

Hearing: “Evaluating Port Security: Progress Made and Challenges Ahead”

Opening Statement of Dr. Tom A. Coburn, Ranking Member

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I would like to welcome all of you. This is an interesting area for us to be talking about. Sitting on the Intelligence Committee, our threats are greater, not less, in terms of risk and getting it right is important.

One of the commitments I made to Congresswoman Janice Hahn from Los Angeles, CA, she has the Port of L.A./Long Beach, which is our largest, busiest and probably most vulnerable port. We are having this hearing and doing the oversight that's necessary to try to improve the security at our ports. So, Mr. Chairman, I'd like unanimous consent to put her testimony in the record. The Congresswomen wanted to participate in this hearing but the House is out this week, and so I'd ask unanimous consent to have her testimony included in the record.

I'd also note that the House has passed legislation that the Congresswoman authored called the GAPS Act. What I hope we do today is find out where our weaknesses are and what we need to improve. As Senator Carper mentioned, the 100 percent scanning mandate may not be viable, but we need to have a better approach than 2 percent to 4 percent scanning that we're seeing today.

We know that a successful attack on one of our ports would be devastating; the RAND Corporation gave an example that would have a trillion dollar effect on our economy. That is a high possibility. We cannot stop every attack that's going to come to this country, but we can certainly make it much more difficult and markedly decrease the likelihood. Everybody knows the history of how we came together after 9/11. We created the Port Security Grant Program; we mandated 100 percent cargo screening; we also created the TWIC card, which has had some significant difficulties and is still not implemented.

So my goal for this hearing is to review all the initiatives that were initially set out, assess whether or not they're working and determine if our ports are as secure from a potential terrorist attack as we can make them feasibly and economically.

I would say we've spent \$2.9 billion on the Port Security Grant Program with no metrics to measure whether or not we have actually improved our security. There's no metrics, so we don't know. We've spent \$2.1 billion on CBP cargo programs to meet a scanning mandate that we are told will never be met. So there's \$5 billion we've spent we have no assessment of what we've improved with that money. The TWIC program was intended to create an I.D. card for transportation workers to enter secure areas, including the ports. In general, I hope this hearing will help us to know how much improvement we've actually made in securing our ports. I want to thank each of you again for being here.