

**Statement of
The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Hearing On
“Follow-up Hearing: Transportation Worker Identification
Credential”
January 23, 2008**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your scheduling today's hearing and continued oversight on the Transportation Worker Identification Credential card system. We are here today to examine the initial progress and process of the TWIC system since it's been over 90 days since the first enrollment center opened.

As of last Wednesday, several of the top ports have enrolled over 14,000 people. Houston has enrolled over 6,500 people, followed by Long Beach and Baton Rouge with approximately 2,900 and Savannah with over 2,000.

Although the enrollment centers have opened and seem to be working efficiently in some ports, there have also been some challenges in other ports which we will discuss later in the hearing.

Since the TWIC is required for all Coast Guard credentialed mariners, regardless of whether or not they require unescorted access to secure areas of MTSA regulated vessels or facilities by September 25, 2008, I would like to hear what is being done by the Coast Guard and TSA to ensure this deadline will be met.

I am also concerned about the mariners who own or operate six-pack vessels in rural areas of the U.S. and do not pose a risk to security, having to obtain a TWIC card simply because they are a Coast Guard credentialed mariner. In many cases, such as fishing guides and charter boat captains, they are the only personnel on their vessel - so why should they have to have a TWIC card reader to gain access to their vessel?

I am also concerned that people that live in remote areas will have to drive hundreds of miles – twice – once to apply for a TWIC card and again to pick it up. For example, there are no TWIC enrollment centers in Montana, Idaho, or Wyoming. How are licensed mariners who work as river guides going to get a TWIC? Do they have to travel to Seattle?

Until TWIC card reader technology is available and the rule is promulgated, the TWIC will be used as a flash pass. Although this offers some layer of security since personnel are vetted through various databases with background checks, the card is not serving the intended purpose. This provides some protection to our ports, but it's imperative that we continue to increase the security of our transportation system.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today, and working with you and the Ranking Members Mica and LaTourette as we continue to explore the issues of TWIC.

###