicting those who may seek to enter the U.S. to do us harm.

The documents required under WHTI are an important part of assisting CBP officers in that vital effort. The program also fulfills an important 9/11 Commission recommendation regarding document security at our borders.

At the same time, it is important to remember that cross-border travel and trade is essential to border communities and our nation’s economy. In these tough economic times, we must ensure that WHTI is implemented efficiently and effectively to minimize any unnecessary delays at our ports of entry.

To this end, I look forward to hearing from our government witnesses about how they have: Educated travelers about the upcoming deadline; trained officers on the new document requirements and procedures; ramped up staffing; issued WHTI-compliant documents like passports and passport cards; and deployed new document readers at ports of entry.

I also look forward to hearing from our private sector witnesses about how we can ensure that the June 1 implementation goes as smoothly as possible. From border violence to the H1N1 flu outbreak to new rules for crossing our borders, America’s border security challenges are constantly evolving.

This Committee remains committed to ensuring that the Department of Homeland Security has the tools it needs to meet this challenge, while facilitating legitimate travel across our borders.”

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