

MF04021449

Phone conversation between Tom Eldridge and Derwood Staeben of DOS

Date: May 11, 2004

Re: Biometric passports and foreign student visas

I asked Woody Staeben to describe the progress toward achieving a worldwide interoperable biometric passport under the ICAO standards.

Woody told me that State had planned to start its pilot program beginning in October 2004, but due to a contractor dispute, they had to delay it. Now, they plan to begin testing in December 2004, and begin full production in December 2005 (the same production as before).

Woody said our computer chip is a 64K chip that is, in effect, a radio antenna in the back of the passport. It conforms to the ICAO standard.

In May 2003, ICAO agreed on a standard for what should be on the chip that is a digital photo (encapsulated in an algorithm) and digitized biographical data. All this is protected by a personal digital signature that makes the data encrypted and locked against tampering.

In May 2003, ICAO rejected fingerprints, and iris scan as the biometric standard. They settled on facial recognition by consensus.

There is an ICAO meeting scheduled for the week of May 17 in Montreal to discuss progress toward this goal.

I also spoke to Woody about foreign student visas. He said there were a number of possible reasons for the slowing or decline (depending on the group in question). They are: (1) the greater cost relative to foreign schools of U.S. schools, (2) the more aggressive recruiting by foreign schools and government than by the USG and schools, and (3) a crackdown on cheating on the TOFEL exam, that reduced the eligible applicant pool.