CHARLES E. SCHUMER
NEW YORK

COMMITTEES:

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 15, 2010

Mr. Robert C. Tapella
Public Printer
U.S. Government Printing Office
732 North Capitol Street, NW
Washington, DC 20401

Dear Mr. Tapella:

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, I am responsible for the Senate's oversight of the Government Printing Office. And as Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security, I am responsible for directing the Senate's immigration and border security legislative efforts and for conducting oversight of the Department of State's passport policies.

I write you, in these capacities, to propose a critical change to better ensure the integrity and security of United States passports. Since May 2007, the United States has been exclusively producing "e-passports" to U.S. citizens, because Congress has required that all countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program issue passports with integrated circuits (chips) to permit storage of at least a digital image of the passport photograph for use with face recognition technology.

It has been reported that key electronic components for American e-passports are being assembled in Ayutthaya, Thailand. Workers in the Thailand plant are assembling components of the passport, including the sophisticated computer chips that eventually are programmed to store biometric and other personal information used by customs officials and border guards to verify the identities of those who enter the United States. On January 22, 2010, the Government Accountability Office, while stating that GPO and the Department of State have taken steps to assure the security of the embedded computer chips in U.S. e-passports, also confirmed that "the U.S. government does not control the entire supply chain for all the components on the chip."

Although, thankfully, there have been no reports of security lapses involving chips manufactured in Thailand, the Center for Public Integrity has warned that weak security in the manufacturing supply chain could allow criminals or terrorists to obtain blank chips and clone e-passports for nefarious reasons.

For this reason, I ask that you take immediate action to ensure that GPO exercises far greater control and oversight over the entire supply chain for all components of the United States passport. This should be done by moving all aspects of the production of U.S. passports —

including the integrated circuit chips which are now being manufactured outside the U.S. — to United States manufacturing and production facilities. By shifting the manufacturing and production of all aspects of e-passports to the United States, it will be far easier for GPO to monitor and conduct quality assurance inspections of these facilities to ensure the highest integrity and security of U.S. passports. There are more than 25 companies in the United States, and at least five companies in New York, that possess the capability and knowledge to manufacture the chips that are currently being manufactured elsewhere and assembled in Thailand.

As you know, possessing a U.S. passport opens virtually all of the doors in the United States to the bearer. A passport can be readily used to get a job, gain access to government buildings, gain access to airports and seaports, and enter and exit the United States with relative ease. Consequently, it is absolutely essential that we are doing all that we possibly can to ensure that criminal and terrorists are not gaining access to U.S. passports by tampering with the supply chain in foreign countries. The only way to accomplish this goal is to ensure that the entire supply chain for U.S. passports is manufactured, assembled, and continually inspected here in the United States. This change will better secure our nation while also creating much needed jobs here at home.

I thank you for your attention to this important matter, and look forward to working with you to protect the people of the United States.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer